

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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²³I pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying,
²⁴“O Lord God, You who let Your servant see
the first works of Your greatness and Your
mighty hand, You whose powerful deeds no god
in heaven or on earth can equal! ²⁵Let me, I pray,
cross over and see the good land on the other
side of the Jordan, that good hill country, and
the Lebanon.” ²⁶But the LORD was wrathful with
me on your account and would not listen to me.
The LORD said to me, “Enough! Never speak to
Me of this matter again! ²⁷Go up to the summit
of Pisgah and gaze about, to the west, the north,
the south, and the east. Look at it well, for you

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל־יְהוָה בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר:
²⁴ אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה אַתָּה הַחֲלוֹת לְהִרְאוֹת
אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ אֶת־גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְאֶת־יָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה
אֲשֶׁר מִי־אֵל בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־
יַעֲשֶׂה כַּמַּעֲשִׂיךָ וְכַגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ: ²⁵ אָעֲבְרָה־
נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר
בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן הַהַר הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבָּנוֹן:
²⁶ וַיִּתְעַבֵּר יְהוָה בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע
אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי רַב־לָךְ אֶל־תּוֹסֵף
דִּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדְּבַר הַזֶּה: ²⁷ עֲלֵה | רֹאשׁ
הַפְּסָגָה וּשְׂא עֵינֶיךָ יָמָה וּצְפֹנָה וְתִימָנָה

Moses' First Discourse (continued)

ISRAEL OBEYS THE SECOND COMMAND TO PROCEED
TO THE PROMISED LAND *(continued)*

VICTORY OVER OG *(continued)*

MOSES PLEADS WITH GOD (3:23–26a)

As related earlier in the chapter, God had allowed Moses to lead the conquest of Transjordan. This then encouraged his hope that God might no longer bar him from the Promised Land. Hence he turned to God with a plea that he be allowed to cross the Jordan.

24. Lord God Literally, “my Lord YHVH,” addressing God by title and name. This form of address is common in prayers and pleas.

25. the good land . . . that good hill country

These phrases express Moses' longing for the Promised Land. The first phrase is especially poignant. God used it not only when He banned the Exodus generation from the land (1:35) but also in His very first words to Moses promising to take Israel there (Exod. 3:8).

GOD'S RESPONSE TO MOSES' PLEA

(vv. 26b–29)

27. God softens His decree by agreeing to part of Moses' request: He may see the land but not cross into it.

CHAPTER 3

Incomparably rich, this *parashah* is the source of the classic words of Jewish worship, *Sh'ma Yisra-el* (Deut. 6:4–9). It also contains the reprise of the Decalogue (cf. Exod. 20) and continues Moses' exhortation to Israel, with special emphasis on God's goodness and on Israel's uniquely intimate relationship with this good and great God.

23. I pleaded It seems so out of character for Moses to plead on his own behalf and to share with the people the frustration of having his plea denied. Ibn Ezra suggests that he did it to impress on the Israelites the great virtue

of living in the land of Israel; it was the one thing he yearned for that was denied him. Others suggest that he was trying to teach that one should never lose hope; our deepest prayers may yet be answered. The Midrash understood this unusual verb (*hit'hannen*) as meaning “to throw oneself at the mercy of the other, to plead with no grounds to justify one's request” (Deut. R. 2:1). A truly righteous person never assumes God owes anyone a favorable response. By contrast, the modern commentator Y. Leibowitz sees Moses as “not aware of the fact that he has sinned, regarding the decree against him as unjustified. He pleads not for forgiveness but for annulment of the decree.”

shall not go across yonder Jordan.²⁸ Give Joshua his instructions, and imbue him with strength and courage, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he shall allot to them the land that you may only see.”

²⁹Meanwhile we stayed on in the valley near Beth-peor.

4 And now, O Israel, give heed to the laws and rules that I am instructing you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ²You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it,

28. Give Joshua his instructions Moses fulfills this command in 31:7–8.

29. The dialogue ends abruptly, indicating that Moses was silent before God’s decree.

valley near Beth-peor A wadi in Moab, run-

וּמִזְרְחָהּ וּרְאָהָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ כִּי־לֹא תַעְבֹּר
אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה: ²⁸ וְצַו אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
וְחִזְקוּהוּ וְאַמְצָהוּ כִּי־הוּא יַעְבֹּר לִפְנֵי הָעָם
הַזֶּה וְהוּא יַנְחִיל אוֹתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
תִּרְאֶה:

²⁹ וַנִּשָּׁב בְּגִזְיָא מוֹל בֵּית פְּעוֹר: פ

ד וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמַע אֶל־הַחֻקִּים
וְאֶל־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם
לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמַעַן תַּחְיוּ וּבִאתֶם וּיְרַשְׁתֶּם
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם
נָתַן לָכֶם: ² לֹא תִסְפוּ עַל־הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר
אֲנִי מְצַוָּה אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא תִגְרְעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ

ning into the river Jordan or the northeastern corner of the Dead Sea. Here Moses delivered his final addresses and was buried (4:46, 34:6). The nearby town of Beth-peor probably was the site of the scandalous idolatrous orgy (Num. 25:1–9).

APPEALS TO OBSERVE GOD’S LAWS (4:1–40)

This chapter, the theological heart of Deuteronomy, contains its most fundamental precepts: monotheism and the prohibition of idolatry.

BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE AT PEOR

(vv. 1–4)

1. give heed Hebrew: שָׁמַע; literally, “hear.” The focus on “hearing” is a key aspect of the theology of Deuteronomy. Like “see” in verse 5, “hear” is employed frequently in urging Israel to consider Moses’ words.

instructing Hebrew: *m’lamed* (often rendered “impart,” as in v. 5), illustrating Moses’ role as teacher of the laws. This is the calling for which he is best remembered in Jewish tradition, which still refers to him as *Moshe Rabbeinu*, “Moses our teacher.”

laws . . . rules Hebrew: *hukkim . . . mishpatim*.

Moses employs the terms indiscriminately here, like the English phrases “rules and regulations” and “laws and ordinances.” According to the Talmud, *mishpatim* are laws whose purpose is evident, such as prohibitions against murder and theft. People would have devised them even if God had not commanded them. *Hukkim* are commandments for which the reason is not obvious, such as the dietary laws; they must be obeyed as expressions of divine sovereignty.

to observe The laws are to be fulfilled, not just learned.

so that you may live Life itself depends on one’s observance of the commandments (see v. 4).

2. You shall not add anything Similar injunctions against adding or removing items appear in many ancient laws and treaties and are attested in prophetic literature. Although this seems

CHAPTER 4

2. You shall not add Yet many laws and customs have been added (and many dropped) over the centuries as circumstances changed. To legitimate the necessary expansion and evo-

lution of Jewish law, the Sages limited this prohibition to “quantitative” changes, such as adding a fourth petition to the Priestly Benediction or a fifth passage to the four passages contained in the *t’fillin*. Extension and clarification of the law was not seen as “adding.” A

but keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I enjoin upon you. ³You saw with your own eyes what the LORD did in the matter of Baal-peor, that the LORD your God wiped out from among you every person who followed Baal-peor; ⁴while you, who held fast to the LORD your God, are all alive today.

⁵See, I have imparted to you laws and rules, as the LORD my God has commanded me, for you to abide by in the land that you are about

לְשׁוֹר אֶת־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר
אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם: ³ עֵינֵיכֶם הִרְאִיתָ אֶת
אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּבַעַל פְּעוֹר כִּי כָל־
הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הִלֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בְּעַל־פְּעוֹר
הִשְׁמִידוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ מִקְרַבְךָ: ⁴ וְאַתֶּם
הַדֹּבְקִים בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם
הַיּוֹם:

שְׁנֵי ⁵ רָאִהוּ | לְמִדַּתִּי אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים
כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת לְךָ בְּקֶרֶב
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בָּאִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

to be an all-encompassing prohibition, it could not have been meant that way. The Torah is not a complete code covering all areas of life. Important subjects such as commerce, civil damages, and marriage are covered incompletely or not at all, and further laws obviously were needed. Actually, here and in 13:1 Moses seems to have but a single issue in mind, which is not to adopt pagan practices or worship their gods.

3. in the matter of Baal-peor This refers to the god of Beth-peor, near the place where the Israelites are still encamped (3:29). A total of 24,000 Israelites who joined in the worship of Baal-peor died in a plague there (see Num. 25:1–9).

followed Baal-peor Following (literally, “walking after”) a god is a biblical idiom for apostasy, forsaking God. The idiom is based on ancient Near Eastern political terminology, in which “walking after” a king means giving him one’s allegiance. Hence, “walking after” a god means de-

flecting from the Lord. There clearly is a link between the prohibition of idolatry and the Baal-peor apostasy.

BASED ON THE COMMANDMENTS’ QUALITY AND EFFECT (vv. 5–8)

Moses appeals for observance of the commandments because they are just and because observing them brings about a unique closeness with God.

5. the LORD . . . has commanded At Mount Sinai.

for you to abide by in the land God’s laws are to be the basis of the society the Israelites are about to establish in the land. This clause does not imply that the laws are inapplicable outside the land of Israel. Indeed, many have been in force since Israel left Egypt, such as for *Shabbat* and the prohibition of idolatry. There are, however, specific laws (e.g., those based on agriculture) that cannot be followed outside the land.

modern Conservative perspective would see the Torah as a living organism, constantly shedding dead cells and growing new ones, changing and adapting to new and unprecedented circumstances. Extending the implications of a law to meet today’s needs is not a case of “adding or subtracting.”

or take anything away Sometimes adding leads to diminishing. If we demand too much, people may be driven to stop observing even what they currently do (Maggid of Dubno).

4. In synagogues, this verse is chanted by the congregation just before the reading of the Torah.

held fast Literally, “are clinging”; this verb describes the closeness of husband and wife in Gen. 2:24. It is not enough to believe in God intellectually—to conclude that there

is a God and that it would be prudent and proper to follow God’s teachings. We must cleave to God as one cleaves to a spouse, to a lover, in response to our soul’s deepest needs. Only then will our relationship to God be a source of life.

are all alive today The life promised by the Torah is not the opposite of physical death, but the alternative to mere vegetative existence that does not deserve to be called life (Kook).

5. “Every other nation becomes a nation by virtue of the fact that it has a land of its own; only after that does it establish the laws to be lived by in that land. You, by contrast, became a nation by virtue of your laws, and you will be given a land of your own solely for the purpose of living by those laws” (Hirsch). After the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion

to enter and occupy. ⁶Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, “Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people.” ⁷For what great nation is there that has a god so close at hand as is the LORD our God whenever we call upon Him? ⁸Or what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as all this Teaching that I set before you this day?

⁹But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your mind as long as you live. And make them known to your chil-

6. great Meant spiritually. Numerically, Israel will be the smallest of nations (7:7).

7. One effect of observing God’s laws is that He is near whenever Israel calls upon Him, providing guidance (through prophecy), and deliverance in times of trouble.

8. perfect Literally, “just.” The other benefit of observing God’s laws is enjoying their justice. We have no information from biblical times about what impression Israel’s laws made on other nations. Modern scholars have compared biblical law to other legal systems of the ancient Near East. The comparison has shown that a number of principles in biblical law are unique in the ancient Near East, such as laws to ameliorate the treatment of aliens and bondservants, the prohibition of collective and vicarious punishment, and the

וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם כִּי הוּא חֻמַּתְכֶם⁶
וּבִינְתְּכֶם לְעֵינַי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּן
אֶת כָּל־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמְרוּ רַק עַם־
חֻכָּם וְנִבְּוֹן הַגּוֹי הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה:⁷ כִּי מִי־גוֹי
גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֱלֹהִים קְרִבִּים אֵלָיו כִּי־הוּא
אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל־קְרָאֵנוּ אֵלָיו:⁸ וּמִלִּי גוֹי גָּדוֹל
אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים צְדִיקִים כָּכֵל
הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם
הַיּוֹם:

וְרַק הַשְּׁמֵר לָךְ וְשִׁמּוֹר נִפְשֶׁךָ מְאֹד פֶּן־
תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ
וּפְנֵי־יָסוּרוֹ מִלְּבָבְךָ כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ וְהוֹדַעְתָּם

absence of capital punishment for economic crimes.

BASED ON EXPERIENCES AT HOREB

(vv. 9–31)

Moses speaks to the present generation as if it came out of Egypt and stood at Mount Sinai. Although most of those he is addressing were born after those events, about one-third of the adults probably experienced them as youngsters. The younger ones undoubtedly heard about the events from their parents or others who were there. Future generations, of course, constitute the real audience.

9. make them known to your children and your children’s children This obligation is the most pervasive expression of the biblical conviction that religion not only is a personal, individual

from the Land, it was the Torah that enabled us to remain a people. The re-establishment of modern Israel in 1948 raises a question: If Israel with the Torah could survive without the Land, can Israel with the Land survive without the Torah?

7. a god so close at hand Idols are physically close to their worshipers but emotionally distant, incapable of responding. God, though physically removed, is emotionally close (Deut. R. 2:10). The idea that God cares about the people, that Israel’s relationship to God is based not merely on obedience but on reciprocal love and commitment, is a constant theme of the Torah and of Deuteronomy in particular.

