

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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<sup>9</sup>This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.—<sup>10</sup>Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup>The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness. <sup>12</sup>When God

9 אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים  
הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ׃  
10 וַיּוֹלֵד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־  
חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת׃  
11 וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמָּלֵא

### NOAH AND THE FLOOD (6:9–9:17)

By the 10th generation after Adam, the moral corruption of humankind is so great that the world must be cleansed. There are numerous parallels between the biblical account of the Flood and the many ancient Near Eastern flood stories. Yet the biblical account differs significantly from all the other versions, which the Commentary will show.

#### THE INDICTMENT (6:9–13)

**9. This is the line of Noah** Because this is the caption for the entire narrative in which Noah plays a central role, it is preferable to translate: “This is the story of Noah.”

**righteous . . . blameless** A righteous person (*tzaddik*) is one whose conduct God finds to be irreproachable. A blameless person (*tamim*) is one whose unimpeachable integrity makes the

enjoyment of God’s fellowship possible. See Pss. 15 and 101:6.

**in his age** In the face of universal corruption, he maintained civilized standards of behavior.

**walked with God** See Comment to Gen. 5:22.

**11. The earth** The use of such all-embracing terms as “the earth,” “man’s wickedness” (v. 5), and “all flesh” (v. 12) in the indictment of humanity serves to justify God’s actions. The totality of the evil makes inevitable the totality of the punishment.

**corrupt** The Hebrew stem for “corrupt” (*shach*) occurs seven times in the narrative in various forms.

**lawlessness** The universal corruption is further defined as *hamas*, a term that elsewhere is

In the first *parashah* of Genesis, the world deteriorated over the course of 10 generations, from the pristine perfection of its beginning to corruption in the days of Noah. God chooses not to destroy the world totally (a *midrash* suggests God did destroy previous disappointing worlds). Instead, God continues with the same creatures, human beings, blessed with free will and cursed with the tendency to misuse that free will, who have brought matters to this point. Noah’s capacity for righteousness gives God cause for hope.

**9. This is the line of Noah.—Noah** The first person Noah “gave birth” to was himself. Confronting the moral corruption of his time, Noah had to decide what kind of person he really was.

**in his age** The Sages debate whether this is a true compliment or qualified praise. Yoḥanan sees Noah as righteous only relatively, in contrast to the wicked people around him. In a more respectable age, he would have been no

better than average. Resh Lakish, on the other hand, says that anyone who had the moral backbone to be a good person in an immoral society would have been an even better person in a generation that encouraged goodness (BT Sanh. 108a). One emphasizes the power of society to shape the behavior of its members; the other champions the power of the individual to withstand the pressures of society.

**11. corrupt before God** God deemed their behavior corrupt, but they themselves saw nothing wrong with it.

**the earth was filled with lawlessness** The Jerusalem Talmud understands the word translated as “lawlessness” (*hamas*) to mean that people cheated each other for such small sums that the courts could not prosecute them (JT BM 4:2). This caused people to lose faith in the power of government to provide them with a fair and livable world, and society began to slip into anarchy.

saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth, <sup>13</sup>God said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the earth. <sup>14</sup>Make yourself an ark of *gopher* wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. <sup>15</sup>This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty

הָאָרֶץ חָמָס: <sup>12</sup>וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וַהֲגִה נִשְׁחָתָה בֵּי־הַשָּׁחִית כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר אֶת־דְּרָכָו עַל־הָאָרֶץ: <sup>13</sup>ס וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַץ כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר בָּא לְפָנַי בֵּי־מַלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַהֲנִי מִשְׁחִיתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: <sup>14</sup>עֲשֵׂה לָךְ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי־גֹפֶר קָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְכִפַּרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר: <sup>15</sup>וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אַמָּה אָרְךָ הַתֵּבָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה רְחֹבָהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אַמָּה

the synonym of “bloodshed,” “falsehood,” or “deceit.” It parallels “no justice” in Job 19:7.

**12. all flesh** The corruption extended to the animal kingdom as well, through the intermingling of species (BT Sanh. 108a). In this way, the Sages confronted the disturbing question of why *all* life had to perish when only human beings were corrupt.

**13. God said to Noah** God speaks to him directly seven times in this narrative. In the Mesopotamian tales, the decision of the gods to destroy the world, intended to be kept secret from humankind, was revealed by one of the gods to a specific individual.

**because of them** They brought it on themselves. The impending catastrophe is not the result of God’s caprice or nature’s blind fury.

**with the earth** Underlying this is the fundamental biblical idea that moral corruption physically contaminates the earth, which must then be cleansed of its pollution.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR BUILDING THE ARK  
(vv. 14–16)

**14. Make** The stem meaning “make” (עשה) appears here seven times, to stress the point that Noah himself must shape the agency of his own salvation.

**ark** The Hebrew translated here as “ark” (*tevah*) appears in the Torah again only in connec-

tion with the rescue of the baby Moses (Exod. 2:3–5). It refers to a boxlike vessel made to float on water. It has no rudder, sail, navigational device, or crew. In the Mesopotamian flood stories, the hero builds a regular ship and employs boatmen to navigate it.

**gopher wood** The term appears only here. Some scholars link it to the cypress, which was used widely in shipbuilding in ancient times because of its resistance to rot.

**compartments** The plural *kinnim* traditionally has been interpreted to mean “cubicles” (from the singular *ken*, “nest”). Most likely, it is related to the same word in Akkadian, meaning “reeds,” from which the boat in one of the Mesopotamian flood stories was constructed.

**pitch** The Hebrew word for “pitch,” borrowed from the Akkadian *kupru*, is the same one found in the Mesopotamian flood stories for the substance used to caulk the boats.

**15. cubits** The Hebrew word *ammah* literally means “forearm,” the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger of an average-size man. The standard biblical cubit is about 18 inches (45 cm), yielding dimensions here of about 450 feet (157 m) in length, 75 feet (23 m) in width, and 45 feet (14 m) in height and a displacement of about 43,000 tons. In a Mesopotamian flood story, the vessel has a tonnage three or four times that of Noah’s.

**14.** Why did God command Noah to build an ark? Surely God could have saved Noah and his family by supernatural intervention. Perhaps God hoped that the project would serve as a warning, moving onlookers to contemplate

the threat of destruction and mend their ways (Tanh. 5). Or perhaps God wanted Noah to participate in some way in his own salvation, as the Israelites would—many centuries later—at the time of the Exodus.

cubits, and its height thirty cubits. <sup>16</sup>Make an opening for daylight in the ark, and terminate it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks.

<sup>17</sup>“For My part, I am about to bring the Flood—waters upon the earth—to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish. <sup>18</sup>But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives. <sup>19</sup>And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to keep alive with you; they shall be male and female. <sup>20</sup>From birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing on earth, two of each shall come to you to stay alive. <sup>21</sup>For your part, take of everything that is eaten and store it away, to serve as food for you and for them.” <sup>22</sup>Noah did so; just as God commanded him, so he did.

קוֹמְתָהּ: <sup>16</sup>צֹהַר | תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתְּבֵה וְאֶל־  
אִמָּה תְּכַלְנָה מִלְמַעְלָה וּפְתַח הַתְּבֵה  
בְּצַדָּהּ תִּשְׁמָר תַּחְתֵּימָם שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים  
תַּעֲשֶׂה:

<sup>17</sup>וְאֲנִי הַנְּנִי מְבִיא אֶת־הַמַּבּוּל מִיָּם עַל־  
הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחַת כָּל־בְּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ  
חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאָרֶץ  
יָגוּעַ: <sup>18</sup>וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתָּךְ וּבֵאתָ  
אֶל־הַתְּבֵה אִתָּה וּבְנֵיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּנְשֵׁי־  
בְנֵיךָ אִתָּךְ: <sup>19</sup>וּמִכָּל־חַי מִכָּל־בְּשָׂר  
שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל תָּבִיא אֶל־הַתְּבֵה לְהַחִיֹּת  
אִתָּךְ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה יְהִי: <sup>20</sup>מִהָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ  
וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ מִכָּל רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה  
לְמִינֵהוּ שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל יָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ לְהַחִיֹּת:  
<sup>21</sup>וְאִתָּה קַח־לְךָ מִכָּל־מֵאֲכָל אֲשֶׁר יֹאכֵל  
וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ וּלְהֵם לְאֹכְלָהּ:  
<sup>22</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים

שְׁנֵי כֵן עָשָׂה: ט

**16. an opening for daylight** The Hebrew word *tzohar* refers here to a “roof,” as it does also in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Arabic. The directive to “terminate it within a cubit of the top” (literally, “from above”) could mean that the slanting roof should project one cubit beyond the side of the ark.

THE PURPOSE OF THE ARK (vv. 17–22)

**17. For My part** The sense is, “When you, Noah, have built the ark, I, God, will act.”

**the Flood** The definite article before the Hebrew term “*mabbul*” implies some well-known entity. The phrase that follows, “waters upon the earth,” serves to indicate a celestial origin. It suggests that “Flood” (*mabbul*) probably refers to the upper part of the original cosmic ocean that is about to fall upon the earth.

**18. My covenant** This is the first use in the

Bible of the Hebrew term “*b’rit*” (“covenant”), one of the core concepts of biblical theology regarding the relationship between God and mortals. In this passage it can mean either that the divine blessing made to Adam in Gen. 1:28 will be fulfilled through Noah and his line (who would all survive and regenerate the world) or that a new, unconditional guarantee of salvation is now being given to Noah.

**you shall enter the ark** Eight persons in all, a single family, from which a renewed human-kind will emerge.

**your sons** The males are listed first, then the females.

**21. of everything that is eaten** The vegetarian diet prescribed in 1:29–30.

**22. Noah did so** The text emphasizes Noah’s trust in God. According to Rashi, this verse refers to the actual construction of the ark.

**17. to destroy all flesh** A corrupt, lawless society brings destruction on all of its citizens,

innocent and guilty alike, and on the environment around it.

**7** Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, with all your household, for you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation. <sup>2</sup>Of every pure animal you shall take seven pairs, males and their mates, and of every animal that is not pure, two, a male and its mate; <sup>3</sup>of the birds of the sky also, seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive upon all the earth. <sup>4</sup>For in seven days’ time I will make it rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence that I created.” <sup>5</sup>And Noah did just as the LORD commanded him.

<sup>6</sup>Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came, waters upon the earth. <sup>7</sup>Noah,

שני וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְנֹחַ בְּאֵתָהּ וְכָל־בֵּיתָהּ אֲלֵה־תִבְבָּהּ בְּיָאֲתָהָּ רְאִיתִי צְדִיק לִפְנֵי בְדוֹר הַזֶּה׃ <sup>2</sup> מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה תִּקַּח־לָךְ שְׁבַעָה שְׁבַעָה אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא טְהוֹרָה הוּא שְׁנַיִם אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ׃ <sup>3</sup> גַּם מֵעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁבַעָה שְׁבַעָה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה לַחַיּוֹת זָרַע עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ׃ <sup>4</sup> כִּי לַיָּמִים עוֹד שְׁבַעָה אָנֹכִי מִמְטִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה וּמַחִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַיְקוּם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה׃ <sup>5</sup> וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה׃  
וְנֹחַ בֶּן־שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְהַמְּבּוּל הָיָה מִיָּם עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ <sup>7</sup> וַיָּבֵא נֹחַ וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ

THE EMBARKATION (7:1–9)

**1. Your household** In the Mesopotamian stories, by contrast, the hero’s relations, craftsmen, and boatmen, enter the vessel along with him and his immediate family.

**for you alone** The Torah does not tell us whether Noah’s family is saved solely through his merit or whether they were individually righteous as well.