9. watch yourselves scrupulously Understood by the Sages as, “guard your soul

greatly.” That is, “Be as careful with the health of your soul as you are with the health of your body” (Jacob Isaac of Lublin). This verse has been used in contemporary times to declare smoking and unhealthy eating and drinking to be practices that violate the Torah.

the things that you saw with your own eyes Jewish faith is based primarily on experience rather than on speculative thought. “The essence of Jewish religious thinking does not lie in entertaining a concept of God but in the ability to articulate a memory of moments of illumination by God’s presence. Israel is not a people of definers but a people of witnesses” (Heschel).

make them known to your children Only when one becomes a parent and begins to teach

dren and to your children's children: ¹⁰The day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to Me, "Gather the people to Me that I may let them hear My words, in order that they may learn to revere Me as long as they live on earth, and may so teach their children." ¹¹You came forward and stood at the foot of the mountain. The mountain was ablaze with flames to the very skies, dark with densest clouds. ¹²The LORD spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but perceived no shape—nothing but a voice. ¹³He declared to you the covenant that He commanded you to observe, the Ten Commandments; and He inscribed them on two tablets of stone.

לְבַנְיָךָ וּלְבַנְיֵי בְנֵיךָ: ¹⁰ יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לְפָנַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחֹרֵב בְּאָמַר יְהוָה אֵלַי הִקְהֵל-לִי אֶת-הָעָם וְאֶשְׁמַעֵם אֶת-דְּבָרֵי אֲשֶׁר יִלְמְדוּן לִירְאָה אֹתִי כָּל-הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם חַיִּים עַל-הָאָדָמָה וְאֶת-בְּנֵיהֶם יִלְמְדוּן: ¹¹ וַתִּקְרָבוּן וַתַּעֲמַדוּן תַּחַת הַהָר וְהָהָר בַּעַר בְּאֵשׁ עַד-לֵב הַשָּׁמַיִם חֹשֶׁךְ עָנָן וְעָרְפָּל: ¹² וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלֵיכֶם מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּבָרִים אַתֶּם שֹׁמְעִים וּתְמוֹנָה אֵינְכֶם רֹאִים זוֹלָתִי קוֹל: ¹³ וַיַּגֵּד לְכֶם אֶת-בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָוָה אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲשֵׂרֵת הַדְּבָרִים וַיִּכְתְּבֵם

concern but must be transmitted by parents to their children and grandchildren. Thus they too will share in the experiences, learn their responsibilities, and gain the benefits of faith and observance.

10–13. These verses seek to impress on the people the awesome nature of the revelation that took place at Horeb. One of Moses' goals in Deuteronomy is to imbue the Israelites with reverence for God as a guiding principle in their lives. Reverence is a mortal's response to God—respect and awe at His grandeur, dread at His power—that deters disobedience to Him.

11. The mountain was ablaze The majestic, awesome Presence of God is expressed by the natural phenomena that accompany His appearance.

12. The LORD spoke to you During the course of His communication with Israel at Horeb the Lord was invisible; He spoke from the midst of fire and only His voice was heard. In the present address this aspect of the experience is emphasized over the content of what God said.

shape Hebrew: *t'munah*; literally, "visage." It has the sense of "appearance" or "aspect." Here, it is not to be taken in the sense of "picture," as in modern Hebrew, but as the visible aspect of a being. In most of the biblical traditions, God was thought to have a visual aspect (e.g., see Exod. 24:10), but it was believed to be highly dangerous for humans to see God. Here, according to Deuteronomy, God revealed Himself in spoken words

alone. The belief that God has no physical form developed in postbiblical times, especially in the philosophical literature of the Middle Ages.

13. covenant The Hebrew term (*b'rit*) has three meanings, all based on the idea of obligation: a promise (an obligation imposed on oneself), a stipulation (an obligation imposed on another), or a compact (reciprocal obligations accepted by two parties). Here, it refers to the Decalogue (5:6–18) as stipulations imposed by God on Israel; that is, as the obligation to which Israel must commit itself in its covenant with God. The term can also refer to the essence of all of the laws. For the other senses see v. 31 (promise) and 5:2–3 and 29:11 (compact).

two tablets of stone Stone normally was used only for texts that were intended to be permanent, such as royal and ceremonial inscriptions, boundary inscriptions, and treaties. An Aramaic decree of the 7th century B.C.E. was written on a stone tablet about 11 inches square. It is inscribed on one side, with 32 words covering eight lines. Two such tablets inscribed on both sides (Exod. 32:15), 15 or 16 inches square, could have held the Decalogue's 189 words (172 according to Exodus). A rectangular shape is consistent with Jewish tradition and early Christian art. The familiar image of tablets with curved tops was introduced in Christian art around the 11th century C.E.

the ideals of Judaism to one's children does one become aware of one's role as a link in the chain of generations, doing for our children what our ancestors did for their children so that

we could be Jews today (Hirsch).

and to your children's children "When a child is taught Torah by a grandparent, it is as if that child received it at Sinai" (BT Ber. 21b).

¹⁴At the same time the LORD commanded me to impart to you laws and rules for you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy.

¹⁵For your own sake, therefore, be most careful—since you saw no shape when the LORD your God spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire—¹⁶not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman, ¹⁷the form of any beast on earth, the form of any winged bird that flies in the sky, ¹⁸the form of anything that creeps on the ground, the form of any fish that is in the waters below the earth. ¹⁹And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. These the LORD your God

עַל-שְׁנֵי לְחוֹת אֲבָנִים: ¹⁴וְאֵתִי צִוָּה יְהוָה בְּעֵת הַהוּא לְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים לַעֲשׂוֹתְכֶם אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

¹⁵וְנִשְׁמַרְתֶּם מְאֹד לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם כִּי לֹא רִאִיתֶם כָּל-תְּמוּנָה בַּיּוֹם דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֵלֵיכֶם בְּחֹרֵב מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ: ¹⁶פֶּן-תִּשְׁחַתְּוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם לָכֶם פֶּסֶל תְּמוּנַת כָּל-סִמָּל תְּבַנִּית זָכָר אוֹ נְקֵבָה: ¹⁷תְּבַנִּית כָּל-בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ תְּבַנִּית כָּל-צִפּוֹר כָּנָף אֲשֶׁר תִּעֹף בַּשָּׁמַיִם: ¹⁸תְּבַנִּית כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ בְּאֲדָמָה תְּבַנִּית כָּל-דָּגָה אֲשֶׁר-בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לְאֶרֶץ: ¹⁹וּפְנֵי-תִשָּׂא עֵינֶיךָ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּרְאִיתָ אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הַיָּרֵחַ וְאֶת-הַכּוֹכָבִים כֹּל צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנִדְחַת וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לָהֶם וַעֲבַדְתָּם אֲשֶׁר חָלַק

14. God personally gave the Decalogue to the people and commanded Moses to convey the rest of the laws to them (see 5:24ff.).

15. since you saw no shape In idolatry, the purpose of an idol was to draw the presence of a deity to the place where the statue stood. Worshipers assumed that a god would enter and reside in the idol that represented it. Here Moses forbids Israel to use idols to attract God. No form was seen in the original contact with God; therefore, none is to be made for future contacts.

16. The verse does not rule out statues that are not idols. Nonidolatrous statues of certain creatures, such as the cherubim, were clearly not considered violations of this commandment and were used both in the wilderness Tabernacle and in Solomon's temple.

17. the form of any beast These figures probably would not have been intended as representations of the Lord, who was thought to have a human appearance (Gen. 1:26). Rather, they might have represented God's chariot or mount. Because God was thought to travel on a chariot

borne by hybrid creatures with the faces of men and animals (Ezek. 1), people might have thought it possible to attract His Presence with an image of one or more of those animals.

18. waters below the earth That is, in oceans, lakes, and rivers. The surface of the earth was conceived as standing or floating on a huge body of water that surrounds it in the form of oceans and breaks through to the earth's surface in the form of lakes, springs, and rivers.

19. These passages express the seductive nature of idolatry, especially of the heavenly bodies. The worship of celestial deities was common in the ancient Near East.

These the LORD . . . allotted to other peoples God assigned these to other peoples as objects of worship, but took the people of Israel to be His own worshipers. The biblical context always makes it clear that these bodies are subordinate to the Lord, but people were not always so discriminating, and some Israelites did worship them, especially in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E.

19. If people are prone to worship aspects of nature as divine, why does God not destroy them to remove the temptation? Because the world needs some of them, such as the sun. Then why does God not destroy the superflu-

ous ones and let the necessary ones survive? Because that would strengthen the conviction of the idolaters that the sun was indeed a mighty god, because it survived the purge in which the other idols perished.

allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven; ²⁰but you the LORD took and brought out of Egypt, that iron blast furnace, to be His very own people, as is now the case.

²¹Now the LORD was angry with me on your account and swore that I should not cross the Jordan and enter the good land that the LORD your God is assigning you as a heritage. ²²For I must die in this land; I shall not cross the Jordan. But you will cross and take possession of that good land. ²³Take care, then, not to forget the covenant that the LORD your God concluded with you, and not to make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, against which the LORD your God has enjoined you. ²⁴For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God.

²⁵When you have begotten children and children's children and are long established in the land, should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, causing the LORD your God displeasure and vexation, ²⁶I call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲתֶם לְכֹל הָעַמִּים תַּחַת
כָּל־הַשָּׁמַיִם: ²⁰ וְאֶתְכֶם לָקַח יְהוָה וַיּוֹצֵא
אֶתְכֶם מִכּוּר הַבְּרֹזֶל מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ
לְעַם נַחְלָה בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

²¹ וַיְהוּה הַתְּאַנְּפֵ־בִי עַל־דְּבָרֵיכֶם וַיִּשָּׁבַע
לְבַלְתִּי עִבְרִי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן וּלְבַלְתִּי־בֹא אֶל־
הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן
לָךְ נַחְלָה: ²² כִּי אֲנֹכִי מֵת בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת
אֵינְנִי עֹבֵר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן וְאַתֶּם עֹבְרִים
וַיִּרְשְׁתֶּם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת:
²³ הַשְּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן־תִּשְׁכַּחוּ אֶת־בְּרִית
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת עִמָּכֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם
לָכֶם פֶּסֶל תְּמוּנֹת כֹּל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ²⁴ כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אִשׁ אֹכְלָה
הוּא אֵל קָנָא: פ

²⁵ כִּי־תוֹלִיד בָּנִים וּבָנֵי בָנִים וְנוֹשְׁנֹתֶם
בְּאֶרֶץ וְהִשְׁחַתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם פֶּסֶל תְּמוּנֹת
כֹּל וַעֲשִׂיתֶם הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה־אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לְהַכְעִיסוֹ: ²⁶ הָעֵידוּתִי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי־אֲבֹד תֵּאבְדוּן

20. iron blast furnace A metaphor for the severity of the Egyptian bondage (iron was smelted in ancient times at a temperature of about 2000°F).

His very own people Literally, “a people that is His inheritance.” The Hebrew word for “inheritance” (*nahalah*) expresses not only God’s sovereignty over the Israelites but also His attachment to them. Inherited land was precious because it was received from one’s ancestors and passed on to one’s descendants; it was regarded as inalienable.

24. consuming fire God’s fiery destructive

power had struck the Exodus generation several times.

26. I call heaven and earth . . . to witness In ancient Near Eastern covenants, heaven and earth are often called as witnesses along with the gods and other parts of nature regarded as supreme authorities in the universe, so that they would punish those who violate the agreement. In the Bible, however, the supreme authority is the Lord, who is Himself a party to the covenant. Heaven and earth are subordinate to Him and cannot act independently. Their role here as “witnesses” is merely a reflection of that ancient motif.

21. on your account Is Moses taking out his frustrations on the people, blaming them for his own mistakes? It would be a very human thing to do, however unjustified in a leader.

25. long established Biblical Hebrew has two words for “old”: *zaken*, which is the opposite of “young”; and *yashan* (used here with

the connotation of growing stale), which is the opposite of “fresh” (Hirsch).

26. I call heaven and earth . . . to witness Heaven and earth do indeed witness against us when we make improper use of that with which God has blessed us. Poisoning the air and water, despoiling the environment do threaten to cause us to “perish from the land.”

from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess; you shall not long endure in it, but shall be utterly wiped out.²⁷The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a scant few of you shall be left among the nations to which the LORD will drive you.²⁸There you will serve man-made gods of wood and stone, that cannot see or hear or eat or smell.

²⁹But if you search there for the LORD your God, you will find Him, if only you seek Him with all your heart and soul—³⁰when you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end, return to the LORD your God and obey Him. ³¹For the LORD your God is a compassionate God: He will not fail you nor will He let you perish; He will not forget

מֵהָרָם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים
אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ לֹא־תֵאָרִיכּוּ
יָמִים עָלֶיהָ כִּי הַשָּׁמַד תִּשְׁמָדוּן: ²⁷ וְהִפְיֵץ
יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם בְּעַמִּים וְנִשְׂאֲרֹתֶם מִתִּי
מִסְפָּר בְּגוֹלִים אֲשֶׁר יִנְהַג יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם
שָׁמָּה: ²⁸ וְעַבְדֹתֵם־שָׁם אֱלֹהִים מַעֲשֵׂה
יְדֵי אָדָם עֵץ וָאֲבֹן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְאוּן וְלֹא
יִשְׁמְעוּן וְלֹא יֵאָכְלוּן וְלֹא יִרְיָחוּן:
²⁹ וּבִקְשֹׁתֶם מִשָּׁם אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
וּמִצָּאתָ כִּי תִדְרָשׁוּנוּ בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־
נַפְשֶׁךָ: ³⁰ בְּצַר לְךָ וּמִצָּאוּךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים וְשִׁבַּת עַד־יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקִלּוֹ: ³¹ כִּי אֵל רַחוּם
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יִשְׁחִיתֶךָ וְלֹא

shall be utterly wiped out This is a hyperbole, meaning, “be ruined.” As verse 27 indicates, there will be survivors.