**2. pure . . . impure** These categories refer only to suitability for sacrifice, not for human consumption. The criteria for that were issued only after the Flood, when people were first permitted to eat the flesh of animals. See 9:2–3. Although only animals are mentioned here, 8:20 shows that the birds were similarly classified.

**seven pairs** There is a discrepancy between this verse and the instructions of 6:19–20, which mention one pair of each species. This has prompted modern scholars to assert that the two passages originate from diverse strands of ancient Israelite tradition. Traditional commen-

tators explain that 6:19–20 refer to the minimum number needed for the regeneration of the species, whereas 7:2–3 include the additional pure animals needed for the sacrifices after the Flood.

**4. in seven days’ time** Presumably, this is the period of time needed for the future occupants of the ark to get aboard and be properly accommodated. Seven-day periods are characteristic of this story.

**I will make it rain** The phrase resonates with the awesome power and transcendence of the one God who alone will determine the dimensions and the duration of the Flood.

**forty days** The number 40, a symbolic number in the Bible, is often connected with purification and the cleansing of sin and has that significance here (see Exod. 24:18, 34:28, Num. 13:25, Ezek. 4:6).

**5. Noah did** This refers to boarding the ark.

**6. six hundred years old** For Mesopotamians, the basic unit of time is 60. Their mathematics did not employ the decimal system but a system (sexagesimal) based on 60. That system

CHAPTER 7

7. The word order—which lists all the husbands first, then the wives—implies that Noah and his sons enter the ark separately from their

wives. It would have been unseemly for them to enjoy marital intimacy while the rest of humanity was drowning. Only after the Flood would they again live as husbands and wives (see Gen. 8:16; Gen. R. 31:12).

with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. <sup>8</sup>Of the pure animals, of the animals that are not pure, of the birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, <sup>9</sup>two of each, male and female, came to Noah into the ark, as God had commanded Noah. <sup>10</sup>And on the seventh day the waters of the Flood came upon the earth.

<sup>11</sup>In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day

All the fountains of the great deep burst apart,

And the floodgates of the sky broke open.

(<sup>12</sup>The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.) <sup>13</sup>That same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, went into the ark, with Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons—<sup>14</sup>they and all beasts of every kind, all cattle of every kind, all creatures of every kind that creep on the earth, and all birds of every kind, every bird, every winged

וּנְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אֶתְּו אֶל־הַתֵּבָה מִפְּנֵי מַי הַמַּבּוּל׃ <sup>8</sup> מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינְנָה טְהוֹרָה וּמִן־הָעוֹף וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־רָמַשׁ עַל־הָאָדָמָה׃ <sup>9</sup> שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם בָּאוּ אֶל־נֹחַ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ׃ <sup>10</sup> וַיְהִי לְשִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וּמַי הַמַּבּוּל הָיוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃

<sup>11</sup> בַּשָּׁנָה שְׁש־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לְחַיֵּי־נֹחַ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בְּשִׁבְעָה־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה

נִבְקְעוּ כָּל־מַעְיֵנֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה וְאַרְבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם נִפְתְּחוּ׃

<sup>12</sup> וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה׃ <sup>13</sup> בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ נֹחַ וְשֵׁם־וְיָחֵם וַיִּפֹּת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ וְאִשְׁת׃ נֹחַ וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת נְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתָּם אֶל־הַתֵּבָה׃ <sup>14</sup> הַמָּה וְכָל־הַחַיָּה לְמִינָהּ וְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׁ הָרֶמֶשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְכָל־הָעוֹף לְמִינָהּ כֹּל צִפּוֹר כָּל־

still survives in some of our reckoning, such as 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour. Note that 600 is a multiple of 60, just as 120 is. See Comment to Gen. 5:32.

**9. two of each** See Comment to 7:2.

THE CATAclysm (vv. 10–24)

**10. The seventh day** The end of the period mentioned in verse 4. Rabbinic traditions differ as to whether the Flood took place in the fall or in the spring.

**11. All the fountains** This line of poetry and the next (“And the floodgates . . .”) are a striking example of the ancient poetic form known as parallelism.

**great deep** The cosmic waters in the ocean depths. See Comment to 1:2.

**floodgates of the sky** The openings in the expanse of the heavens through which water from the celestial part of the cosmic ocean can escape onto the earth. The world is being returned to the condition that preceded Creation (1:2).

**because of the waters of the Flood** Rashi cites the tradition that Noah did not enter the ark until the water reached his ankles. Did he not really believe God's threat? Or was he hoping to the very end that the people would see the rain and repent, making the punishment unnecessary?

**14.** Lions and lambs, predators and prey, set aside their natural enmity and lived together peacefully in the ark. Only when the danger was over did they revert to their old habits. It will be a mark of the Messianic Age (Isa. 11) when traditional enemies learn to live cooperatively without facing an external threat.

thing. <sup>15</sup>They came to Noah into the ark, two each of all flesh in which there was breath of life. <sup>16</sup>Thus they that entered comprised male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And the LORD shut him in.

<sup>17</sup>The Flood continued forty days on the earth, and the waters increased and raised the ark so that it rose above the earth. <sup>18</sup>The waters swelled and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark drifted upon the waters. <sup>19</sup>When the waters had swelled much more upon the earth, all the highest mountains everywhere under the sky were covered. <sup>20</sup>Fifteen cubits higher did the waters swell, as the mountains were covered. <sup>21</sup>And all flesh that stirred on earth perished—birds, cattle, beasts, and all the things that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind. <sup>22</sup>All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life, all that was on dry land, died. <sup>23</sup>All existence on earth was blotted out—man, cattle, creeping things, and birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

<sup>24</sup>And when the waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days, <sup>1</sup>God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and

כָּנָף: <sup>15</sup>וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ אֶל־הַתְּבֵה שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל־הַבֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים: <sup>16</sup>וְהַבָּאִים זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה מִכָּל־בֶּשֶׂר בָּאוּ בְּאֵשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים וַיִּסְגֹר יְהוָה בַּעֲדוֹ:

<sup>17</sup>וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם עַל־הָאָרֶץ שְׁלִישִׁי וַיִּרְבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־הַתְּבֵה וַתָּרֶם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: <sup>18</sup>וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּרְבוּ מְאֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַתִּלָּךְ הַתְּבֵה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: <sup>19</sup>וְהַמַּיִם גָּבְרוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּכְסּוּ כָּל־הַהָרִים הַגְּבוּהִים אֲשֶׁר־תַּחַת כָּל־הַשָּׁמַיִם: <sup>20</sup>חֲמִשָּׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמָּה מִלְּמַעְלָה גָּבְרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ הַהָרִים: <sup>21</sup>וַיִּגָּעוּ כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר ׀ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ בַּעֲוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבַחַיָּה וּבְכָל־הַשָּׂרֵץ הַשָּׂרֵץ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־הָאָדָם: <sup>22</sup>כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת־רוּחַ חַיִּים בְּאַפּוֹ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְבָּה מֵתוּ: <sup>23</sup>וַיִּמַּח אֶת־כָּל־הַיְקוּם ׀ אֲשֶׁר ׀ עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּמַּחוּ מִן־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׂאֵר אַרְיֵנָח וְאֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתְּבֵה: <sup>24</sup>וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וּמֵאֵת יוֹם: <sup>1</sup>וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֵת כָּל־הַחַיָּה וְאֵת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה

**15. two each** See Comment to 7:2.

**16. the LORD shut him in** Unlike the story of the two survivors in the Mesopotamian flood tales, who shut the hatch themselves, the text here is careful to note that the salvation of Noah is due entirely to the will of God.

**18. drifted** The rudderless vessel floated about helplessly on the floodwaters.

**20. higher** The waters crested at a little less than 23 feet (nearly 15 cubits) above the highest peak. The ark was half-submerged in water just above the highest mountain.

**21. all . . . all . . . all** Here and in the following verse, this word emphasizes the total nature of the catastrophe.

**22. dryland** Marine life did not perish.

**23. blotted out** God’s intention, proclaimed in verse 4, has been fulfilled.

**24. one hundred and fifty days** That is, five months of 30 days each. The waters drained away so gradually that they appeared to remain at their maximum height for that length of time.

THE FLOOD COMES TO AN END (8:1–14)

**1. God remembered** “To remember,” in the Bible, is not to retain or to recall a mental image. It is to focus on the object of memory that results in action.

**Noah** Like Adam, Noah is here the representative human being; therefore, he alone is mentioned.



God caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided. <sup>2</sup>The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up, and the rain from the sky was held back; <sup>3</sup>the waters then receded steadily from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished, <sup>4</sup>so that in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. <sup>5</sup>The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.

<sup>6</sup>At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made <sup>7</sup>and sent out the raven; it went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent out the dove to see whether the waters had decreased from the surface of the ground. <sup>9</sup>But the dove could not find a resting place for its foot, and returned to him to the ark, for there was water over all the earth. So putting out his hand, he took it into the ark with him. <sup>10</sup>He waited another seven days, and again sent out

אֲשֶׁר אֶתּוֹ בַּתְּבֵה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל-  
הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכּוּ הַמַּיִם: <sup>2</sup>וַיִּסְכְּרוּ מַעְיֵנֹת  
תְּהוֹם וְאַרְבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּבְלֹא הַגֶּשֶׁם  
מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם: <sup>3</sup>וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ  
הַלֹּךְ וְשׁוֹב וַיִּחְסְרוּ הַמַּיִם מִקְצֵה חֳמֵשִׁים  
וּמֵאֵת יוֹם: <sup>4</sup>וַתִּנַּח הַתְּבֵה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
בְּשִׁבְעֵה-עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ עַל הַרֵי אֲרָרָט:  
<sup>5</sup>וְהַמַּיִם הָיוּ הַלֹּךְ וְחָסוּר עַד הַחֹדֶשׁ  
הָעֲשִׂירִי בְּעֲשִׂירִי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ נִרְאוּ  
רֵאשֵׁי הַהָרִים:

<sup>6</sup>וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבַּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח נֹחַ אֶת-  
חַלּוֹן הַתְּבֵה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: <sup>7</sup>וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-  
הָעֹרֵב וַיֵּצֵא וַיֵּצֵא וְשׁוֹב עַד-יָבֹשׂת הַמַּיִם  
מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: <sup>8</sup>וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הַיּוֹנָה מֵאֶתּוֹ  
לִרְאוֹת הַקְּלוֹ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה:  
<sup>9</sup>וְלֹא-מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מָנוּחַ לְכַף-רַגְלָהּ  
וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתְּבֵה פִּי-מַיִם עַל-פְּנֵי  
כָל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֶתָּהּ  
אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתְּבֵה: <sup>10</sup>וַיַּחַל עוֹד שִׁבְעַת  
יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם וַיִּסֹּף שַׁלַּח אֶת-הַיּוֹנָה מִן-

*caused a wind to blow* As the waters symbolize chaos and the undoing of Creation, so the movement of the wind forecasts the return of order (see 1:2).

*2. were stopped up* The cosmic forces unleashed in 7:11 are halted abruptly, emphasizing God's absolute control over nature. In the Mesopotamian flood tales, the gods lost control over the forces they had set loose and were stricken with terror.

*4. came to rest* The ark was barely above the highest peak when the Flood crested (7:20). Hence a slight receding of the waters would cause the vessel to ground.

*on the mountains of Ararat* On the mountain range of Ararat, which refers to Armenia (as in 2 Kings 19:37, Isa. 37:38, and Jer. 51:27). In Akkadian it is called Urartu. In this region lie the sources of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. Today there is a mountain called Ararat near the conjunction of the Turkish, Armenian, and Iranian borders.

*5. The waters went on diminishing* The tops of other mountains in the area became visible 73 days after the ark grounded.

#### THE RELEASE OF THE BIRDS

(vv. 6–12)

Noah releases a raven 40 days later, then a dove and another dove. In ancient times, mariners would take birds aboard and use them to determine the ship's proximity to land. Both the raven and the dove are also featured in the Mesopotamian stories.

*7. the raven* This wild bird feeds on carrion as well as vegetation and thus could obtain its food from among the floating carcasses. That is why it made repeated forays from the ark. Noah could observe its movements over several days.

*8. the dove* A timid bird. Noah took it in his hand when it returned, probably to see if there was clay on its feet.

the dove from the ark. <sup>11</sup>The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the waters had decreased on the earth. <sup>12</sup>He waited still another seven days and sent the dove forth; and it did not return to him any more.

<sup>13</sup>In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the waters began to dry from the earth; and when Noah removed the covering of the ark, he saw that the surface of the ground was drying. <sup>14</sup>And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

<sup>15</sup>God spoke to Noah, saying, <sup>16</sup>“Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons’ wives. <sup>17</sup>Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds, animals, and everything that creeps on earth; and let them swarm on the earth and be fertile and increase on earth.” <sup>18</sup>So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his

הַתְּבָה׃ <sup>11</sup>וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לְעֵת עֶרֶב  
וְהָיָה עַל-הַזַּיִת טָרֵף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי-  
קָלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ׃ <sup>12</sup>וַיַּיְחַל עוֹד  
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הַיּוֹנָה  
וְלֹא-יָסְפָה שׁוּב-אֵלָיו עוֹד׃

<sup>13</sup>וַיְהִי בְּאַחַת וּשְׁש־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה בְּרֵאשׁוֹן  
בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ חָרְבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ  
וַיִּסַּר נֹחַ אֶת-מִכְסֵה הַתְּבָה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה  
חָרְבוּ פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה׃ <sup>14</sup>וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי  
בְּשִׁבְעָה וָעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ יָבֶשׂה  
הָאָרֶץ׃ ט

רביעי <sup>15</sup>וַיִּדְבַר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-נֹחַ לֵאמֹר׃ <sup>16</sup>צֵא מִן-  
הַתְּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּבְנֵיךָ וּנְשֵׁי-בְנֵיךָ  
אִתָּךְ׃ <sup>17</sup>כָּל-חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר-אִתְּךָ מִכָּל-בֶּשֶׂר  
בָּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל-  
הָאָרֶץ הוּצֵא הִצֵּאת אִתְּךָ וּשְׂרָצוֹ בְּאָרֶץ  
וּפְרוֹ וּרְבוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ׃ <sup>18</sup>וַיֵּצֵא-נֹחַ וּבָנָיו

**11. toward evening** Birds customarily return to their nests at this time. The fact that the dove had been out all day indicated that there were resting places.

**plucked-off** Better: “fresh” or “verdant.” The fresh olive leaf is a sure sign that plant life had begun to renew itself.

**olive leaf** The olive tree, a sturdy evergreen that can live to 1,000 years, is one of the earliest trees cultivated in the Near East. It is a short tree, indicating that the waters had diminished greatly.

THE GROUND DRIES OUT (vv. 13–14)

**13. In the six hundred and first year** On

New Year’s Day of the Hebrew calendar, the ground was dry, meaning that no water was visible on the surface.

**14. in the second month** It took another 56 days for the earth to return to its condition on the third day of Creation.

THE DISEMBARKATION (vv. 15–19)

**16. together with your wife** The order here varies from that in Gen. 6:18 and 7:7, where husbands and wives are not listed together.

**17. be fertile and increase** The repetition of the divine blessing of Gen. 1:22 signals the regeneration of animal, insect, and bird life.

CHAPTER 8

**11.** A dove bearing an olive branch in its beak has become the symbol of the peaceful resolution of conflict. An olive branch, however, tastes bitter. Perhaps this should warn us that although victory is sweet, it sows in the

soul of the defeated the desire for revenge. Compromise, which could leave a bitter taste, promises an end to conflict.

**15.** The Midrash describes Noah as reluctant to leave the ark, afraid that his descendants will again defile God’s clean world and bring on themselves another deluge. God must com-

sons' wives. <sup>19</sup>Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by families.

<sup>20</sup>Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking of every pure animal and of every pure bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. <sup>21</sup>The LORD smelled the pleasing odor, and the LORD said to Himself: "Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done.

<sup>22</sup>So long as the earth endures,  
Seedtime and harvest,  
Cold and heat,  
Summer and winter,  
Day and night  
Shall not cease."

**19. by families** That is, species by species.

NOAH'S SACRIFICE AND  
GOD'S RESPONSE (vv. 20–22)

Noah builds an altar and brings burnt offerings on his own initiative. Now that the earth has been purged of its evil, sacrifice symbolizes the restoration of harmony between God and humankind.

**20. burnt offerings** The Hebrew word *olah* means, literally, "that which ascends." It refers to sacrifices that, except for the hide, must be consumed entirely by fire on the altar. No part of them may be eaten by the worshiper, whereas both priest and worshiper partake of the sacrifices known as *z'vahim* (see Deut. 12:27).

**21. smelled the pleasing odor** This is a cultic term indicating the acceptance of the sacrifice.

וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתּוֹ: <sup>19</sup>כָּל־הַחַיָּה כָּל־  
הָרֶמֶשׂ וְכָל־הָעוֹף כֹּל רוֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ  
לְמִשְׁפַּחְתֵּיהֶם יֵצְאוּ מִן־הַתֵּבָה:

<sup>20</sup>וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקַּח מִכָּל  
הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר  
וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>21</sup>וַיִּרַח יְהוָה אֶת־  
רִיחַ הַנְּיִיחָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־לְבוֹ לֹא־  
אֶסֶף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאָדָמָה בְּעֵבּוֹר  
הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְעֻרָיו  
וְלֹא־אֶסֶף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חַי בְּאִשְׁרֵי  
עֲשִׂיתִי: <sup>22</sup>עַד כָּל־יְמֵי הָאָרֶץ

זְרַע וְקָצִיר  
וְקָר וְחֹם  
וְקִיץ וְחֹרֶף  
וַיּוֹם וְלַיְלָה  
לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ:

**the LORD said to Himself** In Gen. 6:7 this statement of God's resolve was for the purpose of destruction; here it is for salvation. Similarly, the observation here on the nature of humankind echoes that of 6:5.

**Never again will I . . . nor will I ever again** The repetition of the promise, as in Gen. 9:11, gives it the force of a solemn oath.

**the devisings of man's mind** The comment is less a judgment than an observation that the inclination for evil is part of human nature. This pessimism about human nature is also found elsewhere in the Bible (see Jer. 17:9).

**from his youth** But not from conception or birth, thereby implying that the tendency to evil may be curbed and redirected through the discipline of law.

**22. Shall not cease** The orderly cycles of nature will never again be interrupted.

mand him to leave, promising never to send another flood (Gen. R. 34:6). A modern commentator reads Noah's behavior in precisely the opposite way, seeing him as eager to leave the ark and be relieved of responsibility for so many people and animals (Zornberg). Another teacher sees Noah's being enclosed in the ark for a year as punishment for not feeling more

compassion for his drowning neighbors, like the person exiled to a city of refuge for inadvertently causing the death of another (Aaron Samuel Tameret).

**21. from his youth** Only when people leave childhood for adolescent responsibility can we speak of them as good or bad. Children can be only obedient or disobedient. That is why Juda-

**9** God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky—everything with which the earth is astir—and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand. <sup>3</sup>Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. <sup>4</sup>You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it. <sup>5</sup>But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning: I will require it of every beast; of

**ט** ויברך אלהים את־נח ואת־בניו ויאמר להם פרו ורבו ומלאו את־הארץ: <sup>2</sup> ומוראכם וחתכם יהיה על כל־חית הארץ ועל כל־עוף השמים בכל אשר תרמש האדמה ובכל־דגי הים בידכם נתנו: <sup>3</sup> כל־רמש אשר הוא־חי לכם יהיה לאכלה פירק עשב נתתי לכם את־כל: <sup>4</sup> אך־בשר בנפשו דמו לא תאכלו: <sup>5</sup> ואף את־דמכם לנפשותיכם אדרש מיד כל־חיה אדרשנו ומיד

THE REGENERATION AND REORDERING OF SOCIETY (9:1–17)

Humankind must now be re-established on more secure moral foundations than before. New norms of behavior must be instituted. And the possibility of a future cataclysm must be laid to rest, lest it have a paralyzing effect on human progress.

THE NEW ORDER (vv. 1–7)

**1. Be fertile** This is a command. See Comment to Gen. 1:28. In the Mesopotamian flood tales, the people who are saved are granted immortality and removed from human society. Here, Noah and his family are not to withdraw from the world but are to be fertile and to use

the resources of nature for the benefit of humankind.

**2. The fear and dread of you** Human power over the animal kingdom is confirmed and enhanced. It is a concession to human wickedness, which God now tries to limit.

**4. with its life-blood in it** Eating the flesh of a living animal is prohibited. The creature must first be slaughtered.

**5. I will require a reckoning** It is God who calls the murderer to account. The repeated Hebrew verb meaning “require” (דרש) in this verse, with God as the subject, connotes relentless pursuit until punishment is meted out.

**of every beast** The killing of a human being by a beast disturbs the divinely ordered structure of relationships laid down in verse 2. The act

ism sets the age of entering moral responsibility at 12 or 13, the boundary between childhood and adolescence.

CHAPTER 9

**1.** After acknowledging the persistence of the evil impulse (the ego-centric impulse), God commands Noah’s children to be fruitful. “For every human impulse, God provides a moral way of expressing it. The moral channel for sexual lust is the commitment to marriage and family” (Mid. Tad.).

**2.** Originally, God expected people to be vegetarians and not kill living creatures for their food (cf. Gen. 2:18–19). But this ideal became corrupted into the notion that there

are no qualitative differences between humans and animals, leading some people to the conclusion that they could behave like animals. God then compromised the vegetarian ideal, permitting the eating of meat but strenuously forbidding the shedding of *human* blood, as a way of emphasizing the distinction between humans and animals. The dietary laws (Lev. 11) provide ways of reminding ourselves that eating meat is a compromise. We refrain from eating certain animals, not because we and they are so similar but precisely because we are different, because we are capable of introducing religious guidelines into our eating habits.

**5.** Rashi understands these words as a biblical prohibition of suicide.

man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man!

<sup>6</sup>Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
By man shall his blood be shed;  
For in His image  
Did God make man.

<sup>7</sup>Be fertile, then, and increase; abound on the earth and increase on it.”

<sup>8</sup>And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>“I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, <sup>10</sup>and with every living thing that is with you—birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well—all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. <sup>11</sup>I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup>God further said, “This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. <sup>13</sup>I have set My bow in the clouds, and it

הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו אֲדַרְשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁ  
הָאָדָם:

<sup>6</sup>שִׁפַּךְ דַּם הָאָדָם  
בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפָּךְ  
כִּי בְצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים  
עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם:

<sup>7</sup>וְאִתְּם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ שְׂרִצּוּ בָאָרֶץ וּרְבוּ  
בָהּ: ט

<sup>8</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ וְאֶל־בְּנָיו אִתּוֹ חֲמִישִׁי  
לֵאמֹר: <sup>9</sup>וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מִקִּים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי  
אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־זֶרְעֲכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם: <sup>10</sup>וְאֵת  
כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בְּעוֹף  
בְּבִהֵמָה וּבְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכָּל־  
יִצְאֵי הַתֶּבֶה לְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ:  
<sup>11</sup>וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת  
כָּל־בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל וְלֹא־יְהִיָּה עוֹד  
מַבּוּל לְשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ:

<sup>12</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־  
אֲנִי נוֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה  
אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם: <sup>13</sup>אֶת־קַשְׁתִּי

itself, like murder, constitutes the destruction of the image of God. The creature must, therefore, be put to death (see Exod. 21:28).

*of his fellow man* Literally, “his brother.” All homicide is fratricide (see Gen. 4:9).