27. The punishments are the precise opposites of God’s promises: instead of possessing the land (v. 1), the Israelites will be exiled from it; instead of being numerous (1:10–11), they will become few.

28. Exile will bring an additional punishment: worshiping gods that can do nothing. Despite the fact that the Bible regards the Lord as accessible anywhere (see v. 29), it considers only the land of Israel as the “Holy Land” (Zech. 2:16), and other lands as impure. Therefore, it is not permissible to conduct normal, sacrificial worship of God outside the land. (An exception was the wilderness period when a portable sanctuary accompanied Israel in its wanderings.)

that cannot see or hear or eat or smell The Bible considers the worship of statues to be the most preposterous aspect of non-Israelite religion and the most telling argument against it (cf. 27:15,

28:36,64, 29:16). Polytheism held that special ceremonies imparted to the statues all the powers that this verse denies them: sight, hearing, eating, smelling. The more educated idolaters certainly did not believe that the statue actually was the deity but that the god was absent from the statue before the special ceremony and might abandon it at will. The distinction between statue and deity, however, was easily overlooked, and many idolaters sometimes considered images to be the deity or fetishes possessing powers of their own.

30. in the end That is, afterward, ultimately.

return Hebrew: *shuv*, the verb from which the term for “repentance” (*t’shuva*) is derived.

31. compassionate God The Lord is not only impassioned (v. 24), but also compassionate. These are two aspects of God’s personality in the Bible: He both punishes and forgives.

nor will He let you perish; He will not forget the covenant God’s actions are thus contrasted with those of the Israelites. God will not act as they acted.

27. only a scant few of you shall be left Indeed in Jewish history, whenever disaster has befallen a major Jewish community, a saving remnant has survived to carry on.

28. There you will serve man-made gods Losing their relationship with God and attaching themselves to false gods who cannot see or hear (in contrast to God who saw their plight and heard their cry in Egypt) will not be just

their sin but also their punishment. Abravanel, who lived at the time of the Inquisition and the expulsion from Spain, applied this verse to the Marranos of his time: “Many Jews will be brought to forced conversion, worshiping idols but knowing full well that they are made of wood and stone. Unable to practice the observance of Judaism, their seeking of God will be in their hearts and minds alone” (v. 29).

the covenant which He made on oath with your fathers.

³²You have but to inquire about bygone ages that came before you, ever since God created man on earth, from one end of heaven to the other: has anything as grand as this ever happened, or has its like ever been known? ³³Has any people heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have, and survived? ³⁴Or has any god ventured to go and take for himself one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts, by signs and portents, by war, by a mighty and an outstretched arm and awesome power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? ³⁵It has been clearly demonstrated to you that the LORD alone is God; there is none beside Him. ³⁶From the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; on earth He let you see His great fire; and from amidst that fire you heard His words. ³⁷And because He loved your fathers, He chose their heirs after them; He Himself, in His great

יִשְׁפַח אֶת־בְּרִית אֲבֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם:

³² כִּי שְׁאַל־נָא לַיָּמִים רְאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר־הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים | אָדָם עַל־הָאָרֶץ וּלְמַקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד־קֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם הִנְהִיָּה כְּדָבָר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה אוֹ הַנִּשְׁמָע כְּמָהוּ: ³³ הֲשָׁמַע עִם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים מִדְּבַר מִתּוֹף־הָאֵשׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַעְתָּ אֹתָהּ וַיַּחֲיוּ: ³⁴ אוֹ | הִנְסָה אֱלֹהִים לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לּוֹ גּוֹי מִקְרֵב גּוֹי בְּמִסַּת בְּאוֹתָת וּבְמוֹפְתִים וּבְמַלְחָמָה וּבִידֵי חֻזְקָה וּבְזִרְעֵ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדֹלִים כָּכֵל אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לָכֶם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ: ³⁵ אֹתָהּ הִרְאָתָ לְדַעַת כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבָדוֹ: ³⁶ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם הִשְׁמִיעָךְ אֶת־קוֹלוֹ לְיִסְרֹךְ וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ הִרְאָךְ אֶת־אֲשׁוֹ הַגְּדוֹלָה וּדְבַרְיוֹ שָׁמַעְתָּ מִתּוֹף הָאֵשׁ: ³⁷ וַתַּחַת כִּי אָהַב אֶת־אֲבֹתֶיךָ וַיִּבְחַר בְּזִרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו וַיּוֹצֵאֲךָ

BASED ON MONOTHEISM (vv. 32–40)

Following the warning of exile, Moses concludes with a final appeal to observe the commandments so that the Israelites may prosper and remain in the Land forever.

32. ever since God created man on earth As far back as human memory goes.

from one end of heaven to the other That is, from one end of earth to another. Heaven was pictured as a dome standing atop pillars situated at the ends of the earth.

33. A direct, visual encounter with God was thought to be too awesome to endure. This passage and 5:21–23 imply that hearing God was regarded as equally dangerous.

34. take . . . one nation from the midst of another This is the most telling point of Moses' argument: The Lord took Israel out of Egypt,

thereby showing the powerlessness of the gods of Egypt and that the Lord is the only true God (see Exod. 12:12).

by prodigious acts The signs Moses and Aaron performed before Pharaoh, including the Ten Plagues and the defeat of Egypt at the Sea of Reeds.

35. The events just described, witnessed by the entire nation, established that the Lord alone is God. This demonstration goes beyond the practical concern of the 2nd commandment, which prohibits worshiping other gods. Here Moses states clearly that there are no others.

36. Deuteronomy never describes God as descending to earth or as dwelling in the sanctuary. Unlike the previous books of the Torah, it avoids allusions to the physical or human nature of God. Divine transcendence is central to Deuteronomy.

37. He Himself Literally, "with His face."

³⁵ Because this verse refers to the revelation at Mount Sinai, it is the first in a collection of verses recited when the Torah scrolls are

taken from the Ark on *Simhat Torah*, among *Ashk'nazim*. Among *S'fardim*, it is recited every *Shabbat* at that point in the service.

might, led you out of Egypt,³⁸ to drive from your path nations greater and more populous than you, to take you into their land and assign it to you as a heritage, as is still the case.³⁹ Know therefore this day and keep in mind that the LORD alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other.⁴⁰ Observe His laws and commandments, which I enjoin upon you this day, that it may go well with you and your children after you, and that you may long remain in the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you for all time.

⁴¹Then Moses set aside three cities on the east side of the Jordan⁴² to which a manslayer could escape, one who unwittingly slew a fellow man without having been hostile to him in the past; he could flee to one of these cities and live:⁴³ Bezer, in the wilderness in the Tableland, belonging to the Reubenites; Ramoth, in Gilead, belonging to the Gadites; and Golan, in Bashan, belonging to the Manassites.

⁴⁴This is the Teaching that Moses set before the Israelites: ⁴⁵these are the decrees, laws, and

בַּפְּנֵי בְּכַחוֹ הַגְּדֹל מִמֵּצְרַיִם: ³⁸ לְהוֹרִישׁ
גוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְעֲצֻמִּים מִמֶּךָ מִפְּנֵיךָ
לְהַבְיֵאֲךָ לְתַת־לָךְ אֶת־אֶרֶצָם נַחֲלָה בְּיוֹם
הַזֶּה: ³⁹ וַיִּדְעַתָּ הַיּוֹם וְהִשְׁבַּתָּ אֶל־לִבְבְּךָ
כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל
וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת אֵין עוֹד: ⁴⁰ וְשָׁמַרְתָּ
אֶת־חֻקֵּי וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה
הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִיטֵב לָךְ וּלְבָנֶיךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ וּלְמַעַן
תִּאָרֶיךָ יָמִים עַל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ כָּל־הַיָּמִים: פ

אִז יבְדִיל מֹשֶׁה שְׁלֹשׁ עָרִים בְּעֵבֶר
הַיַּרְדֵּן מִזְרָחָה שָׁמֶשׁ: ⁴² לְנֶס שְׁמָה רוֹצֵחַ
אֲשֶׁר יִרְצַח אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ בְּבִלְיַדְעַת וְהוּא
לֹא־שָׂא לֹו מִתְּמַל שְׁלֹשׁוֹם וְנָס אֶל־אֶחָת
מִן־הָעָרִים הָאֵל וְחָי: ⁴³ אֶת־בְּצֵר בְּמִדְבָּר
בְּאֶרֶץ הַמִּישֹׁר לְרְאוּבֵנִי וְאֶת־רְאֵמֹת
בְּגֹלָעַד לְגָדִי וְאֶת־גּוֹלָן בְּבָשָׁן לְמַנַּשֵּׁי:

וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁴⁵ אֵלֶּה הָעֲדוֹת וְהַחֻקִּים

The Hebrew equivalent of “in person.” The idiom emphasizes that God used no intermediary (such as an angel) in freeing the Israelites, but freed them personally as a sign of His favor.

39. That God spoke from heaven and acted on earth shows His dominion in both realms. He is God everywhere.

40. The fact that the Lord alone is God leads to the conclusion that observance of His commandments is the prerequisite for prosperity and well-being. The address thus ends on the same note with which it began. It reminds the audience that its central message is proper behavior.

ASYLUM CITIES IN TRANSJORDAN (vv. 41–43)

These verses are not part of Moses’ address but

a narrative appendix, relating that Moses designated three cities in Transjordan to provide asylum for accidental manslaughter. The law establishing these cities appears in 19:1–13 (19:3–5 is abridged here) and Num. 35:9–34. According to Num. 35:14, six such cities were to be chosen, three of them in Transjordan.

41. Then This could refer to any time after the conquest of Transjordan, which took place shortly before Moses’ address. It is possible that Moses selected the cities after the actions described in 3:18–29. Because verses 41–43 are by the narrator, and not Moses, they were placed here to avoid interrupting his address.

43. The cities are listed in order from south to north.

Bezer In Moab.

in Gilead That is, upper Gilead.

41. Why was the institution of cities of refuge so important to Moses? Because he himself

was once a manslayer (Exod. 2:11–15) and had to flee (Deut. R. 2:27).

rules that Moses addressed to the people of Israel, after they had left Egypt, ⁴⁶beyond the Jordan, in the valley at Beth-peor, in the land of King Sihon of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, whom Moses and the Israelites defeated after they had left Egypt. ⁴⁷They had taken possession of his country and that of King Og of Bashan—the two kings of the Amorites—which were on the east side of the Jordan ⁴⁸from Aroer on the banks of the wadi Arnon, as far as Mount Sion, that is, Hermon; ⁴⁹also the whole Arabah on the east side of the Jordan, as far as the Sea of the Arabah, at the foot of the slopes of Pisgah.

והמשפטים אשר דבר משה אל־בני ישראל בצאתם ממצרים: ⁴⁶ בעבר הירדן בגיא מול בית פעור בארץ סיון מלך האמורי אשר יושב בחשבון אשר הפה משה ובני ישראל בצאתם ממצרים: ⁴⁷ ויירשו את־ארצו ואת־ארץ | עוג מלך־הבשן שני מלכי האמורי אשר בעבר הירדן מזרח שמש: ⁴⁸ מערער אשר על־שפת־נחל ארנון ועד־הר שיאן הוא חרמון: ⁴⁹ וכל־הערבה עבר הירדן מזרחה ועד ים הערבה תחת אשדת הפסגה: פ

5 Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the laws and rules that

ה ויקרא משה אל־כל־ישראל ויאמר רביעי אלהם שמע ישראל את־החקים ואת־

Moses' Second Discourse, Part 1: Background to the Covenant Made in Moab (4:44–5:30)

CONTENTS AND SETTING OF THE COVENANT (4:44–49)

The main subject of Moses' second, and longest, discourse is the laws that he communicates to the people in Moab, in preparation for Israel's entry into the Promised Land.

45. after they had left Egypt Literally, "when they left Egypt." Like the victories mentioned in verse 46, these laws were given to the

people 40 years after the Exodus. Deuteronomy, however, refers to the entire period between the Exodus and arrival in the Promised Land as "after they/you had left Egypt" (see 23:5, 24:9, 25:17).

48–49. Transjordan is described in terms of its two topographic regions: the highlands (v. 48) and the Jordan Valley (v. 49).

Mount Sion A third name, along with Sirion and Senir, for Mount Hermon, which lies north of the Jordan Valley.

THE REVELATION AND COVENANT AT HOREB (5:1–30)

Moses tells the people how and why God gave the laws to him. The belief that God is the author of the laws is a distinctive feature of Israelite law. Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the laws of society were believed to be the products of human minds, with their promulgation sponsored by the deity, as in the case of the Code of Hammurabi. In Deuteronomy the validity of the laws rests firmly on their divine authorship and on Moses'

legitimacy as the intermediary conveying them to the people. As a result, obedience to the law—civil no less than ritual and moral—was seen as a religious duty, not only as an act of good citizenship.