**6. Whoever sheds the blood of man** The sanctity of human life is reaffirmed here.

*By man* Punishment is now the responsibility of humankind. A judiciary must be established to correct the condition of lawlessness that prevailed before the Flood (6:11). Murder is a crime against society.

*shall his blood be shed* By capital punishment.

*For in His image* Murder is the ultimate

crime because the dignity and sanctity of human life derive from the fact that every human being bears the stamp of the divine maker. Murderers may be put to death because their act has effaced the divine image in the victim.

*image* See Gen. 1:26 and 5:3.

THE COVENANT AND THE RAINBOW (vv. 8–17)

**9. I now** The same Hebrew phrase (*va-ani bin'ni*) was also used in 6:17 to introduce the original pronouncement of doom. The same supreme authority who executed the judgment stands behind the message of hope.

**12. the sign** A distinctive, visible object.

**13. My bow** Ramban points out that the

**6. whoever sheds the blood of man** The verse not only prohibits murder. It is understood to prohibit embarrassing a person in public, causing him or her to blush or turn pale as the blood rushes to or from the face (Hafetz Hayyim, based on BT BM 58b). Another com-

mentator reads it, “Whoever sheds human blood allegedly in the name of humanity defaces the divine image in every individual.” If every human life is of infinite value, we cannot calculate that it is acceptable to sacrifice some lives for the good of others.

shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup>When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. <sup>17</sup>That,” God said to Noah, “shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth.”

<sup>18</sup>The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth—Ham being the father of Canaan. <sup>19</sup>These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole world branched out.

<sup>20</sup>Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. <sup>21</sup>He drank of the wine and

rainbow, a phenomenon that already exists, is now invested with new symbolic significance as an eternal testimony to God’s constancy and mercy. No other celestial body is similarly endowed in biblical literature. The bow, widespread in ancient Near Eastern mythology as the weapon favored by the gods, is here transformed into a symbol of reconciliation between God and humankind.

THE DEPRAVITY OF  
CANAAN (vv. 18–29)

Much time has elapsed since the Flood. Noah now has a grown grandson. The events depicted here are given in the barest outline. Apparently

נָתַתִּי בָעֲנַן וְהִיְתָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ: <sup>14</sup>וְהָיָה בָעֲנַן עָנָן עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְנִרְאָתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת בָּעֲנָן: <sup>15</sup>וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר וְלֹא־יְהִיָּה עוֹד הַמַּיִם לְמַבּוּל לְשַׁחַת כָּל־בָּשָׂר: <sup>16</sup>וְהִיְתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת בָּעֲנַן וְרֵאִיתִיהָ לְזִכָּר בְּרִית עוֹלָם בֵּין אֱלֹהִים וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: <sup>17</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ זֶה זֵאת אֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר הִקְמַתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵין כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ: פ

<sup>18</sup>וַיֵּהְיוּ בְנֵי־נֹחַ הַיְצִאִים מִן־הַתֵּבָה שֵׁם וְחָם וַיִּפֹּת וְחָם הוּא אָבִי כְנַעַן: <sup>19</sup>שְׁלֹשָׁה אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־נֹחַ וּמֵאֵלֶּה נִפְצָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:

<sup>20</sup>וַיַּחַל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטַּע כַּרְם: <sup>21</sup>וַיִּשְׁתֶּה מִן־הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכַּר וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ

the original incidents, in all their detail, were well known to the biblical audience but for reasons of delicate sensibility were not preserved.

**20. the tiller of the soil** This phrase implies something well known about Noah (see 5:29).

**was the first to plant a vineyard** He was the initiator of orchard husbandry.

**21. He drank of the wine** Noah was involved not only in viticulture (the science and art of grape growing) but also in viniculture (the specific cultivation of grapes for wine making). (It is interesting to note that many historians believe that viniculture first began in the vicinity of Ararat.) Here again, as in 4:17–22, advances in the arts of civilization are human achieve-

**13.** The rainbow is the sign of God’s covenant not to destroy the world again. The rainbow is a sign of peace in at least three ways: It represents the inverted bow, the weapon turned away so that it does not threaten (Maimonides). It represents all shades and colors joined side by side in a single entity, calling on different races and nations to do the same. And it represents the promise that, no matter how hard it may rain, the rain eventually will stop—and the

sun will come out again. Therefore, the Sages teach us to recite a blessing whenever we see a rainbow: “Praised are You, LORD our God, Sovereign of the universe who remembers the Covenant, is faithful to it, and keeps promises” (BT Ber. 59a).

**20-1.** Overwhelmed by the task of rebuilding a destroyed world, finding himself virtually alone and friendless in a nearly empty world, or perhaps burdened by a sense of guilt at having

became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. <sup>22</sup>Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. <sup>23</sup>But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed it against both their backs and, walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned the other way, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. <sup>24</sup>When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup>he said,

אהלה אָהֶלוֹ: <sup>22</sup>וַיֵּרָא חָם אָבִי כְנָעַן אֶת עֶרְוַת אָבִיו וַיַּגֵּד לְשְׁנֵי-אָחָיו בְּחוּץ: <sup>23</sup>וַיִּקַּח שֵׁם וַיִּפֹּת אֶת-הַשְּׂמֹלָה וַיִּשְׂימוּ עַל-שִׁבְחָם שְׂנִיָּהֶם וַיִּלְכוּ אַחֲרָיִת וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת עֶרְוַת אָבִיהֶם וּפְנֵיהֶם אַחֲרָיִת וְעֶרְוַת אָבִיהֶם לֹא רָאוּ: <sup>24</sup>וַיִּיקֶץ נֹחַ מִיֵּינוֹ וַיֵּדַע אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה-לוֹ בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן: <sup>25</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר

ments, not the work of gods or demigods as they generally were considered to be in the ancient world.

**and became drunk** No blame attaches to Noah for his drunkenness, because he was unaware of the intoxicating effects of his discovery.

**he uncovered himself** An act associated with shame and loss of dignity (see 3:7,21).

**within his tent** In the privacy of his dwelling, which makes Ham's behavior all the more contemptible.

THE BEHAVIOR OF THE SONS (vv. 22–23)

**22. saw his father's nakedness** Early traditional commentary takes this verse literally. Ham magnified his act of disrespect: He left his

father uncovered and told others what he had seen.

**23. a cloth** The Hebrew word *"simlah"* refers to a garment that also served as a covering at night.

**24. woke up from his wine** That is, when he had sobered up.

**his youngest son** This description makes Ham the youngest despite the five-times-repeated sequence: Shem, Ham, Japheth. Here Ramban points to Gen. 25:9 and Josh. 24:4 as proof that the order of listing need not always reflect the order of birth. In Gen. 10:21, the text explicitly states that Shem is the elder brother of Japheth.

**had done to him** Shem and Japheth had re-

survived when so many others perished, Noah turns to drink.

**22.** The severity of Noah's reaction led Rabbinic sources to suggest that the Torah may have suppressed the sordid details of some repugnant act.

**23ff.** One senses that originally there was more to the story than what we have here, that Ham (or Canaan) did something more reprehensible than look at Noah's nakedness. But the Sages find moral lessons about filial respect in the story as we have it, teaching that it is disrespectful for young people to see their parents or teachers unclothed, unless they need

help bathing (Hal. Ged. 56a). We lose a great deal if we come to see our parent or teacher as just another person. The Sages understood the Torah's description of Ham as Noah's smallest child, not because he was the youngest or shortest but because he was smallest in moral stature (Gen. R. 36:1).

Why was Canaan punished for his father Ham's sin? The Torah views the family as a corporate unit, so that punishing one is punishing all. Furthermore, because Ham's offense was a lack of respect for his father, a fitting punishment would be having a son who reflected badly on him.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**9:21 became drunk** Wine is used in the rituals that celebrate Sabbaths, festivals, births, and weddings; and Jewish law permits drinking alcohol for pleasure. Drunkenness, however, is strongly opposed. The drunk person is fully responsible for any violations of the law committed while drunk (BT Er. 65a). Today we understand alcoholism, or any addiction, as an illness. With any illness, Jewish law generally obligates the ill to seek healing.

“Cursed be Canaan;  
The lowest of slaves  
Shall he be to his brothers.”

<sup>26</sup>And he said,

“Blessed be the LORD,  
The God of Shem;  
Let Canaan be a slave to them.

<sup>27</sup>May God enlarge Japheth,  
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;  
And let Canaan be a slave to them.”

<sup>28</sup>Noah lived after the Flood 350 years. <sup>29</sup>And all the days of Noah came to 950 years; then he died.

**10** These are the lines of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah: sons were born to them after the Flood.

ported the facts, whatever they were, to their father.

**25. Canaan** The text is silent as to why Canaan, not Ham, is cursed. Saadia and Ibn Janah take the verse to mean, “Cursed be [the father of] Canaan.” The phrase “the father of” has already appeared twice in this narrative. Perhaps in the fuller story Canaan, son of Ham, participated in the offense against Noah, and his deed was well known to the reader.

אָרוּר כְּנָעַן  
עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים  
יִהְיֶה לְאָחָיו:  
וַיֹּאמֶר <sup>26</sup>  
בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵי שֵׁם  
וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ:  
וַיַּזְכֵּר אֱלֹהִים לְיַפֶּת <sup>27</sup>  
וַיִּשְׁכֵּן בְּאֶחָיו שֵׁם  
וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ:

וַיְחִי־נֹחַ אַחַר הַמַּבּוּל שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת  
שָׁנָה וְחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה: <sup>29</sup>וַיְהִי\* כָּל־יְמֵי־נֹחַ  
תְּשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וְחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: פ

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ שֵׁם חָם וַיִּפֹּת  
וַיּוֹלְדוּ לָהֶם בָּנִים אַחַר הַמַּבּוּל:

v. 29. “וַיְהִי” לפי נוסח ספרד ותימן

**The lowest of slaves** Literally, “a slave of slaves.”

**26. Blessed be the LORD** Shem’s virtuous behavior inspires Noah to bless the LORD, whose norms of conduct Shem upholds.

THE DEATH OF NOAH (vv. 28–29)

**28. Noah lived** This verse and the one following conclude the story of Noah. They belong to the pattern of the listings in chapter 5, and complement verse 32 there.

THE TABLE OF NATIONS (10:1–32)

The text now offers us a genealogy that shows how, after the Flood, all of humankind branched out from the three sons of Noah. Racial characteristics, physical types, and the color of skin play no role in this genealogy.

**1. These are the lines of Shem** After the digression about Noah’s drunkenness, the text resumes the theme of 9:18–19.

**after the Flood** This same phrase functions in Mesopotamian texts to denote historical time.

According to some authorities, the name Canaan means “the low-lying land.” Genesis consistently employs metaphors of “moral geography,” in which high and low have moral as well as geographic connotations. Thus Sodom, the lowest point on earth, also represents

the depth of human depravity. Abraham finds God on mountaintops, but when he “goes down” to Egypt (in Gen. 12:10) he lowers himself to the moral level of the Egyptians. To this day, we speak of “going up” to Israel and to Jerusalem, regardless of our starting altitude.



<sup>2</sup>The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. <sup>3</sup>The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. <sup>4</sup>The descendants of Javan: Elishah and Tarshish, the Kittim and the Dodanim. <sup>5</sup>From these the maritime nations branched out. [These are the descendants of Japheth] by their lands—each with its language—their clans and their nations.

<sup>6</sup>The descendants of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. <sup>7</sup>The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

<sup>8</sup>Cush also begot Nimrod, who was the first man of might on earth. <sup>9</sup>He was a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD; hence the saying, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD.” <sup>10</sup>The mainstays of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup>From that land

בְּנֵי יָפֶת גֹּמֶר וּמָגוֹג וּמְדַי וַיִּזָּן וְתוּבַל  
וּמִשֵּׁן וְתִירָס׃<sup>3</sup> וּבְנֵי גֹמֶר אֲשֶׁנַּז וְרִפְתָּה  
וְתוֹגַרְמָה׃<sup>4</sup> וּבְנֵי יָוָן אֵלִישָׁה וְתַרְשִׁישׁ  
כִּיְתִים וְדֹדָנִים׃<sup>5</sup> מֵאֵלֶּה נִפְרְדוּ אֵי  
הַגּוֹיִם בְּאַרְצֹתָם אִישׁ לְלִשְׁנוֹ לְמִשְׁפּוּחֹתָם  
בְּגוּיָהֶם׃

וּבְנֵי חָם כּוּשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וּפּוּט וּכְנַעַן׃<sup>6</sup>  
וּבְנֵי כּוּשׁ סְבָא וְחַוִּילָה וְסַבְתָּה וְרַעְמָה  
וְסַבְתֵּכָא וּבְנֵי רַעְמָה שְׁבָא וְדֵדָן׃

וְכוּשׁ יָלַד אֶת־נִמְרֹד הוּא הַחַל לְהִיּוֹת  
גִּבּוֹר בְּאַרְץ׃<sup>9</sup> הוּא־הָיָה גִבּוֹר־צִיד לְפָנָי  
יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן יֵאמָר כְּנִמְרֹד גִּבּוֹר צִיד  
לְפָנָי יְהוָה׃<sup>10</sup> וְתֵהִי רֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ  
בָּבֶל וְאַרְךָ וְאַכַּד וְכַלְנֵה בְּאַרְץ שִׁנְעָר׃

#### NIMROD (vv. 8–12)

This section shifts the focus of interest to Mesopotamia.

**8. Nimrod** He is not a historical figure. He may be based on an outstanding Mesopotamian personality (Tukulti-Ninurta I) whose exploits left their mark on the historical memory of Israel. His achievements were commemorated on steles, buildings, and inscriptions; and he was the subject of numerous tales and legends.

**10. The mainstays of his kingdom** These cities were the power base from which he expanded into Assyria.

**Babylon** The famous city on the river Eu-

phrates, about 50 miles (80 km) south of modern Baghdad in Iraq.

**Erech** The Sumerian city-state Uruk, now Warka on the east side of the Euphrates, about 40 miles (64 km) up the river from Ur in southern Iraq.

**Calneh** The only name in this list that never appears in Akkadian inscriptions. A widely accepted suggestion is to read the word as *v'-khullanab*, meaning, “all of them being.”

**Shinar** The land of Babylonia, embracing Sumer and Akkad and bounded on the north by Assyria, modern southern Iraq.

**11. From that land** That is, “From that land, he (Nimrod) went forth to Asshur.” The

#### CHAPTER 10

**2ff.** These tables of the descendants of Noah’s sons do not seem to conform to any identifiable racial or linguistic pattern. It has been suggested that they are divided by types of social organization: the sons of Japheth represent island communities (the Greek isles of the Mediterranean), the sons of Ham are city dwellers (which is why Egypt and Assyria are on the

same list), while the sons of Shem are seminomadic shepherds.

**8. Nimrod** The name in Hebrew suggests rebelliousness. The Midrash sees Nimrod as the first person to take advantage of God’s permission to kill animals for food. Then, having developed a taste for blood and the thrill of being able to take life, he killed human beings. Blessed by God with grace and skill, he misused his talents.

Asshur went forth and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, <sup>12</sup>and Resen between Nineveh and Calah, that is the great city.

<sup>13</sup>And Mizraim begot the Ludim, the Anamim, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim, <sup>14</sup>the Pathrusim, the Casluhim, and the Caphtorim, whence the Philistines came forth.

<sup>15</sup>Canaan begot Sidon, his first-born, and Heth; <sup>16</sup>and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, <sup>17</sup>the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, <sup>18</sup>the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites spread out. (<sup>19</sup>The [original] Canaanite territory extended from Sidon as far as Gerar, near Gaza, and as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha.) <sup>20</sup>These

11 מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא יֵצֵא אַשּׁוּר וַיְבִן אֶת־נִינְוֶה וְאֶת־רְחוֹבֹת עִיר וְאֶת־כַּלַּח: 12 וְאֶת־רֶסֶן בֵּין נִינְוֶה וּבֵין כַּלַּח הוּא הָעִיר הַגְּדֹלָה: 13 וּמִצְרַיִם יָלַד אֶת־לֹדִים וְאֶת־עַנְמִים וְאֶת־לְהָבִים וְאֶת־נַפְתָּחִים: 14 וְאֶת־פַּתְרֻסִים וְאֶת־כַּסְלֻחִים אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאוּ מִשָּׁם פְּלִשְׁתִּים וְאֶת־כַּפְתָּרִים: 15 וּכְנַעַן יָלַד אֶת־צִידֹן בְּכָרוֹ וְאֶת־חֵת: 16 וְאֶת־הֵבְוִסִי וְאֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי וְאֶת־הַגִּרְגָּשִׁי: 17 וְאֶת־הַחִוִּי וְאֶת־הָעַרְקִי וְאֶת־הַסִּינִי: 18 וְאֶת־הָאַרְוָדִי וְאֶת־הַצְּמָרִי וְאֶת־הַחֲמָתִי וְאַחַר נָפְצוּ מִשְׁפַּחֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי: 19 וַיְהִי גְבוּל הַכְּנַעֲנִי מִצִּידֹן

passage reflects the historical fact that, in its early period, Assyria was long under the domination of Sumer and Akkad, whose religious, linguistic, and cultural influence it freely acknowledged.

**Asshur** The region of the Upper Mesopotamian plain.

**Nineveh** Situated on the left bank of the Tigris, about 250 miles (400 km) northwest of Babylon, presently the mounds of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus (“the prophet Jonah”) opposite Mosul.

**Rehoboth-ir** Literally, “broad places of the city,” this is a Hebraized form of *rebit Ninua*, which refers to “the quarters of Nineveh.”

**Calah** The famous Assyrian city Kalah, the site of which is presently known as Nimrud, located on the left bank of the Tigris near its juncture with the Great Zab.

**12. Resen** This may be related to the Assyrian city of *Resh-eni*.

**that is the great city** Nineveh.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF CANAAN  
(vv. 15–19)

**15. Sidon** The famous Phoenician port city.

**Heth** The ancestor of the Hittites, an Indo-European people who settled in Asia Minor, took over the name of the earlier inhabitants, the Hatti, and ca. 1800 B.C.E. founded the Hittite Empire.

**16. Jebusites** Nothing is known about the

origin of this people. In the period of Joshua’s wars of conquest, and until David’s time, they were located in Jerusalem.

**Amorites** A Semitic people who first appeared in Babylonia in significant numbers ca. 2000 B.C.E., having migrated from the fringes of the Syrian desert. In later centuries, successive waves of Amorites infiltrated the entire Fertile Crescent.

**17–18. Arkites . . . Hamathites** All these refer to the inhabitants of five Syrian cities, four on the coast and one inland.

**Afterward** This note corresponds to that in verse 5. The text recognizes that Phoenicia proper and Palestine constituted a cultural continuum.

**19. Canaanite territory** Here “Canaan” is not a person but a people. The Table of Nations is leading up to the forerunner of Abraham, whose descendants are to inherit the land; hence this interest in the boundaries of Canaan.

**Gerar** An important city in the western Negeb, situated west or northwest of Beer-sheba in a region sufficiently well watered to provide pasturing facilities for shepherds.

**Gaza** The regional capital of the Egyptian province of Canaan and the most southerly of the coastal cities, it was strategically situated along the main highway and trade route that linked Mesopotamia and Egypt.

**Sodom . . . Zeboiim** These are the “cities of the Plain” (mentioned again in Gen. 14:2 and Deut. 29:22) that were destroyed because of

are the descendants of Ham, according to their clans and languages, by their lands and nations.

<sup>21</sup>Sons were also born to Shem, ancestor of all the descendants of Eber and older brother of Japheth. <sup>22</sup>The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. <sup>23</sup>The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. <sup>24</sup>Arpachshad begot Shelah, and Shelah begot Eber. <sup>25</sup>Two sons were born to Eber: the name of the first was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and the name of his brother was Joktan. <sup>26</sup>Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup>Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup>Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup>Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan. <sup>30</sup>Their settlements extended from Mesha as far as Sephar, the hill country to the east. <sup>31</sup>These

בְּאֵכָה גֵרְרָה עַד־עֵנָה בְּאֵכָה סְדֻמָּה  
וְעַמְרָה וְאֲדָמָה וְצַבִּיִּם עַד־לְשֵׁעַ: <sup>20</sup> אֵלֶּה  
בְּנֵיהֶם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְלִשְׁנָתָם בְּאַרְצֹתָם  
בְּגוּיָהֶם: ס  
<sup>21</sup> וּלְשֵׁם יֶלֶד גַּם־הוּא אָבִי כָּל־בְּנֵי־עֶבֶר  
אָחִי יֶפֶת הַגְּדוֹל: <sup>22</sup> בְּנֵי שֵׁם עֵילָם  
וְאַשּׁוּר וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד וְלוֹד וְאַרָם: <sup>23</sup> וּבְנֵי  
אַרָם עוּץ וְחוּל וְגֵתֵר וּמָשׁ: <sup>24</sup> וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד  
יָלַד אֶת־שְׁלַח וְשְׁלַח יָלַד אֶת־עֶבֶר:  
<sup>25</sup> וְלְעֶבֶר יָלַד שְׁנֵי בָנִים שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פֶּלֶג  
כִּי בְיָמָיו נִפְלְגָה הָאָרֶץ וְשֵׁם אָחִיו  
יֶקְטָן: <sup>26</sup> וְיֶקְטָן יָלַד אֶת־אַלְמוֹדָד וְאֶת־  
שְׁלֵף וְאֶת־חֲצַרְמוֹת וְאֶת־יֶרַח: <sup>27</sup> וְאֶת־  
הַדּוֹרָם וְאֶת־אוּזַל וְאֶת־דִּקְלָה: <sup>28</sup> וְאֶת־  
עוֹבַל וְאֶת־אַבִּימָאֵל וְאֶת־שְׁבָא: <sup>29</sup> וְאֶת־  
אוֹפֵר וְאֶת־חֻוִּילָה וְאֶת־יֹוֹבָב כָּל־אֵלֶּה  
בְּנֵי יֶקְטָן: <sup>30</sup> וַיְהִי מוֹשְׁבָם מִמִּשְׁא

their wickedness. They have not been identified, but their most likely location is in the area now covered by the southern extension of the Dead Sea below the Lisan.

**Lasha** Otherwise unknown. Rabbinic commentators identified it with Callirrhoe, a site of hot springs near the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.

#### THE SHEMITES (vv. 21–31)

**21. all the descendants of Eber** Eber, although he is the fourth generation from Shem, receives special mention here because he is the ancestor both of Israel and of a variety of peoples with whom Israelite history is linked: Arameans, Ammonites, Moabites, Midianites, the Ishmaelite tribes, and Edomites.

**22. Elam** The ancient name for modern Khūzestān in southwestern Iran in the Iranian Plateau east of Babylon and northeast of the Persian Gulf. Its capital was Susa, the biblical Shushan of Esther 1:2–5. Elam is the most eastern country in the Table of Nations.

**Asshur** The city of Asshur on the Tigris in Upper Mesopotamia gave its name to the surrounding territory, which became known as Assyria.

**Arpachshad** A tradition from Second Temple times connects this name to the ancestor of the Chaldeans, an Aramean tribe that inhabited the desert regions between northern Arabia and the Persian Gulf.

**Lud** Possibly Lydia, a region on the west coast of Asia Minor.

**Aram** It is unclear whether this term applies here to a specific tribe or to the wider confederation of Aramean tribes that were western Semites.

**23. descendants of Aram** Of the four subdivisions of Aram, only Uz is known from sources outside the Bible. See Gen. 22:21 and 1 Chron. 1:17.