THE SCENE AT HOREB (vv. 1–5)

1. laws and rules These are the laws that Moses received from God after the people heard

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

5:1. Study them According to the Talmud (BT Kid. 29b), even if parents fail to fulfill their obligation to teach Torah to their children (Deut. 6:7), the children, as adults, have the obligation to seek instruction for themselves. Indeed, as the Sages make clear in many places, Jewish learning is a life-long process.

I proclaim to you this day! Study them and observe them faithfully!

²The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today. ⁴Face to face the LORD spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire—⁵I stood between the LORD and you at that time to convey the LORD's words to you, for you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain—saying:

⁶I the LORD am your God who brought you

הַמְשַׁפְּטִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי דֹבֵר בְּאָזְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם
וּלְמַדְתֶּם אֹתָם וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:
2 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּרַת עִמָּנוּ בְרִית בְּחָרֵב:
3 לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרִית
הַזֹּאת כִּי אֲתָנוּ אֲנֹחֲנוּ אֵלֶּה פֶּה הַיּוֹם
כִּלְנֹנוּ חַיִּים: 4 פָּנִים | בְּפָנִים דִּבֶּר יְהוָה
עִמָּכֶם בְּהָר מְתוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ: 5 אָנֹכִי עֹמֵד
בֵּין־יְהוָה וּבֵינֵיכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא לְהַגִּיד
לְכֶם אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה כִּי יִרְאֶתֶם מִפְּנֵי
הָאֵשׁ וְלֹא־עֲלִיתֶם בְּהָר לֵאמֹר: 6
אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ

נדפס בטעם תחתון בלבד, והוא למערכאי, והפסוקים ממוספרים לפי מהדורת לעטעריס. נדפס בטעם עליון בסוף החומש

vv. 6–18.

the Decalogue. The Decalogue itself is called “the Covenant” or “the (Ten) Words” (4:13).

2. made a covenant Hebrew: *karat b'rit*; literally, “cut a covenant.” The idiom apparently derives from a ceremony in which parties to a covenant would cut up an animal to signify their acceptance of a similar fate if they violated the agreement (see Gen. 15). The phrase was used even when a covenant was ratified by other ceremonies, as in the present case (see Exod. 24:1–8). Here “covenant” does not refer to the Decalogue alone (as in 4:13) but to the relationship that God established with Israel at Horeb, where Israel agreed to do all that the Lord commanded, including the laws that Moses would later give Israel in Moab (vv. 24,28).

3. our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In

Deuteronomy, “our/your fathers” always refers to the patriarchs.

4. Face to face That is, in person, without intermediation. “Face” is used in the same sense in 4:37. The idiom does not mean that they literally saw God's face. This is ruled out by statements that God spoke from within fire and clouds and that the Israelites saw no visual image (see vv. 20,21, 4:12).

5. In their fright the people had sent Moses ahead to hear God for them. According to the previous verse, however, God insisted on their hearing Him directly.

THE DECALOGUE (vv. 6–18)

Moses repeats the Decalogue first presented in Exodus 20. Most of the differences from the

CHAPTER 5

1. Note that observance of the law is seen as the purpose of its study (see BT Yev. 109b).

2–5. Moses recalls the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Perhaps because he is speaking to the children of those who actually experienced the event, he notes that the covenant is binding even on later generations of Israelites. And he summons up the overwhelming, dramatic impact of the Revelation.

5. I stood between the LORD and you Unmediated, direct experience of God is overwhelming for the ordinary person. Moses is in the great tradition of religious leaders who can endure that intense encounter and mediate its

effect and power so that every person feels he or she has been in the presence of the Divine.

This clause can also be read: “I” (that is, your ego) stand between God and you (Menahem Mendel of Kotzk).

you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain Early *Hasidim* in eastern Europe were criticized by their opponents for the highly emotional, enthusiastic manner in which they prayed and celebrated. They responded to the criticism by citing this verse; thus they accused their opponents of discomfort with emotion in religion—that is, of keeping Jewish observance on an intellectual level and, therefore, not rising to a higher spiritual level.

out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage:

⁷You shall have no other gods beside Me.

⁸You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, any likeness of what is in the heavens

מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים *⁷ לֹא יִהְיֶה
לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פָּנָי;
⁸ לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ פֶסֶל | כָּל-תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר

v. 7. למערבאי לא נחשב פסוק נפרד

wording in Exodus are minor. Some, however, especially in the *Shabbat* commandment, are substantial. The Decalogue is arranged in two groups of laws. The first group deals with conduct toward God, the second toward fellow humans. Within each group, the commandments are arranged in descending order, according to the gravity of the prohibited offense. Duties to God come first, because the commandments presuppose His authority and their very purpose is to serve as the terms of Israel's covenant with Him. The first 4 commandments are uniquely Israelite duties. Because the reasons for the first 5 are not well known or self-evident, or perhaps because they are easy to violate, explanatory comments and exhortations to encourage observance accompany them. The remaining 5 commandments are universally recognized ethical requirements and need no such support.

There are different views about how these 10 commandments are to be divided; see Comment to Exod. 20:2. Here we follow the view of Philo and Josephus and some talmudic sources, which seems closest to the sense of the text. It divides the first two commandments differently from the traditional enumeration found on tablets in synagogues and in art.

Traditionally the Decalogue has two systems of cantillation. The version known as the "lower notes" is presented here; for the "upper notes," which are used in many synagogues on certain occasions, see p. 1509.

6. This verse is a self-presentation formula that substantiates the divine proclamation that follows. As such, it is not the 1st commandment, but serves as its motive clause. Such self-presentations are common in the openings of royal inscriptions in the ancient Near East and serve as introductions to treaties. The concept of a covenant between God and Israel is modeled on ancient treaties in which a weaker king accepted a more powerful one as his superior and on royal covenants in which a population accepted a king. Such covenants established relationships that were inherently exclusive: A subject population or

king could have only one sovereign ruler, and ancient oaths of allegiance and treaties explicitly prohibit subjects and vassals from accepting another. Subjects entered into such relationships on the basis of past benefits realized through the king or ruler, often his having delivered them from enemies. The covenant was thus an apt metaphor for Israel's exclusive relationship with *YHVH* because of the Exodus.

brought you out That is, liberated you.

house of bondage Literally, "house of slaves."

A common biblical designation for Egypt.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT (v. 7)

In practical terms, the Israelites may not build altars or sanctuaries for other gods, nor make images of them, present offerings to them, consult them, prophesy or take oaths in their names, or even mention their names. This prohibition, banning the worship of all but one deity, is unique in the history of religion. Polytheism was inherently tolerant of the worship of many gods, because no single god was thought to control all the phenomena that are vital for human life. The gods were believed to tolerate this pluralism, and several could be worshiped in the same sanctuary or addressed in the same prayer. The biblical demand was based on the premise of exclusivity, because God alone liberated the Israelites and provided for all their needs.

7. other gods The Hebrew terms for "god" (*el* and *elohim*) can be used for angels, spirits, idols, pagan deities, and even spirits of the dead (1 Sam. 28:13), as well as God Himself. All but the last are "other gods," and their worship is prohibited.

beside me Hebrew: *al panai*; literally, "in addition to Me" or "in opposition to Me." This commandment recognizes that Israelites would not abandon *YHVH* but might be tempted to worship others in addition to Him. Polytheists do not choose one god to the exclusion of others, but worship many gods. Note that this prohibition is not quite the same as the affirmation of monotheism (in 4:35,39), because by itself it does not deny the existence of other gods.

6. I the LORD am your God These words precede "you shall have no other gods." Faith

in the true God protects us from being attracted to false gods (Tzadok ha-Kohen of Lublin).

above, or on the earth below, or in the waters below the earth. ⁹You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, ¹⁰but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT (vv. 8–10)
The ban on idols immediately follows the command against worshipping gods. The text does not distinguish between images of the Lord and idols of other gods. Because idolaters often spoke of idols as if they were gods, not merely symbols of gods and because the Bible insists that no statue can be the Lord, it considers any idol as de facto a god, no matter whom or what the worshiper identifies it with. The reference to the jealousy of God thus applies to the 2nd commandment as well as the 1st; this is why it comes only after the second.

8. The language of this verse prohibits not only idols of animate creatures (4:16–18) but also images of inanimate objects, such as stars and sacred trees.

9. bow down . . . serve Each of these verbs has a technical meaning. “Bowing” refers to prostration; “serving” often refers to making offerings. When the two are paired they refer more broadly to any form of worship or submission.

them The various types of idols mentioned in verse 8 and the gods mentioned in verse 7. The combination of idols and gods reinforces the position of the commandments (and the Bible as a whole) that any idol is de facto a pagan god.

impassioned Hebrew: *kanna*, combining the meanings of “jealous” and “zealous.” The root קנא is often associated with fire (see 4:24); it refers primarily to fiery passions such as love, anger, indignation, and jealousy. In the Torah the Lord’s *kin-ab* is provoked by the worship of idols and gods. In these contexts, God’s outrage includes jealousy: God does not tolerate the honor due

בְּשָׂמִים | מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת
וְאֲשֶׁר בְּמַיִם | מִתַּחַת לְאָרֶץ: ⁹ לֹא-
תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָנָא פֶקֶד עֵינָי אָבוֹת
עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים
לְשָׁנָי: ¹⁰ וְעִשָּׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאֹהֲבֵי
וְלִשְׂמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי: ח

Him being given to another. References to God’s *kin-ab* are frequently accompanied by a description of His punitive action or power, as in the remainder of this verse. The very mention of God’s jealousy is, thus a warning against provoking it.

visiting the guilt of the parents That is, inflicting punishment for their guilt on their descendants. The jealousy of God is such that the punishment will not be limited to the idolater alone, but will last for generations. This view of divine retribution reflects the powerful sense of family solidarity in ancient societies, especially those with a tribal background. The concept was progressively modified in the later biblical period and ultimately reduced to the principle that individuals should be rewarded and punished only for their own deeds (see Jer. 31:28ff.; Ezek. 18:2–4).

third and . . . fourth generations Grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Living to see three generations of descendants is the most one could naturally expect. Thus God extends punishment only to descendants the guilty are likely to see in their own lifetimes, an act intended as a deterrent to sin and not as a transfer of guilt to those descendants.

those who reject Me The Rabbis maintain that this phrase (and “those who love Me” in v. 10) refer to descendants who act as their ancestors did. Thus God visits the guilt of the parents on future generations that reject Him and rewards the loyalty of ancestors to the thousandth generation of descendants who are also loyal to Him.

10. showing kindness “Keeping faith,” or “dealing faithfully.” The basic meaning of “kind-

9. visiting the guilt of the parents We are learning how strongly patterns of behavior are passed on from parents to children. Abused children too often become abusive parents.

12. Observe Hebrew: *shamor*; here Exod. 20:8 reads “remember” (*zakhor*). Regarding *Shabbat*, some spiritually gifted souls are able

to appreciate its sublime beauty and truth immediately and need only to remember that the day is *Shabbat* to be cast into its mood. The average person, however, has to begin with the prohibition of labor, the requirement of rest—the restrictive side of *Shabbat*—to come to appreciate it.

¹¹You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

¹²Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.

¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

¹⁴but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle,

11 לֹא תִשָּׁא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׂוֹא כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׂוֹא: ס

12 שְׁמֹר אֶת־יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקֹדְשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: 13 שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלַאכְתֶּךָ: 14 וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלֶאכֶה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ־וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ־וְאִמָּתְךָ וְשׂוֹרְךָ וְחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל־בְּהֵמַתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר

ness” (*hesed*) is “loyalty” or “fidelity,” the type of act that can be expected between parties in a relationship—husband and wife, relatives, and allies.

love Hebrew: *ahavah*. In the Bible, the term encompasses friendship and loyalty, including the loyalty of allies and of a vassal toward his suzerain. In Deuteronomy, love of and loyalty to God are virtually synonymous with keeping His commandments; they refer to an emotional attachment that is expressed in action (see 6:5–6, 10:12–13, 11:1,22).

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT (v. 11)

11. Assertions in court, in public affairs, and even in ordinary conversation often were backed up with oaths that included God’s name. These were conditional self-curses that would take effect if the swearers’ assertions were not true or their promises were not fulfilled. The normal formulations were “As the LORD lives, I will [or will not] . . .” or “May the LORD do such and such to me if I did [or did not] . . .” Swearers proved their sincerity by calling down punishment on themselves from God, who cannot be deceived or evaded. A false oath would show contempt for God by implying that the swearer does not fear His punishment.

will not clear Literally, “leave unpunished.” Those who swear falsely will not escape divine justice even if they somehow avoid human justice. This belief was taken seriously throughout the ancient world. In an Egyptian penitential prayer, a man confesses that his suffering is punishment for taking a false oath in the name of a deity.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT (vv. 12–15)

The first three commandments prohibit actions that show disrespect for the Lord. The 4th commandment requires a positive act by observing a day sacred to Him.

12. Observe That is, celebrate the day by following its prescribed procedures. The earlier version of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:8) uses the verb “remember” (*zakhbor*), meaning “remember to observe *Shabbat*.”

sabbath day The seventh day of each week. The Bible understands the Hebrew word *shabbat* as a derivative of the verb meaning “cease” or “desist” (Exod. 23:12; Lev. 23:3). “The sabbath day” thus means “the day of desisting [from labor].”

holy Withdrawn from common use and reserved for a special purpose associated with God. *Shabbat* was withdrawn from common use by desisting from labor. And its dedication to God was expressed by: visits to sanctuaries and prophets (2 Kings 4:23; Isa. 1:13, 66:23); special sacrifices and other temple activities (Lev. 24:8; Num. 28:9–10); recitation of a special psalm (Ps. 92); and a joyous atmosphere (Hos. 2:13; Isa. 58:13; Lam. 2:6).