**25. Peleg** Possibly in Syria. His descendants are listed in Gen. 11:18–28. The name can mean “water channel” and may refer to an area of land watered by irrigation canals.

**the earth was divided** Traditionally, this has been taken as a reference to the confusion of languages and the dispersal of mankind described in the next chapter. The “dividing of the earth” may also refer to the development of agriculture by irrigation canals, some historic split up of tribes, or even an earthquake.

are the descendants of Shem according to their clans and languages, by their lands, according to their nations.

<sup>32</sup>These are the groupings of Noah’s descendants, according to their origins, by their nations; and from these the nations branched out over the earth after the Flood.

בְּאֵלֶּה סִפְרָה הָרַקְדָּם: <sup>31</sup>אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי-  
שֵׁם לְמִשְׁפּוֹתָם לְלִשְׁנָתָם בְּאַרְצוֹתָם  
לְגוֹיֵיהֶם:

<sup>32</sup>אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפּוֹת בְּנֵי-נֹחַ לְתוֹלְדוֹתָם  
בְּגוֹיֵיהֶם וּמֵאֵלֶּה נִפְרְדוּ הַגּוֹיִם בְּאַרְץ  
אֲחֵר הַמְּבּוּל: פ

**11** Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. <sup>2</sup>And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>They said

וַיְהִי כִּלְהֵאָרֶץ שְׂפֵה אֶחָת  
וַדְּבָרִים אֶחָדִים: <sup>2</sup>וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם מִקְּדָם  
וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְּקֵעָה בְּאַרְץ שִׁנְעָר וַיִּשְׁבוּ שָׁם:

THE TOWER OF BABEL (11:1–9)

The generation after the Flood proves to be out of harmony with God, who must then embark on a new effort to fulfill divine purposes on earth.

THE MAKING OF BABEL (vv. 1–4)

**1. Everyone on earth** This and the following verses emphasize repeatedly the involvement of all humankind in the offense. This point is vital to the proper understanding of this narrative, which closes the second universal epoch in human history. It indicates that humankind is still rebellious against God, having learned nothing from the past.

**the same language** Belief in an original universal human language seems to have been current in ancient Sumer as well. The Bible here portrays the disruption of communication be-

tween human beings as having been the consequence of humankind’s deliberate disharmony with God.

**2. migrated** Humankind is seen as having been nomadic after the Flood.

**from the east** That is, from the vantage point of Canaan.

**a valley** The flat alluvial plain in southern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

**Shinar** See Comment to Gen. 10:10. A similar tradition is preserved by the ancient historian Berosus, whose story of the Mesopotamian flood also has the survivors first going to Babylon.

**there** The Hebrew word “*sham*,” repeated five times, directs our attention to the crucial importance of the site.

CHAPTER 11

Commanded to disperse and settle the earth, Noah’s descendants insist on clustering in one area. Commanded to submit to the will of God, they set out to make a name for themselves. The story of the Tower of Babel seems inspired by the Babylonian temple towers (zigurats). Can we sense here the Torah’s ambivalence about large cities, with the anonymity, crime, and lack of neighborliness they represent? Or its suspicion that technology, the celebration of human ingenuity, will often lead to idolatry, people worshiping the work of their own hands?

One writer distinguishes between “mountain cultures,” which see the heart of the world in wilderness, revering nature and adapting to it, and “tower cultures,” for whom the essence of the world is the city and the human-made environment, stripping the sense of awe from nature and attaching it to the social and technological order. Egypt, land of pyramids and treasure cities, will be a tower culture. Israel, from Mount Sinai to the Temple Mount, will be largely a mountain culture. The people of the Tower of Babel are a pre-eminent example of a tower culture. Although human beings have done many wonderful things to reshape their environment, there is always the danger

to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard.”—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.—<sup>4</sup>And they said, “Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world.”<sup>5</sup>The LORD came down to look at the city and tower that man had built, <sup>6</sup>and the LORD said, “If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ הַבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה  
לְבָנִים וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָּה וַתְּהִי לָהֶם  
הַלְבְּנָה לְאֶבֶן וְהַחֲמֹר הָיָה לָהֶם לְחֵמֶר׃  
וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַבֵּה | נִבְנֶה־לָּנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל  
וְרִאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה־לָּנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן־נִפּוּץ  
עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ׃<sup>5</sup> וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה לִרְאוֹת  
אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי  
הָאָדָם׃<sup>6</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֵן עָם אֶחָד  
וְשָׂפָה אַחַת לְכָלֶם וְזֶה הַחֲלֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת  
וְעַתָּה לֹא־יִבָּצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ

**3. Come, let us make bricks** The narrator, writing from the perspective of a foreign observer, nevertheless displays an accurate and detailed knowledge of Mesopotamian construction methods.

**Brick . . . mortar** This editorial aside expresses wonderment at construction techniques so different from those familiar to the narrator in Israel where stone was used for construction purposes. (The phrase “with bitumen and burnt-brick” is a standard formula in Babylonian building inscriptions.)

**4. a tower** The ziggurat—a lofty, massive, solid-brick, multistaged temple tower that symbolized a sacred mountain, a meeting point of heaven and earth. The outstanding feature of most Mesopotamian cities, it was regarded as the center of the universe, the arena of divine activity, where humankind and the gods might enter into direct contact with one another.

**with its top in the sky** This phrase is the name of the chief ziggurat of Babylon, the locus of the story and the very tower in question, Esagilāh, “the house that lifts its head to heaven.” This expression is also often found in other Mesopotamian building inscriptions, leading to the

widespread interpretation that the aim of the tower builders was to storm heaven. Generally, the Bible considers tall towers to be symbols of human arrogance (see Isa. 2:12–15 and 30:25; Ezek. 26:4,9).

**to make a name for ourselves** “Name” here probably means “monument,” as in Isa. 56:5. Important kings were associated with great building projects. Bricks inscribed with royal names were placed in the ziggurat’s foundations to ensure the monarch’s eternal fame.

**else we shall be scattered** The ziggurat, a source of civic pride, was expected to foster a spirit of unity. But the Torah interprets construction as a mark of human arrogance and a direct affront to God.

#### GOD’S COUNTERMEASURES (vv. 5–9)

**5. The LORD came down** To investigate humankind’s doings.

**man** The biblical narrator stresses the strictly human nature of the entire enterprise. In Mesopotamian tradition, the gods erected the temple at Babylon.

**had built** Thus far; Gen. 11:8 tells us that the project was never completed.

of becoming so enamored of technology that human values are lost.

A rabbinic legend relates that people paid no mind if a worker on the tower fell to his death. If a brick fell, however, they lamented the delay in their building project (PRE 24). “The purpose of these awe-inspiring monuments erected by the technical skill of men was to enable people to forget their insignificance and transient nature” (N. Leibowitz).

**4. God learns from experiences like these,** “When I am gracious to decent people, they respond with gratitude and humility. When I am gracious to wicked people (like Nimrod and the builders of the Tower), they respond with arrogance” (BT Hul. 89a).

**5. The LORD came down** A *midrash* states that this passage is intended to teach us not to pass judgment on anyone without personally examining the situation (Tanḥ.).

be out of their reach. <sup>7</sup>Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech.”  
<sup>8</sup>Thus the LORD scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup>That is why it was called Babel, because there the LORD confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

<sup>10</sup>This is the line of Shem. Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years after the Flood. <sup>11</sup>After the birth of Arpachshad, Shem lived 500 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>12</sup>When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he begot Shelah. <sup>13</sup>After the birth of Shelah, Arpachshad lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>14</sup>When Shelah had lived 30 years, he be-

לַעֲשׂוֹת: <sup>7</sup> הַבָּה נִרְדָּה וְנִבְלָה שָׁם שְׁפָתַם  
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׁפַת רֵעֵהוּ:  
<sup>8</sup> וַיִּפֶץ יְהוָה אֹתָם מִשָּׁם עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-  
 הָאָרֶץ וַיַּחְדְּלוּ לְבַנֵּת הָעִיר: <sup>9</sup> עַל-כֵּן קָרָא  
 שְׁמָהּ בָּבֶל כִּי-שָׁם בָּלַל יְהוָה שְׁפַת כָּל-  
 הָאָרֶץ וּמִשָּׁם הִפְיֹצָם יְהוָה עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-  
 הָאָרֶץ: פ

<sup>10</sup> אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת שָׁם שֵׁם בֶּן-מֵאָת שָׁנָה  
 וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-אַרְפַּכְשָׁד שְׁנַתִּים אַחַר  
 הַמַּבּוּל: <sup>11</sup> וַיְחִי-שָׁם אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-  
 אַרְפַּכְשָׁד חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים  
 וּבָנוֹת: ס <sup>12</sup> וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד הִי חֲמִישׁ  
 וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-שֶׁלַח: <sup>13</sup> וַיְחִי  
 אַרְפַּכְשָׁד אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת-שֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ  
 שָׁנִים וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים  
 וּבָנוֹת: ס <sup>14</sup> וְשֶׁלַח הִי שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה  
 וַיּוֹלֵד אֶת-עֵבֶר: <sup>15</sup> וַיְחִי-שֶׁלַח אַחֲרֵי

**7. Let us, then** Unless preventive measures are taken, there will be no limit to humankind's schemes. For the plural use of the verb, see Comment to 1:26.

**confound** The Hebrew word “*navlah*” is a form of the stem for “to confuse” (בלל).

**8. they stopped building** This narrative may have been inspired by the spectacle of Babylon and its ziggurat lying in ruins, which was the situation after the Hittite raid on the city ca. 1600 B.C.E.

**the city** That is, the ziggurat.

**9. it was called** Literally, “one called its name,” an ironic echo of verse 4. They aspired

to “make a name” for themselves, but succeeded only in attaching the name “confusion” to their handiwork.

**Babel** Neither the “gate of god,” as the inhabitants of Babylon interpreted the name, nor the center of the earth, as they conceived their city to be—but a site of gibberish, radiating divisiveness and disastrous alienation from God.

The narrative of this chapter's opening is a parody belittling Babylon and its temple tower (ziggurat). Babylon (“the gate of the god,” *bab-il*) becomes “babble.” The ziggurat, the abode of the god, is unable to withstand the divine onslaught.

FROM SHEM TO ABRAHAM (11:10–32)

The narrative now focuses on one line of descent within the family tree of Shem. This line leads to Abraham, the 10th generation from Shem, just as Noah was the 10th generation from Adam. From the biblical point of view, the birth of Abraham constitutes a decisive turning point in the history of humankind.

**10. This is the line** The advent of Terah is a climactic event set off by the words translated here as “This is the line” (*eilleh tol'dot*). The He-

brew phrase appears another 10 times in Genesis. Here, the phrase establishes the transition from universal to patriarchal history.

**100** This figure is approximate, because Shem would now have been 102, according to the data of 5:32 and 7:6.

**Arpachshad** Inexplicably, in 10:22 he is the third son of Shem, whereas here he seems to be the first-born.

got Eber. <sup>15</sup>After the birth of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>16</sup>When Eber had lived 34 years, he begot Peleg. <sup>17</sup>After the birth of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>18</sup>When Peleg had lived 30 years, he begot Reu. <sup>19</sup>After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>20</sup>When Reu had lived 32 years, he begot Serug. <sup>21</sup>After the birth of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>22</sup>When Serug had lived 30 years, he begot Nahor. <sup>23</sup>After the birth of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>24</sup>When Nahor had lived 29 years, he begot Terah. <sup>25</sup>After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and begot sons and daughters.