14. sabbath of the LORD The day belongs to the Lord and must, therefore, be used for the Lord’s purposes, not one’s own (cf. Isa. 58:13). This explains why certain activities that may not be performed for human benefit on *Shabbat* are permitted in the Temple, such as burning the sacrifices and kindling the lamps (Exod. 27:20–21, 29:38–42; Num. 28:9–10).

you Includes both males and females, because both are specified in the following list of those covered by the law. In general, biblical laws address men and women alike.

work Examples, such as agricultural labor, gathering food and firewood, kindling fire, and business activities, are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

slave Includes both slave and bondservant. No distinction is made here between Israelite and foreign slaves.

ox . . . ass . . . cattle Kindness to animals is also the theme of several other laws in the Torah.

or the stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. ¹⁵Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

¹⁶Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may long endure, and that you may fare well, in the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you.

stranger The *ger*, the resident alien. This reminder to include resident aliens in *Shabbat* rest is comparable to Deuteronomy's exhortations to include them in religious celebrations (16:11,14, 26:11). Such reminders are necessary because of the aliens' vulnerability and the likelihood that their needs would be overlooked.

so that your . . . slave may rest The law assumes that the householders will find time for themselves and their families to rest, but may neglect their servants' need to do so. Thus the law mandates that one day in each week the servants are to be treated as the master's equal. The entire household is required to rest, so that there can be no occasion to make the servants work.

15. The experiences of servitude and redemption are recalled to motivate observance of several humanitarian laws in Deuteronomy (see 15:15, 16:12, 24:18,22). Commentators are divided over what this motive emphasizes. Some believe that it is the memory of the servitude, to create empathy for the servant's need to rest. Others believe it is God's redeeming them from Egypt, to remind the people of His kindness and of His authority to establish such a command. Contrast the reason for observing *Shabbat* offered here with that in Exod. 20:11.

14. so that your male and female slave may rest as you do This clause does not appear in Exod. 20. It may represent a later stage of Israelite society, which thought of the slave as a fellow human being, halfway between a hired hand and a member of the family. Similarly, Deut. 15:12 refers to the slave as "your brother"; no such appellation occurs in the earlier, parallel source (Exod. 21:2).

15. The Exodus version of the 4th com-

בשְׁעָרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ :
 15 וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
 וַיֹּצִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה
 וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה עַל-פְּנֵי צִוְּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת : ס

16 כִּבְדֵד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמַעַן | יֵאָרִיכוּן יָמֶיךָ וּלְמַעַן
 יֵיטֵב לָךְ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 נֹתֵן לָךְ : ס

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT (v. 16)

Honoring parents is first among duties toward other human beings, just as it is first among the laws of holiness in Lev. 19:3. One aspect of this duty is respect, which includes obedience to parents and adherence to their teachings and forbids hitting, insulting, and behaving disrespectfully toward them and misappropriating their property. Another aspect is caring for parents when they are aged or infirm (this commandment, like the Decalogue as a whole, is not addressed merely to youngsters; see v. 14). The fact that honoring parents appears among the first five commandments, all of which deal with honoring God and mention His name, indicates how important this commandment was considered to be. Other ancient societies, too, ranked the honor of parents second only to the honor of the gods.

16. father and . . . mother See Comment to Lev. 19:3.

that you may long endure . . . in the land This is the only commandment in the Decalogue for which a reward is promised, although the promise can be read as a veiled threat ("otherwise your days will be shortened"). Some ancient legal documents make children's right to inherit their parents' property contingent on their honoring

mandment explains *Shabbat* in terms of what scholars of religion call *imitatio dei* (i.e., as God rested on the seventh day, so should you). But the wording here, addressed to the children and grandchildren of the Israelites who had actually experienced slavery, bases *Shabbat* observance on the memory of Egyptian bondage and God's liberation. Both reasons are mentioned in *Shabbat* evening's *Kiddush*.

¹⁷You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁸You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not crave your neighbor's house, or his field, or his male or female slave, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

¹⁹The LORD spoke those words—those and no more—to your whole congregation at the

וְלֹא תִרְצַח ס

וְלֹא תִנְאֹף ס

וְלֹא תִגְנוֹב ס

וְלֹא תִעֲנֶה בְרַעַף עַד שׁוֹא: ס

וְלֹא תַחְמֹד אִשְׁתׁ רֵעֶךָ* ס וְלֹא

תִּתְאֹהַב בַּיִת רֵעֶךָ שְׂדֵהוּ וְעַבְדּוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ

שׁוֹר וְחִמְרוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ: ס

חמישי ¹⁹ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־

כָּל־קְהַלְכֶם בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ הַעֲנִן

v. 17. למערבאי שלוש פעמים פיסקא באמצע פסוק

v. 18. פיסקא באמצע פסוק

their parents by providing and caring for them. Here God applies the same condition on a national scale: The right of future generations of Israelites to inherit the land of Israel from their parents is contingent on honoring them.

THE SIXTH TO NINTH COMMANDMENTS (v. 17)

17. murder The Hebrew word *ratzah* refers to illicit killing, both intentional and accidental (see 1 Kings 21:19; Deut. 19:4). The frequent translation “you shall not kill” is far too broad; it implies that even capital punishment and war are prohibited, whereas the Torah sometimes mandates these.

adultery In the Bible and the ancient Near East, the term meant voluntary sexual relations between a married or betrothed woman and a man other than her husband. It did not refer to the extramarital relations of a married man (unless, of course, the other woman was married). One reason for this distinction is that ancient Near Eastern society was polygamous. In such a context, although a husband had an exclusive right to his wife, a wife might share her husband with his other wives and did not have an exclusive right to him. Furthermore, in a patrilineal society, it was essential to be certain of the paternity of heirs, and the extramarital intercourse of the wife would make such certainty impossible. As in the case of murder, adultery is regarded as an offense

against both God and mortals. No option is offered for the husband or any human authority to waive or mitigate the punishment, as it is in ancient Near Eastern laws. Provisions for dealing with adultery are found in Num. 5:11–31 and Deut. 22:22–27.

false witness Includes both false accusation and false testimony in court. The penalty for false testimony is given in 19:16–21.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT (v. 18)

18. covet . . . crave Both Hebrew verbs describe desires wrongly directed at objects that belong to others.

crave This Hebrew verb refers to an emotional state rather than an action. In contrast, the ambiguous wording in Exod. 20:14 permits the interpretation “seize by force” rather than “covet.”

wife . . . house . . . field Unlike in Exodus, where “house” means “household” and includes wife, servants, and livestock, here the wife is placed in the first clause by herself and separated from property. Deuteronomy thus disengages family from property. By including houses and fields in the list, this version refers to the kinds of property people will own after the settlement in Canaan, and reflects Deuteronomy's aim of preparing the Israelites for life in the Land.

MOSES AS INTERMEDIARY (vv. 19–30)

19. those words Those commandments.

17. false witness Literally, “worthless witness”—a different term than in Exod. 20:13. Here the wording forbids testimony that is misleading though not technically untrue (Ramban).

19. those and no more Hebrew: *v'lo yasaf*; literally, “and did not continue.” See also Num. 11:25, where the spirit of God inspires 70 elders to prophesy—“and they did not continue [to prophesy after that moment].” There,

mountain, with a mighty voice out of the fire and the dense clouds. He inscribed them on two tablets of stone, which He gave to me. ²⁰When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, you came up to me, all your tribal heads and elders, ²¹and said, “The LORD our God has just shown us His majestic Presence, and we have heard His voice out of the fire; we have seen this day that man may live though God has spoken to him. ²²Let us not die, then, for this fearsome fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, we shall die. ²³For what mortal ever heard the voice of the living God speak out of the fire, as we did, and lived? ²⁴You go closer and hear all that the LORD our God says, and then you tell us everything that the LORD our God tells you, and we will willingly do it.”

²⁵The LORD heard the plea that you made to me, and the LORD said to me, “I have heard the plea that this people made to you; they did well to speak thus. ²⁶May they always be of such mind, to revere Me and follow all My commandments, that it may go well with them

וְהִעֲרַפְלָ קוֹל גָּדוֹל וְלֹא יִסָּף וַיִּכְתְּבֵם
עַל-שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים וַיִּתֵּנֵם אֵלַי: ²⁰ וַיְהִי
בְּשָׁמְעֵכֶם אֶת-הַקּוֹל מִתּוֹךְ הַחֹשֶׁךְ וְהָהָר
בָּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ וַתִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי כָּל-רָאשֵׁי
שְׁבֻטֵיכֶם וְזִקְנֵיכֶם: ²¹ וַתֹּאמְרוּ הֵן הִרְאֵנוּ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת-כְּבוֹדוֹ וְאֶת-גְּדֻלוֹ וְאֶת-
קְלוֹ שָׁמַעְנוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
רְאִינוּ כִּי-יִדְבֵר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וְחַי:
²² וְעַתָּה לְמָה נָמוֹת כִּי תֹאכְלֵנוּ הָאֵשׁ
הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת אִם-יִסְפִּים | אֲנַחְנוּ לְשָׁמַע
אֶת-קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ עוֹד וּמָתְנוּ: ²³ כִּי
מִי כָל-בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע קוֹל אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים
מִדְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ-הָאֵשׁ כְּמֵנוּ וַיָּחִי: ²⁴ קְרַב
אֲתָהּ וּשְׁמַע אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֵר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֶת | הַדְּבָר אֲלֵינוּ אֶת כָּל-
אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֵלֶיךָ וּשְׁמַעְנוּ
וְעָשִׂינוּ:

²⁵ וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת-קוֹל דְּבַרְיֶכֶם
בְּדַבְּרְכֶם אֵלַי וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי שְׁמַעְתִּי
אֶת-קוֹל דְּבַרֵי הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ אֵלַיךָ
הֵיטִיבוּ כָל-אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ: ²⁶ מִי-יִתֵּן וְהָיָה
לְבָבָם זֶה לָהֶם לִירְאָה אֹתִי וּלְשַׁמֵּר
אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי כָּל-הַיָּמִים לְמַעַן יִיטַב

which He gave to me That is, 40 days later (9:9).

21. though God has spoken to him Out of a fire.

22. Let us not die Humans can survive hearing God speak. The people fear that their constant exposure to the unprecedented fire may prove fatal to them.

23. the living God The demonstration of God’s power has made the people cognizant of His nature as “the living God,” i.e., as the effective God, in contrast to the lifelessness of false gods.

24. we will willingly do it Literally, “we will hear [what you tell us] and do it.” This is a crucial

moment: The people pledge to accept Moses’ reports of what God commands and to fulfill whatever laws Moses transmits to them. Thus they have voluntarily relinquished receiving the remaining laws from God personally, and they may not in the future disobey Moses or challenge what he reports to them (see Exod. 24:7).

26. God appreciates the reverence that leads the people to make their request. He hopes that this reverence will remain with them and motivate them to observe the commandments. Implicit in His words is the concern that their reverence will diminish as the experience recedes from the people’s memory.

as here, some commentators interpret the phrase differently: It did not end, unlike nor-

mal utterances that fade away after a few seconds (BT Sanh. 17a).

and with their children forever! ²⁷Go, say to them, ‘Return to your tents.’ ²⁸But you remain here with Me, and I will give you the whole Instruction—the laws and the rules—that you shall impart to them, for them to observe in the land that I am giving them to possess.”

²⁹Be careful, then, to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. Do not turn aside to the right or to the left: ³⁰follow only the path that the LORD your God has enjoined upon you, so that you may thrive and that it may go well with you, and that you may long endure in the land you are to possess.

6 And this is the Instruction—the laws and the rules—that the LORD your God has commanded [me] to impart to you, to be observed in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, ²so that you, your children, and your children’s children may revere the LORD your God and follow, as long as you live, all His laws and commandments that I enjoin upon you, to the end that you may long endure. ³Obey, O Israel, willingly and faithfully, that it may go well

לָהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם לְעֹלָם: ²⁷ לָךְ אָמַר לָהֶם שׁוּבוּ לְכֶם לְאֹהֲלֵיכֶם: ²⁸ וְאַתָּה פֹּה עֹמֵד עִמָּדִי וְאִדְבַּרְהָ אֵלַיךְ אֶת כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמְשָׁפְטִים אֲשֶׁר תִּלְמְדֵם וְעָשׂוּ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לָהֶם לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ²⁹ וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲתֶכֶם לֹא תִסְרוּ יְמִין וּשְׂמָאל: ³⁰ בְּכָל־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲתֶכֶם תֵּלְכוּ לְמַעַן תַּחֲיוּן וְטוֹב לְכֶם וְהֶאֱרַכְתֶּם יָמִים בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּירְשׁוּן:

ו וְזֹאת הַמִּצְוָה הַחֻקִּים וְהַמְשָׁפְטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְלַמֵּד אֲתֶכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ² לְמַעַן תִּירָא אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךְ לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת־כָּל־חֻקְתָּיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה אֹתָהּ וּבְנֶה וּבְנֶה־כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ וּלְמַעַן יֵאָרְכַן יָמֶיךָ: ³ וּשְׁמַעְתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּשְׁמַרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲשֶׁר יִיטֵב לָךְ

28. Moses’ role as intermediary is now formalized. He stayed with God for 40 days and nights (9:9–11; Exod. 24:18).

29. The lesson learned at Mount Sinai—and

Moses’ main point in this speech—is that the laws and rules that he is about to teach came from God and must, therefore, be observed. They are prerequisites for well-being in the Promised Land.

Moses’ Second Discourse, Part 2: Preamble to the Laws Given in Moab (6:1–11:30)

1. this is the Instruction—the laws and the rules By using the identical terms that God used in 5:28, Moses indicates that the commands he is transmitting to Israel are precisely those given to him by God.

2. Moses has a twofold purpose in teaching the laws: He wishes to ensure their perfor-

mance and to inculcate reverence for God. Thus the laws were not only an expression of reverence for God but also a means of teaching reverence.

revere . . . and follow Literally, “revere . . . by following.” Following God’s laws is the means of revering Him, the expression of reverence.

28. I will give you the whole Instruction God revealed the entire Torah to Moses, but Moses, being a mortal, wrote down only what he could understand and absorb. Later generations would discover moral

truths and expand the notion of Torah to include them. If Truth (*Emet*) is one of the names of God, then there must be room in our understanding of Torah for all that is true.

with you and that you may increase greatly [in] a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, spoke to you.

⁴Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the

וְאִשֶּׁר תִּרְבּוּן מֵאֵד פֶּאֶשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
אֲבוֹתֵיךָ לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ : פ
שְׁמֵי 4 שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה |

3. Obey . . . willingly and faithfully Literally, to do as it promised in 5:24, which states, literally, “obey . . . and faithfully do.” Moses urges Israel “we will obey and do.”

A SERMON ON THE FIRST COMMANDMENT (6:4–25)

UNDIVIDED LOYALTY AND CONSTANT AWARENESS (vv. 4–9)

This passage states the major themes of Deuteronomy and the core demands of the Covenant. It has become, with the passage of time, the centerpiece of Jewish daily worship: *K’ri-at Sh’ma* (Recitation of the *Sh’ma*).

4. Hear, O Israel! Focus your attention and heed the following teaching.

the LORD is our God, the LORD alone

Hebrew: *YHVH Eloheinu, YHVH ehad*; literally, “*YHVH* [is] our God, *YHVH* [is] one.” Another

possible translation for the last word is “unique.” For all of its familiarity, the precise meaning of the *Sh’ma* is uncertain. The translation here renders it as describing a relationship: *YHVH* alone is Israel’s God. This is not a declaration of monotheism, meaning that there is only one God; that point was made in 4:35 and 39, which state that “*YHVH* alone is God.” This verse, by adding the possessive “our,” focuses on the way Israel is to apply that truth: Although other peoples worship various beings and things they consider divine, Israel is to recognize *YHVH* alone.

CHAPTER 6

4–9. How did the *Sh’ma* (vv. 4–9) become the quintessential Jewish prayer, when technically it is not a prayer at all? (Prayers are addressed to God; the *Sh’ma* is addressed to the Israelites.) Probably because it contains in just a few lines the basic theological commitments of Judaism: That there is a God; that there is only one God; that God is not only singular but also unique—no other being is like God; that the Jewish people have a specially intimate relationship with God; and that we are commanded as Jews to love God wholeheartedly, to study God’s word, and to teach God’s word to our children. More prosaically, it may be that, because this passage commands us to study words of Torah each morning and evening, we fulfill that obligation by reciting this passage.

The *Sh’ma* may be recited in any language the worshiper understands, because it is crucial that the worshiper understand what he or she is affirming (*S’fat Emet*, based on BT Ber. 13a). Yet there is value in saying it in the language of the original revelation, as a link to the Torah and to Jews around the world. For that reason, these words are typically among the first Hebrew words a Jewish child learns.

4. A *midrash* traces the origin of this verse to the last moments of the patriarch Jacob’s life. He was concerned that his children and grandchildren, living in Egypt, would depart from the traditions of Abraham and serve the local gods. They put his mind at ease, assuring him, “Hear, O Israel [i.e., Jacob]: We accept the one God as our god” (Deut. R. 2:35).

In Torah scrolls and many prayer books, the letter *ayin* at the end of “*sh’ma*” and the letter *dalet* at the end of “*ehad*” are written larger than the other letters, spelling “*ed*” (witness). That is, to recite *Sh’ma Yisra-el* is to testify to the unity and uniqueness of God. To live by the precepts of the *Sh’ma* is to bear witness to the truths of God’s Torah; it must be true if it can bring ordinary people to lead such extraordinary lives.

Hear This emphasizes the need to listen. Prayer is not only talking to God; it also includes listening to what God has to say to us. “When I pray, I speak to God. When I study Torah, God speaks to me” (Finkelstein). In a world filled with noise and superficial conversation, we need to be reminded of the sacred duty to pause and listen. “Jewish prayer is an act of listening. We do not bring forth our own words. The self is silent; the spirit of the people Israel speaks. In prayer, we listen to what the words convey” (Heschel).

LORD alone. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶Take to

אֶחָד * : וְאֶהְבֵּתָ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-
לְבַבְךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ : וְהָיָה

v. 4. ע' ד' רבתי

5. You shall love Israel's duty to love God is inseparable from action and is regularly connected with the observance of His commandments (see 10:12–13, 11:1,13, 19:9, 30:16). In ancient Near Eastern political terminology, “love” refers to the loyalty of subjects, vassals, and allies. One of the striking parallels between political treaties and the covenant between God and Israel is the requirement that vassals “love” the suzerain—i.e., act loyally to him—with all their heart. The command to love God accordingly may be understood as requiring one to act loyally toward Him, though an emotional response is also called for.

heart . . . soul The Hebrew word for “heart” (*lev* or *levav*) usually refers to the interior of the body, conceived of as the seat of thought, intention, and feeling. The Hebrew word for “soul” (*nefesh*) refers to the seat of the emotions, passions, and desires. To do something with all one's heart and soul means to do it with the totality of one's thoughts, feelings, intentions, and desires.

with all your might That is, “exceedingly.” The Hebrew (*b'khol m'odekha*) is comparable to the more common phrase for “very, very much” (*bim'od m'od*), implying with all the power and means at one's disposal. Israel must love and serve God with undivided devotion and loyalty.

the LORD alone Literally, “YHVH [is] one.” What do we mean when we proclaim that God is one? First, we reject the claim that God is none, that there is no God and the world is the product of random chance. Second, we reject the claim that God is two, a god of good and a god of evil. Jewish theology does not explain evil by positing a devil, a force of wickedness as powerful as God. Human misuse of our power to choose causes most of the evil in the world. And third, we reject the claim that God is many, that there are many deities, each specializing in one aspect of life or another. Only when God is one can we speak of a single moral law, of behavior being right or wrong in the sight of God (Steinberg).

5. You shall love Love is more than an emotion. It is a commitment to another, a demand for absolute faithfulness to God and to no other god. How can one command love? The *S'fat Emet* teaches that every human soul instinctively desires to love God, its Creator; but distractions and obstacles intervene. By performing the *mitzvot* we remove those obstacles and let our souls fulfill their natural inclination. “One who serves a master out of fear will always seek ways of escaping his obligations. But for one who serves out of love, obedience is a source of joy” (*Sifrei*).

The commandment to love our neighbor is found in Lev. 19:18. The commandment to love the stranger is found in Lev. 19:34. The commandment to love God comes later, in Deuteronomy. We learn to love God by practicing loving God's creatures, our fellow human beings. “Love the LORD your God” com-

mands not belief but behavior. Act in such a way as to make God beloved in the eyes of those who know you (Mid. Ha-Gadol).

with all your heart Learn to serve God not only with our noble impulses but even with the base, selfish desires of our hearts (M Ber. 9:5). Learn to turn to God's service our appetites, our physical lusts, and our egocentricity; we do so by sanctifying the way we eat, the way we act sexually, and the way we earn and spend money.

It can also be thought of as “wholeheartedly.” The opposite of wholehearted love is not hatred but apathy—going through the motions with no passion, no real caring (whether one is describing one's attitude toward God or toward family members). As Aaron Zeitlin wrote, “Praise Me, says God, and I will know that you love Me. / Curse Me, says God, and I will know that you love Me . . . / But if you look at the stars and yawn, / If you don't praise and you don't curse, / then I created you in vain, says God.”

with all your soul Even at the cost of your life. The account of Akiva's death by torture at the hands of the Romans (BT Ber. 61b) describes him as reciting *Sh'ma Yisra-el* with his dying breath, so that his death would bear witness to his undying faith in the one true God. (“Martyr” is derived from the Greek word for “witness.”) Jewish law limits the requirement to undergo martyrdom to cases in which Jews are threatened with death unless they commit murder, acts of sexual depravity, or public idolatry in times of persecution (S.A. YD 157).

with all your might Traditional rendering:

heart these instructions with which I charge you this day.⁷ Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead;⁹ inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

6. Take to heart Moses urges Israel to internalize God's teachings.

these instructions with which I charge you this day This and similar phrases refer to the entire body of Deuteronomic law.

7. Impress them Literally, "repeat them." Oral teaching was the primary means of instruction in Israel. Ancient Near Eastern treaties emphasize the vassal's duty to instruct his sons about the treaty and their duty to follow it.

Recite them Speak about them.

when you stay at home . . . when you get up That is, "speak of these words wherever you are, and at all times."

8. Bind them as a sign on your hand Bind "these words" (v. 6) on your hand in the same way that signs are placed on the hand. Not only must God's commandments be remembered and spoken of constantly but copies of them must be

הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם
עַל-לִבְבְּךָ: ⁷ וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם
בְּשֹׁבְתֶךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתֶּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ
וּבְקוּמְךָ: ⁸ וְקִשְׂרָתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ
לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ: ⁹ וְכִתַּבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזֹת
בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ: ט

worn on the body as well.

as a symbol Literally, "as a frontlet." That is, a headband, the characteristic headdress worn in the region of Syro-Palestine during the biblical period, as depicted in ancient Egyptian and Assyrian art.

9. on the doorposts People will thereby be reminded of God's instructions every time they enter and leave their homes.

gates Of cities. (Houses rarely had gates.) City gates consisted of the entire roofed structure that housed the doors, including several chambers (some up to 32 feet [10 m] wide), benches, and a long passageway. It functioned as the center of public activity, because it was often the most open area in an otherwise crowded city, and people constantly passed through it on their way to and from the city. Inscribing God's teachings on the walls of the gate would be the most effective way of publicizing them.

with your wealth. We serve God not only by giving to charity, but also by refusing financial gain in ways that either violate God's law or risk bringing the Torah into disrepute (as when people known to be Jewish are exposed for fraudulent business dealings).

6. Take to heart Literally, "they shall be upon your heart." Why "upon" rather than "in" your heart? Much of the time, a person's heart is closed, not ready to receive these words. Let the words remain outside, on the

heart, until the day when circumstances break the heart open and the words of the Torah can enter (Menaḥem Mendel of Kotzk).

7. your children Not only your biologic children but anyone whose impression of Judaism is likely to be shaped by their contact with you (*Sifrei*).

8-9. The *t'fillin* are personal statements of our committing our deeds and thoughts to God. The *m'zuzah* is a public declaration that this is a home where a Jewish family dwells.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

6:7. Impress them The Sages maintain that grandparents are also obligated to teach these things to their grandchildren (BT Kid. 30a).

Recite them From this the Sages derive the obligation to recite the *Sh'ma* in the evening—preferably before midnight, when most people "lie down"—and in the morning before the first quarter of the day is over, by which time most people would be up (M Ber. 1:1-2).

6:8. Bind them The commandment to wear *t'fillin* is derived from this verse as well as Exod. 13:9,16 and Deut. 11:18. These four passages are, therefore, contained in the boxes worn on the head and on the biceps of the person's weaker arm.

6:9. doorposts The commandment is fulfilled by attaching a *m'zuzah* to the right doorpost of any entrance to the house. Some also attach a *m'zuzah* to the right doorpost leading into every livable room, excluding bathrooms and closets. The *m'zuzah* is placed in the top third of the doorway, its top angled into the room.

¹⁰When the LORD your God brings you into the land that He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to you—great and flourishing cities that you did not build, ¹¹houses full of all good things that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and you eat your fill, ¹²take heed that you do not forget the LORD who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. ¹³Revere only the LORD your God and worship Him alone, and swear only by His name. ¹⁴Do not follow other gods, any gods of the peoples about you—¹⁵for the LORD your God in your midst is an impassioned God—lest the anger of the LORD your God blaze forth against you and He wipe you off the face of the earth.

DO NOT ALLOW PROSPERITY TO
MAKE YOU FORGET (vv. 10–15)

10. This reminder that the Israelites did not create the material wealth they are about to possess is an implicit warning against the attitude of self-sufficiency that prosperity can induce.

11. all good things The basic possessions of a settled agricultural society, which the Israelites, after a generation of wandering in the wilderness, are about to enjoy.

cisterns Most Israelite population centers were in the highlands, which depend mainly on rain for their water. Because rain falls in Israel only between October and May, it was necessary to store rainwater for the dry season; otherwise, the highlands could not have supported many people. Water was stored in large jars and in communal and private cisterns located beneath houses or their inner courtyards.

vineyards and olive groves Among the agricultural staples of the land of Israel, grapes and olives were second in importance only to grains (8:8, 28:51).