<sup>26</sup>When Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. <sup>27</sup>Now this is the

הוֹלִידוּ אֶת־עֵבֶר שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: ס  
 וַיְחִי־עֵבֶר אַרְבַּע וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ אֶת־פֶּלֶג: <sup>17</sup> וַיְחִי־עֵבֶר אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־פֶּלֶג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: ס <sup>18</sup> וַיְחִי־פֶלֶג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ אֶת־רְעוּ: <sup>19</sup> וַיְחִי־פֶלֶג אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־רְעוּ תִשַׁע שָׁנִים וּמֵאוֹתִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: ס <sup>20</sup> וַיְחִי רְעוּ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ אֶת־שְׂרוּג: <sup>21</sup> וַיְחִי רְעוּ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־שְׂרוּג שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וּמֵאוֹתִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: ס <sup>22</sup> וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ אֶת־נְחֹר: <sup>23</sup> וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־נְחֹר מֵאוֹתִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: ס <sup>24</sup> וַיְחִי נְחֹר תִּשַׁע וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ אֶת־תְּרַח: <sup>25</sup> וַיְחִי נְחֹר אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־תְּרַח תִּשַׁע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וּמֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: ס <sup>26</sup> וַיְחִי־תְּרַח שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיֹּלְדוּ אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נְחֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן: <sup>27</sup> וְאַלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי תְּרַח תְּרַח הוֹלִידוּ

**18. Reu** Probably a shortened form of Reuel, meaning “friend of God.” (Cf. Reuel, a name of Moses’ father-in-law, in Exod. 2:18.)

**20. Serug** The well-known city of Sarugi, not far north of Haran in the Balikh Valley.

**22. Nahor** An important site in the upper Balikh Valley.

**24. Terah** Ancient sources mention a place-name *Til (sa) Turahi* situated on the Balikh River not far from Haran and Nahor. The name may well be connected with *yarei-ah*, “moon.” Several members of Terah’s family, as well as some of the sites connected with him, bear names associated with moon worship. Josh. 24:2 explicitly describes Terah as an idolater. Note that both Haran and Ur were also associated with moon worship.

**26. 70 years** Terah begets children when he is about twice the age of all his predecessors in the line of Shem. This detail inserts into the nar-

rative the motif of protracted childlessness, a condition that will be a major factor in the lives of his descendants, the patriarchs of Israel.

**Abram** This form of the name is consistently used until it is expanded to Abraham in Gen. 17:5, after which it appears again only in Neh. 9:7 and 1 Chron. 1:26 as required by their respective contexts. The name Abram is west Semitic and attested in cuneiform sources. It could mean “exalted father,” “the father is exalted,” or “the (divine) father loves (him).”

**Nahor** Apparently named after his grandfather.

**Haran** A name derived from *har*, “a mountain,” used in the sense of “mountain god” in ancient Semitic personal names.

THE FAMILY OF TERAH (vv. 27–32)

**27. Now this is the line** This *eilleh tol'dot* phrase introduces the biography of Abraham.

line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. <sup>28</sup>Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. <sup>29</sup>Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. <sup>30</sup>Now Sarai was barren, she had no child.

<sup>31</sup>Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as

אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נְחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט׃<sup>28</sup> וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תְּרַח אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלְדוֹתוֹ בְּאֹר כְּשָׂדִים׃<sup>29</sup> וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנְחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם שָׂרַי וְשֵׁם אִשְׁת־נְחוֹר מִלְכָּה בַת־הָרָן אִבְי־מִלְכָּה וְאָבִי יִסְכָּה׃<sup>30</sup> וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלֶד׃<sup>31</sup> וַיִּקַּח תְּרַח אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בְּן־הָרָן בְּן־בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כְּלֵתוֹ אִשְׁת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אֹתָם מֵאֹר כְּשָׂדִים לְלַכֵּת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ

מפסיר

**Lot** The origin of this name is unknown.

**28. Haran died** A fact essential for understanding 12:4–5.

**Ur of the Chaldeans** Most scholars regard this mention of the Chaldeans as an anachronism. They were a Semitic people related to, but distinct from, the Arameans. Nothing excavated from the great city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia indicates the presence of Chaldeans until the 7th to 6th centuries B.C.E., long after the period of the patriarchs. Thus the Ur of our text may be one of the sites in Upper Mesopotamia, founded by citizens of the famous city in the south and named after it. An Upper Mesopotamian Ur would have been much closer to Haran, a city crucial to patriarchal narratives.

**29. Sarai** The name (changed to Sarah in 17:15) means “princess” in Hebrew. If it is based on the Akkadian word *sharratu* (a term used for the female consort of the moon god Sin, the principal god of Ur), it means “queen.” The parentage of Nahor’s wife is given, that of Sarai is not—a startling omission that must have been intentional. Perhaps the narrator withholds that information so as not to diminish the suspense in chapter 20 when Abraham, to extricate himself from an embarrassing predicament, reveals that Sarai is his half-sister.

**Milcah** The name is a variant form of Malcah, “queen.” In Akkadian, *malkatu* is a title of the goddess Ishtar, known as Queen of Heaven, daughter of the moon god Sin.

**Iscah** The name may derive from the stem meaning “to see” (סכה) and may be a shortened form of a sentence name: “May God see [i.e., with favor] the child.” Nothing is known of her; she may have been the central figure of traditions now lost.

**30. barren** The Hebrew word *akarab* simply means “childless,” but not necessarily infertile.

**31. they set out . . . as far as Haran** Haran is situated some 550 miles (885 km) northwest of Ur, about 10 miles (16 km) north of the present-day Syrian–Turkish border on the left bank of the Balikh River. The name means “route, journey, caravan,” no doubt derived from the city’s location as an important station on the main international trade routes from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Sea.

Nahor is not mentioned as included in the company, but he was closely associated with Haran. Indeed, the place is called “the city of Nahor” in Gen. 24:10. Perhaps he migrated at a later time.

**31. They set out together from Ur** We know from archeological sources that there was a great influx of population into Ur at about this time. But Abraham, the *Ivri*, from a word meaning

“the other side,” ever the contrarian, chose to leave Ur in pursuit of God.

**they settled there** So often in life, we set out with the best of intentions, only to give up half-way to our goal (*Arugat Ha-Bosem*).



Haran, they settled there.<sup>32</sup>The days of Terah came to 205 years; and Terah died in Haran.

שָׁם: <sup>32</sup>וַיְהִי יְמֵי תֵרַח חֲמִשׁ עָשָׂר וַיָּמָתוּ בְּחָרָן: ט

**32. Terah died** The Torah does not always tell its stories in strict time sequence. A calculation based on the data of 11:26 and 12:4 shows him to have been 145 years old when Abraham

left Haran for Canaan. Thus Terah lived on in Haran for another 60 years after Abraham's departure.

**32. Terah died in Haran** Actually, Terah did not die for another 60 years. Therefore the Torah must be describing him here as "spiritually dead," having given his soul over to idol worship (Gen. R. 39:7).

As the previous *parashah* lightened the note

of disappointment at its end by introducing the righteous Noah, this *parashah* tempers God's disappointment by anticipating the emergence of Abraham. "Whereas Noah remained fixed in Nature, Abraham sets out into history to proclaim God's dominion" (Buber).

# הַפְּטָרָה נח

## HAFTARAH FOR NO·AḤ

ISAIAH 54:1–55:5 (*Ashk'nazim*)

ISAIAH 54:1–10 (*S'fardim*)

This *haftarah* presents a series of promises and assurances to Zion and its inhabitants. They constitute prophecies addressed to the city (Jerusalem) and to the nation, destroyed and defeated since the Babylonian conquest in 587–586 B.C.E. The prophet promises the restoration of divine mercy and covenantal guarantees. God's wrath will be replaced with kindness everlasting, recalling the oath sworn after the Flood in the time of Noah.

Figures of assurance dominate the prophet's style, as dramatized through expanding expressions of God's language and attributes. The opening proclamation ends simply with the words "said the LORD" (54:1). After several oracles of renewed kindness, however, the conclusion states, "said the LORD your Redeemer" (v. 8); and the finale to God's oath of permanent loyalty triumphantly proclaims, "said the LORD, who takes you back in love" (v. 10). From another perspective, the nation successively learns that "The Holy One of Israel" who "redeems" Zion is none other than the "God of all the Earth." Intimate love is expressed by the universal God.

The use of comparisons for the sake of rhetorical emphasis is another stylistic feature of this *haftarah*. In one instance, the prophet imagines the desolation and restoration of Zion as a ruptured and healed marriage relationship. "The LORD has called you back / As a wife forlorn and forsaken" (v. 6). She who once was "espoused" (*b'ulah*; v. 1) will be espoused anew by her redeeming and loving Lord (*boalayikh*; v. 5). This language draws from older legal usage (Deut. 24:1) and prophetic tradition (Hos. 2 and Jer. 2:1 and 3:1, especially). In those cases, too, God's relation with Israel is that of husband and wife. Isaiah's emphasis that God will take His bride

back in "love" (*rihamtikh*) and "kindness everlasting" (*hesed olam*; v. 8) literally recalls the vows of new espousals as enunciated in Hos. 2:21. "And I [God] will espouse you forever (*l'olam*): / I will espouse you with . . . goodness and mercy (*hesed v'rahmim*)." There is a notable difference, however. Isaiah speaks of a marriage between God and Zion, not between God and the people Israel. The city is a mystical embodiment of its inhabitants, a connection underscored by the imagery of barrenness and repopulation found throughout the prophecy. Nevertheless, the wider Near Eastern theme of a bond between a deity and its city is maintained here.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The primary connection between the *haftarah* and *parashah* is their common reference to the Flood in the days of Noah, the result of divine wrath. That event from earliest time, together with God's oath that followed, are invoked by Isaiah as part of God's promise of renewed loyalty to His people. A series of close verbal links establish a relationship between the present situation and the original event. In the ancient past, God made a "covenant" (*b'rit*) with Noah and his descendants (Gen. 9:9,11,15), swearing that "not again" (*lo . . . od*) will the earth and its inhabitants be destroyed (9:11,15). Now, too, God promises the nation (Isa. 54:10, 55:1) a renewed "covenant" (*b'rit*) and the hope that the nation's shame will "not again" (*lo od*) be recalled (Isa. 54:4).

The prophet transforms the language of the narrative in two respects. In the first case, a covenant guaranteeing the stability of nature becomes a guarantee of permanent divine loyalty toward Zion and Israel. The second instance in-

volves taking a pact made between God and all humans and applying it to a covenant with a particular people. These contrasts heighten the mythic proportions by which the nation experienced its destruction and will experience its restoration.

Another version of the divine oath in Genesis adds an additional dimension. In it, God swears: “Never again (*lo . . . od*) will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again (*v’lo . . . od*) destroy every living being, as I have done” (Gen. 8:21). According to the prophet, the divine oath of restraint is not justified by this realization of the human propensity for evil. Rather, it is motivated by the return of God’s love to His creatures and the decision to transform that love into an everlasting covenant.

The final section of the *haftarah* suggests that the human heart may be transformed through

heeding the call for spiritual living that is God’s gift to “all who are thirsty” (Isa. 55:1–3).

Two models of piety are offered by the *parashah* and *haftarah*. One model is the example of Noah, characterized as a “righteous man” (*tzaddik*) who was “blameless in his age” and “walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). This model of righteousness is focused on inner purity and divine-centered living. It is the way of spiritual aloneness, with all its inner demands and mysteries. The other model is that of the “disciples of the LORD” who establish their city “through righteousness (*bitzdekah*)” (Isa. 54:13–14). The focus of this model is the community and its collective transformation. Here the tasks are public and the demands are in full view. Maimonides perceptively identified a scriptural source for the duty of giving charity (*tz’dakah*) in 54:14, underscoring the importance of such personal piety for collective religious life.

## 54 Shout, O barren one,

You who bore no child!

Shout aloud for joy,

You who did not travail!

For the children of the wife forlorn

Shall outnumber those of the espoused

—said the LORD.

<sup>2</sup>Enlarge the site of your tent,

Extend the size of your dwelling,

Do not stint!

Lengthen the ropes, and drive the pegs  
firm.

<sup>3</sup>For you shall spread out to the right and  
the left;

Your offspring shall dispossess nations

And shall people the desolate towns.

<sup>4</sup>Fear not, you shall not be shamed;

## נד רְנִי עֲקָרָה

לֹא יָלְדָה

פִּצְחִי רְנָה וְצַהֲלִי

לֹא-חָלָה

כִּי-רַבִּים בְּנֵי-שׁוֹמְמָה

מִבְּנֵי בְעוּלָה

אָמַר יְהוָה:

<sup>2</sup>הֲרַחֲבִי | מְקוֹם אֹהֶלְךָ

וּרְיָעוֹת מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִטּוּ

אֶל-תַּחֲשֻׁכִי

הָאֲרִיכִי מִיַּתְרוֹךָ וַיִּתְדַחֲךָ חֲזָקִי:

<sup>3</sup>כִּי-יִמִּין וּשְׂמֹאל\* תִּפְרָצִי

וְזָרְעֶךָ גּוֹיִם יִירָשׁ

וְעָרִים נְשֻׁמוֹת יוֹשְׁבוֹ:

<sup>4</sup>אֶל-תִּירָאִי כִּי-לֹא תִבוֹשִׁי

v. 3. מלא ו

Do not cringe, you shall not be disgraced.  
 For you shall forget  
 The reproach of your youth,  
 And remember no more  
 The shame of your widowhood.  
 5For He who made you will espouse  
 you—  
 His name is “LORD of Hosts.”  
 The Holy One of Israel will redeem you—  
 He is called “God of all the Earth.”

6The LORD has called you back  
 As a wife forlorn and forsaken.  
 Can one cast off the wife of his youth?  
 —said your God.

7For a little while I forsook you,  
 But with vast love I will bring you back.  
 8In slight anger, for a moment,  
 I hid My face from you;  
 But with kindness everlasting  
 I will take you back in love  
 —said the LORD your Redeemer.

9For this to Me is like the waters of Noah:  
 As I swore that the waters of Noah  
 Nevermore would flood the earth,  
 So I swear that I will not  
 Be angry with you or rebuke you.  
 10For the mountains may move  
 And the hills be shaken,  
 But my loyalty shall never move from  
 you,  
 Nor My covenant of friendship be shaken  
 —said the LORD, who  
 takes you back in love.

וְאֶל־תִּכְלַמֵּי כִי לֹא תִחַפְּיִי  
 כִי בִשְׁתַּעַלְוֹמִיךָ  
 תִשְׁכַּחֵי  
 וְחִרְפַּת אֲלֻמְנוּתֶיךָ  
 לֹא תִזְכְּרִי־עוֹד:  
 5 כִּי בַעֲלֶיךָ עֲשִׂיךָ  
 יִהְיֶה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ  
 וְגֹאֲלֶךָ קָדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 אֱלֹהֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ יִקְרָא:

6 כִּי־כִאֲשֶׁה עֲזוּבָה וְעֲצוּבַת רוּחַ  
 קָרָאךָ יְהוָה  
 וְאִשֶׁת נְעוּרַיִם כִּי תִמָּאֵס  
 אָמַר אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

7 בְּרִגְעַ קָטָן עֲזַבְתִּיךָ  
 וּבְרַחֲמַיִם גְּדֹלִים אֶקְבְּצֶךָ:  
 8 בְּשִׂצְף קָצֶף  
 הִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי רָגַע מִפָּנֶיךָ  
 וּבְחֶסֶד עוֹלָם  
 רִחַמְתִּיךָ

אָמַר גֹּאֲלֶךָ יְהוָה: ס  
 9 כִּי־יָמֵי נָח זֹאת לִי  
 אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מֵעַבְרַת מִיַּנֹּחַ  
 עוֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ  
 בֵּן נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי  
 מִקְצֶף עֲלֶיךָ וּמִגְעַר־כָּבֶד:  
 10 כִּי הַהָרִים יִמוּשׁוּ  
 וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמוּטְנָה  
 וְחִסְדֵי מֵאֲתָנָךְ לֹא־יִמוּשׁוּ  
 וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמוּט  
 אָמַר מְרַחֲמֶךָ יְהוָה: ס

**Isaiah 54:6–8.** The reference to Israel as “wife of his youth” (*n’urim*) recalls the terminology in other images of the marriage motif in prophetic literature (Hos. 2:17, Jer. 2:2, Ezek. 23:8,19–20). The idea of loyalty and commitment is conveyed by the word “*hesed*” (cf. Isa.

54:10; 2 Sam. 7:15; Ps. 89:34). The same word alludes to the covenant response found also in Hos. 2:21 and Jer. 2:2. Through *hesed* one deals faithfully or keeps faith with another; it is so used of divine–human and interpersonal relationships (Deut. 5:10, 1 Sam. 20:8).

<sup>11</sup>Unhappy, storm-tossed one, uncom-  
forted!

I will lay carbuncles as your building stones  
And make your foundations of sapphires.

<sup>12</sup>I will make your battlements of rubies,  
Your gates of precious stones,  
The whole encircling wall of gems.

<sup>13</sup>And all your children shall be disciples  
of the LORD,

And great shall be the happiness of your  
children;

<sup>14</sup>You shall be established through right-  
eousness.

You shall be safe from oppression,  
And shall have no fear;

From ruin, and it shall not come near you.

<sup>15</sup>Surely no harm can be done

Without My consent:

Whoever would harm you

Shall fall because of you.

<sup>16</sup>It is I who created the smith

To fan the charcoal fire

And produce the tools for his work;

So it is I who create

The instruments of havoc.

<sup>17</sup>No weapon formed against you

Shall succeed,

And every tongue that contends with you  
at law

You shall defeat.

<sup>11</sup>עֲנִיָּה סַעֲרָה לֹא נַחֲמָה  
הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מִרְפִּיץ בַּפוֹךְ אֲבֹנֶיךָ  
וַיִּסְדְּתִיךָ בַּסַּפִּירִים:

<sup>12</sup>וְשִׁמְתִי כְדָכֹד שִׁמְשֵׁתֶיךָ

וְשַׁעֲרֶיךָ לְאַבְנֵי אֶקֶדָח

וְכָל־גְּבוּלְךָ לְאַבְנֵי־חַפָּץ:

<sup>13</sup>וְכָל־בְּנֶיךָ לְמוֹדֵי יְהוָה

וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֶיךָ:

<sup>14</sup>בַּצְדָקָה תִּכְוֶנֶנִי

רַחֲקֵי מֵעֲשָׂק

כִּי־לֹא תִירָאֵי

וּמִמַּחֲתָה כִּי לֹא־תִקְרַב אֵלֶיךָ:

<sup>15</sup>הֵן גּוֹר יְגוֹר

אָפֶס מֵאוֹתַי

מִי־גַר אֶתְּךָ

עָלֶיךָ יִפּוֹל:

<sup>16</sup>הֵן הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי בְרָאתִי חָרָשׁ

נִפְחֵ בָאֵשׁ פָּחִים

וּמוֹצִיא כְלֵי לְמַעֲשָׂהוּ

וְאֲנֹכִי בְרָאתִי

מִשְׁחִית לְחַבֵּל:

<sup>17</sup>כָּל־כְּלֵי יוֹצֵר עָלֶיךָ

לֹא יִצְלַח

וְכָל־לְשׁוֹן תִּקְוֹם־אֶתְּךָ לְמִשְׁפָּט

תִּרְשִׁיעֵי

**13. disciples** Hebrew *limmudei*, a technical term (see 8:16, 50:4).

**your children** Hebrew: *banayikh*, spelled בניך. In a well-known *midrash*, the second instance of this word in v. 13 is reread as *bonayikh* (your builders); it became the basis for teaching that knowledgeable children are the culture builders of the next generation (BT Ber. 64a). The spelling is בניכי in the large Isaiah scroll from Qumran (the “Dead Sea Scrolls”), which supports the midrashic vocalization *bonayikh*. However, this spelling may equally indicate that

the original sense was “your learned ones” (from the root בִּינָה, “to know”). If so, this noun would parallel “disciples of the LORD” in the first part of the verse.

**14. You shall be established through righteousness** This sentence recalls 1:27: “Zion shall be saved in the judgment; / Her repentant ones, in the retribution.”

**17. their triumph** In Hebrew: *tzidkatam*. The force of the noun is justification in court. It counterpoints the opening clause (cf. Exod. 23:7; 2 Sam. 15:4; Isa. 5:23; Prov. 17:15). God

Such is the lot of the servants of the LORD,  
Such their triumph through Me  
—declares the LORD.

זֹאת נַחֲלַת עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה  
וְצִדְקַתְּם מֵאֵתִי  
נֹאמֵר יְהוָה: ס

**55** Ho, all who are thirsty,

Come for water,  
Even if you have no money;  
Come, buy food and eat:  
Buy food without money,  
Wine and milk without cost.  
<sup>2</sup>Why do you spend money for what is  
not bread,

Your earnings for what does not satisfy?  
Give heed to Me,

And you shall eat choice food  
And enjoy the richest viands.

<sup>3</sup>Incline your ear and come to Me;  
Hearken, and you shall be revived.

And I will make with you an everlasting  
covenant,

The enduring loyalty promised to David.

<sup>4</sup>As I made him a leader of peoples,  
A prince and commander of peoples,

<sup>5</sup>So you shall summon a nation you did  
not know,

And a nation that did not know you  
Shall come running to you—

For the sake of the LORD your God,  
The Holy One of Israel who has glorified  
you.

**נֹה** הוֹי כָּל-צָמֵא  
לִכּוּ לַמַּיִם  
וְאֲשֶׁר אֵין-לוֹ כֶּסֶף  
לִכּוּ שִׁבְרוּ וְאָכְלוּ  
וּלְכוּ שִׁבְרוּ בְלֹא-כֶסֶף  
וּבְלֹא מַחִיר יַיִן וְחֶלֶב:  
<sup>2</sup>לָמָּה תִשְׁקְלוּ-כֶסֶף בְּלֹא-לֶחֶם  
וַיִּגְיַעְכֶם בְּלֹא לְשִׁבְעָה  
שָׁמְעוּ שְׁמוֹעַ אֵלַי  
וְאָכְלוּ-טוֹב  
וְתִתְעַנֵּג בְּדִשָּׁן נֶפְשְׁכֶם:  
<sup>3</sup>הִטּוּ אָזְנוֹכֶם וּלְכוּ אֵלַי  
שָׁמְעוּ וּתְחִי נֶפְשְׁכֶם  
וְאִכְרַתְּהָ לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם  
חֶסְדֵי דָוִד הַנֶּאֱמָנִים:  
<sup>4</sup>הֵן עַד לְאוֹפִיִּים נִתְּתִי  
נָגִיד וּמְצֹנֵה לְאֻמִּים:  
<sup>5</sup>הֵן גּוֹי לֹא-תִדְעַתְּ תִקְרָא  
וְגוֹי לֹא-יִדְעוּךָ  
אֵלַיךָ יָרוּצוּ  
לְמַעַן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
וּלְקִדּוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי פִאֲרָךְ: ס

is the vindicator of Israel and thus the one who brings them triumph.

**Isaiah 55:1. all who are thirsty** The appeal is either to those of Israel who are still far from the Lord or to the nations who follow foreign wisdom (Ibn Ezra). The imagery of hunger and thirst indicates the absence of divine instruction, as in Amos 8:11 (cf. Radak).

**3. The enduring loyalty promised to David** The royal covenant given to David (2

Sam. 7) is now transferred to the entire people.

It employs *hesed* in the sense of covenant faithfulness. The divine pact with David promised unconditional commitment.

**4. a leader of peoples** The word translated here as “leader” (*ed*) has the literal meaning of “witness.” The figure combines images of Israel’s mission as a “light of nations” and “witness” to God’s power for all (cf. Isa. 42:7, 43:10).