12. take heed Literally, “be careful.” For-

10 וְהָיָה כִּי יְבִיאֲכֶם אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה אֶלְהֵיכֶם אֶל-
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְאִשְׁרָהּ
לְיִצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר לְךָ עָרִים גְּדוֹלוֹת
וְטֹבֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְנִיתָ: ¹¹ וּבָתִּים מְלֵאִים
כָּל-טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא מְלֵאתָ וּבְרוֹת חֲצוּבוֹת
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-חָצַבְתָּ כְּרִמִּים וְזֵיתִים אֲשֶׁר
לֹא-נִטַּעְתָּ וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ: ¹² הִשְׁמַר לְךָ
פֶּן-תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת-יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאֲךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: ¹³ אֶת-
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא וְאִתּוֹ תַעֲבֹד
וּבְשֵׁמוֹ תִשְׁבַּע: ¹⁴ לֹא תִלְכּוּן אַחֲרֵי
אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים מֵאֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר
סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם: ¹⁵ כִּי אֵל קָנָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ
בְּקִרְבְּךָ פֶּן-יִחַרְהוּ אֶפְיֵי-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּךְ
וְהִשְׁמִידְךָ מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: ס

getting one's dependence on God is not only wrong but also dangerous (8:19–20, 11:17). The possibility that material wealth and satiety can lead to pride and arrogance and to disregarding one's dependence on God is a persistent concern in the Bible.

13. worship And obey. This is a common term in the ancient Near East both for worshipping deities and for obeying kings.

swear only by His name Swearing by a god indicates a belief that that god has power and authority. The Bible, therefore, considers it a test of loyalty that the Israelites swear by *YHVH* alone. This expression of fidelity is similar to ancient Near Eastern ways of displaying loyalty to a king. In a Sumerian prayer, the writer denies that he has sworn an oath by a foreign king.

14. gods of the peoples about you All foreign deities are prohibited to Israel (5:7, 13:8), but Moses' immediate concern is with gods of the surrounding peoples that the Israelites will encounter in the Promised Land.

15. in your midst The recognition that God is present in Israel's midst, regulating their affairs, is a deterrent to sin.

Its purpose is not magic, to protect us from harm, but to remind us, when we leave our homes and when we return to them, of what God demands of us.

10. that you did not build It is not just that

generation which received so much. Similar statements could be made for every generation of human beings. Humility and gratitude, therefore, are appropriate responses for what we have received from those who came before us.

¹⁶Do not try the LORD your God, as you did at Massah. ¹⁷Be sure to keep the commandments, decrees, and laws that the LORD your God has enjoined upon you. ¹⁸Do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you and that you may be able to possess the good land that the LORD your God promised on oath to your fathers, ¹⁹and that all your enemies may be driven out before you, as the LORD has spoken.

²⁰When, in time to come, your children ask you, “What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the LORD our God has enjoined upon you?” ²¹you shall say to your children, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the LORD freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand. ²²The LORD wrought before our eyes marvelous and destructive signs and portents in Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household; ²³and us He freed from there, that He might take us and give us the land that

DO NOT TEST GOD (vv. 16–19)

Moses, having indicated that God will meet all the needs of Israel, recalls an incident in which the people challenged God’s ability and implicitly threatened to rebel against Him. He urges them never to confront God again but to observe the commandments so that all may go well with them.

16. Do not try That is, do not test. During the incident in question, the people complained because they lacked water to drink (Exod. 17:1–7). Tests of that sort imply a lack of confidence in God’s power.

18. right and good Associated elsewhere with obeying God’s commandments, and that is

16. Do not try the LORD Do not test God by demanding miracles, nor lose faith in God when miracles do not occur. True love does not require constant proofs of its genuineness. Rely instead on the memories of what God did for your ancestors (vv. 20–23).

18. The Torah could not possibly include every specific instance of good conduct; therefore it offers this general statement to cover any eventuality. That is, be willing to compromise or to accept mediation, or to go beyond

לֹא תִנְסֹוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּאִשֶּׁר נְסִיתֶם בְּמַסָּה: ¹⁷ שְׁמֹר תִּשְׁמְרוּן אֶת־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְעֲדֹתָיו וְחֻקֵּי אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ: ¹⁸ וְעָשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ וּבָאתָ וִירַשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתָּיִךְ: ¹⁹ לְהַדֹּף אֶת־כָּל־אִיְבֹיֶךָ מִפְּנֵיךָ בְּאִשֶּׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: ס

²⁰ כִּי־יִשְׁאֲלֶךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה הָעֲדוֹת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אִתְּכֶם: ²¹ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבְנֶךָ עֲבָדִים הָייִנוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיּוֹצִיאֲנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה: ²² וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אוֹתוֹת וּמִפְתִּים גְּדֹלִים וָרַעִים אֲנִי בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ לְעֵינֵינוּ: ²³ וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם לְמַעַן הַבִּיא אֶתְנוּ לְתֵת לָנוּ אֶת־

undoubtedly what is meant in His sight here and in 12:28.

19. A reminder that the injunctions of this passage are a condition for the conquest of the Promised Land.

EXPLAINING THE COMMANDMENTS TO ONE’S CHILDREN (vv. 20–25)

In this passage, Moses resumes the theme of verse 7, which calls for teaching children about God’s instructions.

22. before our eyes The parents—those who, as children, witnessed the Exodus and the Revelation—can now assure their children that they speak not from hearsay but personal experience.

the letter of the law—“for God loves the good and the right” (Ramban). The Sages of the Talmud also insisted that this verse requires us to go beyond the letter of the law and, as Rashi suggests, voluntarily waive privileges in order to end disputes amicably.

20. This verse is the source of the wise child’s question in the *Pesah Haggadah*. In the better manuscripts of the *Haggadah*, the last word of the verse reads “us,” following the reading in the Talmud and in the Septuagint.

He had promised on oath to our fathers. ²⁴Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these laws, to revere the LORD our God, for our lasting good and for our survival, as is now the case. ²⁵It will be therefore to our merit before the LORD our God to observe faithfully this whole Instruction, as He has commanded us.”

הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתֵּינוּ: ²⁴ וַיִּצְוֵנוּ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה לְיִרְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְטוֹב לָנוּ כָּל־הַיָּמִים לְחַיֵּתֵנוּ כִּהְיוֹם הַזֶּה: ²⁵ וַיְצַדֵּקָהּ תְּהִי־הִיא לָנוּ כִּי־נִשְׁמָר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוֵּנוּ: ס

7 When the LORD your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and He dislodges many nations before you—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you—²and the LORD your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no quarter. ³You

ז שביעי כִּי יְבִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה בָּא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ וְנָשְׂל גוֹיִם־רַבִּים | מִפְּנֵיךָ הַחַתִּי וְהַגְּרִגָּשִׁי וְהָאֲמֹרִי וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי שְׁבַעַה גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְעִצּוּמִים מִמֶּךָ: ² וְנָתַתָּם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִפְנֵיךָ וְהִפִּיתָם הַחֶרֶם תַּחְרִים אֹתָם לֹא־תִכְרַת לָהֶם בְּרִית וְלֹא תִחַנֵּם: ³ וְלֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם

24. observe . . . revere Observing the laws is in itself an act of reverence.

AVOIDING DANGERS TO FAITH AND OBEDIENCE AFTER THE CONQUEST (7:1–10:22)

Moses now turns to specific laws, beginning with the first issue that the Israelites will face when they enter the Promised Land: what to do with the Canaanites. The laws are accompanied by explanations and exhortations, because the proper attitude in observing them is as important as the laws themselves.

EXHORTATIONS CONCERNING CONQUEST (7:1–8:20)

1. God brings you to the land The angel mentioned in Exod. 23:20 is omitted here, in keeping with Deuteronomy’s insistence on the exclusive role of God in Israel’s history.

Hittites A people by this name, living in Hebron, Bethel, and elsewhere in the central highlands of Canaan, is mentioned in Genesis. Outside the Bible, “Hittites” refers to several groups, and it is not clear which, if any, is meant in Genesis or here. This list of the inhabitants of the land is not meant to be complete. Other lists name as many as 12 nations, many name 6, and some name fewer.

Girgashites Virtually nothing is known of this group, although Girgish appears as the name of a person in some ancient texts. There was a land of Karkisha in Asia Minor; perhaps the Girgashites migrated to Canaan from there.

Amorites, Canaanites Sometimes these names are used for all the peoples of the Promised Land, but here they refer to the inhabitants of specific regions (see 1:7).

Perizzites Several passages mention them in connection with the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, in the north-central part of the Land; that may be where they were concentrated.

Hivites The population of Shechem in the days of Jacob (see Gen. 34:2). In Joshua’s time they made up the population of Gibeon and were also found in the far north, at the foot of Mount Hermon and in the Lebanon range.

Jebusites The population of Jerusalem before its conquest by David. Nothing is known of them outside the Bible; but at Mari, in Syria, Yabasi appears as a clan and a geographic name.

2. terms That is, conditions, such as labor in

shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. ⁴For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and the LORD's anger will blaze forth against you and He will promptly wipe you out. ⁵Instead, this is what you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts, and consign their images to the fire.

⁶For you are a people consecrated to the LORD your God: of all the peoples on earth the LORD your God chose you to be His treasured people.

return for which they would be spared (20:11). According to Exod. 23:31–33, Canaanites were to be expelled from the land; here they are to be killed.

3. The intent behind the severe treatment of the Canaanites is the prevention of the intermarriages, which would certainly lure the Israelites to worship pagan gods and then to violate the first two commandments (see Exod. 23:32–33, 34:15–16; Deut. 20:17–18).

4. from Me Moses, when transmitting God's commands, often alternates between speaking of God in the third person and quoting Him directly.

He will promptly wipe you out Because the exclusive worship of YHVH was the fundamental condition for Israel's survival, leaving Canaanites alive who might entice the Israelites into idolatry was a matter of life and death.

5. tear down Even the physical objects of Canaanite religion must be eliminated. The common practice of taking them as booty or bringing them as offerings to the victor's deity is forbidden, because anything associated with the religion of the Canaanites is repugnant to the Lord (vv. 25–26).

altars Structures on which offerings of food, drink, or incense were made to gods. They might be simple stones or mounds of dirt, tables plated with precious metal, or platforms large enough to be ascended by steps or ramps.

pillars Cut or uncut stones that were erected for a religious purpose. Some contained engravings or reliefs showing a deity or its symbols, and

בַּתָּךְ לֹא־תִתֵּן לְבָנוּ וּבִתּוֹ לֹא־תִקַּח לְבָנְךָ: ⁴ כִּי־יִסִיר אֶת־בְּנֶךָ מֵאַחֲרַי וְעַבְדּוֹ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְחָרָה אַף־יְהוָה בְּכֶם וְהִשְׁמִידֶךָ מֵהָר: ⁵ כִּי־אִם־כֹּה תַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִזְבְּחֹתֵיהֶם תִּתְצוּ וּמִצְבֹּתָם תִּשְׁבְּרוּ וְאֲשִׁירֵיהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּן וּפְסִילֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בָּאֵשׁ:

⁶ כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּךְ בְּחָר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְהִיּוֹת לּוֹ לְעַם סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: ס

others were plain. Apparently they were thought to embody the presence of a deity, either by representing the deity or by serving as its residence. Sacrifices were offered to them and they were treated as idols.

sacred posts Hebrew: *asherah*. Refers to a standing wooden object at a place of worship. According to 16:21, it was a tree planted near an altar. Some passages suggest that it might also be an image, an artificial tree, or perhaps a tree trunk or a pole. Others indicate that it was regarded as a symbol of the Canaanite goddess Asherah.

fire If burning is meant literally, the text must be referring to wooden images with metal plating (see v. 25). All the verbs in these commands, however, may simply mean “destroy.” In the excavations at Hazor a statue with its head chopped off was found in the remains of the stratum destroyed by the Israelites at the time of the conquest.

6. consecrated Hebrew: *kadosh*. Usually translated “holy,” here it has the sense of “set apart.”

God chose you Israel was the only people devoted to YHVH. The Bible considers this a special privilege for which Israel was chosen.

His treasured people Israel is God's “treasure” (*s'gullab*), meaning that it is cherished. The Hebrew word belongs to covenantal terminology. There is an account of a Hittite king who called his vassal, the king of Ugarit, his treasure. On a Syrian royal seal a king is called “the servant of Adad, the beloved of Adad, the *siktum* [*s'gullab*] of Adad.”

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

7:3. not intermarry Marriage is the basis of the family and the home in which religious identity is transmitted. The Torah commands us to marry within the faith to build a Jewish family (see Gen. 24:3, 26:35, 28:1).

⁷It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the LORD set His heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; ⁸but it was because the LORD favored you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that the LORD freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

⁹Know, therefore, that only the LORD your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps His covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments, ¹⁰but who instantly requites with destruction those who reject Him—never slow with those who reject Him, but requiting them instantly. ¹¹Therefore, observe faithfully the Instruction—the laws and the rules—with which I charge you today.

AN APPEAL TO AVOID COMPLACENCY
(vv. 7–11)

7. *smallest of peoples* This assertion contrasts with others that state that in Egypt Israel grew into “a great and very populous nation” (26:5) and that it is now as numerous as the stars (1:10, 10:22, 28:62). Unless the present assertion is a deliberate exaggeration for the sake of dismissing Israel’s size as a factor, it may reflect conditions of a historical period different from that of the other references.

9. Know, from God’s election and redemp-

7 לֹא מֵרַבְּכֶם מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק יְהוָה בְּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם כִּי־אַתֶּם הַמְעַט מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים: 8 כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם וּמִשְׁמֵרוֹ אֶת־הַשְּׁבָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתֵיכֶם הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וַיַּפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים מִיַּד פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרָיִם:

9 וַיִּדְעַתְּ כִּי־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים הָאֵל הַנֶּאֱמָן שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֲסֵד לְאַהֲבָיו וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו מִצְוֹתָיו לְאַלְף דֹּר: 10 וּמִשְׁלָם לְשֹׂנְאָיו אֶל־פָּנָיו לְהַאֲבִידוֹ לֹא יֵאָחֵר לְשֹׂנְאוֹ אֶל־פָּנָיו יִשְׁלַם־לוֹ: 11 וְשֹׁמְרֵת אֶת־הַמִּצְוָה וְאֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מִצְוֶה הַיּוֹם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם: פ

tion of Israel, that He is reliable and steadfast.

10. Although punishment may extend to three or four generations of descendants (5:9), offenders themselves cannot hope to escape retribution if they violate God’s laws.

11. *observe* The verb שמר describes both Israel’s obligation to “observe” and God’s act of “keeping” the covenant (v. 9). The intent here may be to lend a moral dimension to Moses’ argument: Israel ought to respond to God’s faithfulness with its own sincere faithfulness—and not merely obey God to avoid punishment and receive a reward.

CHAPTER 7

9. *those who love Him and keep His commandments* This phrase actually refers to two groups: those who wholeheartedly love

and serve God; and those who keep commandments only for other reasons—such as seeking to be admired for their ethical standards, or out of concern for their neighbors’ opinion (Rashi).

הַפְטָרָה רֵאשׁוֹנָה דְנַחֲמָתָא

FIRST HAFTARAH OF CONSOLATION HAFTARAH FOR VA-ETHANNAN

ISAIAH 40:1–26

(Recite on the first Shabbat after the 9th of Av, called Shabbat Nahamu—named after the first word of this haftarah. This occasion coincides with the reading of Va-ethannan.)

The *haftarah* opens with prophecies of consolation. Apparently these were addressed both to the Judeans who had been exiled to Babylon (in the deportations of 597 and 587–586 B.C.E.) and to the destroyed city of Jerusalem itself. Because we are told that the people's sins have been forgiven and that their punishment is complete, these words most likely were spoken after 538 B.C.E. (That was when Cyrus the Mede conquered Babylon and issued a proclamation permitting the restoration of subject peoples, including the return of Judeans to Jerusalem.)

The *haftarah* does not speak the language of political freedom or release but announces God's heavenly word of comfort and restoration. Indeed, the prophet stresses the fulfillment of God's word and His supremacy over all nations and kings. The prophecy reorients the people to Zion and announces the advent of God's Presence—to confirm and guide the renewal of His people and their homeland.

The *haftarah* is divided into two series: proclamations of consolation to the nation and to Zion (vv. 1–11), and teachings that emphasize God's unfathomable majesty and transcendence (vv. 12–26). At the outset, a series of divine charges is addressed to heavenly messengers, instructing them to bring God's word of comfort to Zion. The prophet overhears these proclamations and announces them to the people, thus giving them comfort as well.

To reinforce confidence in the prophetic proclamation, the next part of the *haftarah* depicts God as awesome in might. The prophet addresses the people with a series of rhetorical questions. By this means, he confronts the nation with the surpassing power and wisdom of God. Two series of rhetorical questions—verses 12–14 and 21–24—provide a theological frame for the entire section. In the first series, God's transcendence is juxtaposed to the comparative nothingness of nature and the delusion of idol makers. Then a question is asked: "To whom, then, can you liken God?" (v. 18). In the second series, God's might is juxtaposed to the limited knowledge of human beings. Once again the question resounds, "To whom, then, can you liken Me?" (v. 25).

THE SEVEN HAFTAROT OF CONSOLATION

This passage is the first of the Seven *Haftarot* of Consolation (*shiv-ah d'nehemata*) that announce Israel's redemption. All of these selections are taken from Isaiah 40–66. They are recited on the seven Sabbaths after *Tish-ah b'Av*, a fast day that commemorates the destruction of Zion and the exile of Judah.

The Seven *Haftarot* of Consolation follow the Three *Haftarot* of Admonition (*puranuta*) that were recited on the three Sabbaths before *Tish-ah b'Av*. As the synagogue calendar progresses, these 10 *haftarah* readings are followed by one chosen especially for the *Shabbat* that precedes *Yom Kippur*. Thus we have a cycle of special *haftarot* for this period, each unrelated to the *parashah* that is read on *Shabbat*.

40 Comfort, oh comfort My people,
Says your God.
2Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
And declare to her
That her term of service is over,
That her iniquity is expiated;
For she has received at the hand of the LORD
Double for all her sins.

³A voice rings out:

“Clear in the desert

A road for the LORD!

Level in the wilderness

A highway for our God!

⁴Let every valley be raised,

Every hill and mount made low.

Let the rugged ground become level

And the ridges become a plain.

⁵The Presence of the LORD shall appear,

And all flesh, as one, shall behold—

For the LORD Himself has spoken.”

⁶A voice rings out: “Proclaim!”

Another asks, “What shall I proclaim?”

“All flesh is grass,

מ נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי
יֹאמֵר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:
2 דַּבְּרוּ עַל-לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם
וְקִרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ
כִּי מִלְאָה צָבְאָה
כִּי נִרְצָה עֲוֹנָהּ
כִּי לָקְחָה מִיַּד יְהוָה
כַּפְלַיִם בְּכָל-חַטָּאתֶיהָ: ס

³ קוֹל קוֹרֵא

בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּנוּ

דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה

יִשְׁרוּ בְעֵרְבָהּ

מִסְלָה לְאֵלֵהֵינוּ:

⁴ כָּל-גֵּיא יִנָּשֵׂא

וְכָל-הַר וְגִבְעָה יִשְׁפָּלוּ

וְהָיָה הָעֵקֶב לְמִישׁוֹר

וְהָרְכָסִים לְבִקְעָה:

⁵ וְנִגְלָה כְבוֹד יְהוָה

וְרָאוּ כָל-בֶּשֶׂר יַחְדָּו

כִּי פִי יְהוָה דַּבֵּר: ס

⁶ קוֹל אֹמֵר קְרֵא

וְאֹמֵר מָה אֶקְרֵא

כָּל-הַבֶּשֶׂר חֲצִיר

Isaiah 40:1. Comfort, oh comfort Hebrew: *nahamu nahamu*. The double verb form is a hallmark of Isaiah (see 51:9,17, 52:11). It serves to express rhetorical intensification (Radak). In Ibn Ezra’s opinion, it “indicates that the comfort will occur swiftly or repeatedly.” God’s word of comfort is apparently directed to his heavenly messengers, who are charged with addressing Jerusalem and its people (see v. 3).

2. The opening proclamation is intensified by three explanations of the comfort to come; each is introduced by the word *ki* (that, for). A theology of divine punishment and forgiveness lies behind this passage. Unilaterally God determines the period of punishment (“service”) involved. Nothing is said of human repentance.

3. A voice rings out The anonymous voice of a divine messenger is heard (see v. 1). Rashi proposed that it was the Holy Spirit; Ibn Ezra suggested that it was the voice of the messengers.

6. Another asks Hebrew: *v’amar*. Apparently one messenger speaks to another, and the prophet overhears them. The Septuagint’s rendering, however, suggests an underlying *va-omar*, “And I said (asked),” as if a divine messenger has addressed the prophet. Similarly, the large Isaiah scroll from Qumran (the “Dead Sea Scrolls”) reads *va-om’rah*.

All flesh is grass This image underscores human mortality and transience compared to the eternal, supernatural word of God. The image recurs in Psalms (90:4–6, 103:15–17).

All its goodness like flowers of the field:
 7Grass withers, flowers fade
 When the breath of the LORD blows on them.
 Indeed, man is but grass:
 8Grass withers, flowers fade—
 But the word of our God is always fulfilled!”

וְכָל־חֲסָדוֹ כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה:
 7 יִבֶּשׂ חֲצִיר נִבְלָה צִיץ
 כִּי רוּחַ יְהוָה נִשְׁבָּה בּוֹ
 אֲכַנּוּ חֲצִיר הָעָם:
 8 יִבֶּשׂ חֲצִיר נִבְלָה צִיץ
 וּדְבַר־אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם: ס

9Ascend a lofty mountain,
 O herald of joy to Zion;
 Raise your voice with power,
 O herald of joy to Jerusalem—
 Raise it, have no fear;
 Announce to the cities of Judah:
 Behold your God!
 10Behold, the Lord GOD comes in might,
 And His arm wins triumph for Him;
 See, His reward is with Him,
 His recompense before Him.
 11Like a shepherd He pastures His flock:
 He gathers the lambs in His arms
 And carries them in His bosom;
 Gently He drives the mother sheep.

9 עַל הַר־גְּבוּהָ עֲלִי־לָךְ
 מִבְּשָׂרְתָּ צִיּוֹן
 הָרִימִי בְּכַח קוֹלְךָ
 מִבְּשָׂרְתָּ יְרוּשָׁלַם
 הָרִימִלִּי אֶל־תִּירְאִי
 אֲמַרְלִי לְעַרְיִי יְהוּדָה
 הִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:
 10 הִנֵּה אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בַּחֲזֶק יָבֹא
 וּזְרָעוֹ מִשְׁלָה לוֹ
 הִנֵּה שְׂכָרוֹ אִתּוֹ
 וּפְעֻלָּתוֹ לִפְנֵי:
 11 כְּרֹעָה עָדְרוֹ יִרְעָה
 בְּזֹרְעוֹ יִקְבֹּץ טְלָאִים
 וּבְחִיקוֹ יִשָּׂא
 עֲלוֹת יְנַהֵל: ס

12Who measured the waters with the hollow
 of His hand,
 And gauged the skies with a span,
 And meted earth’s dust with a measure,
 And weighed the mountains with a scale
 And the hills with a balance?
 13Who has plumbed the mind of the LORD,
 What man could tell Him His plan?
 14Whom did He consult, and who taught
 Him,

12 מִי־מָדַד בְּשַׁעְלוֹ מַיִם
 וּשְׁמַיִם בְּזֶרֶת תַּבֵּן
 וְכָל בְּשָׁלֵשׁ עַפְרֵי הָאָרֶץ
 וְשָׁקַל בַּפֶּלֶס הָרִים
 וּגְבָעוֹת בְּמֵאזְנַיִם:
 13 מִי־תַבֵּן אֶת־רוּחַ יְהוָה
 וְאִישׁ עֲצָתוֹ יוֹדִיעֵנוּ:
 14 אֶת־מִי נֹעֵץ וַיְבִינָהוּ

12. Repeated questioning confronts us with the unfathomable majesty of God, whose cosmological supremacy is emphasized. This puts into perspective the work of human hands and mocks the mortal desire to create divine forms from the world God created.

14. *Whom did He consult* This may be an indirect critique of Gen. 1:26, in which God apparently speaks to the heavenly court before creating man (“Let us make man”). Similarly, the emphatic point “To whom, then, can you liken [t’damyun] God?” (Isa. 40:18, cf. v. 25) may be

Guided Him in the way of right?
Who guided Him in knowledge
And showed Him the path of wisdom?

וַיְלַמְדֵהוּ בְּאֹרַח מִשְׁפָּט
וַיְלַמְדֵהוּ דַעַת
וְדַרְךְ תְּבוּנוֹת יוֹדִיעֵנוּ:

¹⁵The nations are but a drop in a bucket,
Reckoned as dust on a balance;
The very coastlands He lifts like motes.

¹⁵ הֵן גּוֹיִם כְּמַר מִדְּלִי
וּכְשֶׁחַק מֵאֲזַנִּים נֶחְשְׁבוּ
הֵן אַיִים כְּדָק יִטּוֹל:

¹⁶Lebanon is not fuel enough,
Nor its beasts enough for sacrifice.
¹⁷All nations are as naught in His sight;
He accounts them as less than nothing.

¹⁶ וּלְבָנוֹן אֵין דִּי בַעַר
וְחֵיתוֹ אֵין דִּי עוֹלָה: ס
¹⁷ כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם כְּאֵין נֶגְדוֹ
מֵאַפֵּס וְתֵהוּ נֶחְשְׁבוּ-לוֹ:

¹⁸To whom, then, can you liken God,
What form compare to Him?

¹⁸ וְאֵל-מִי תִדְמִיּוֹן אֵל

¹⁹The idol? A woodworker shaped it,
And a smith overlaid it with gold,
Forging links of silver.

וּמַה-דְּמוּת תַּעֲרֹכוּ לוֹ:
¹⁹ הַפֶּסֶל נִסַּף חָרֵשׁ
וְצִרְף בְּזָהָב יִרְקַעֵנוּ
וְרִתְקוֹת כֶּסֶף צוֹרֵף:

²⁰As a gift, he chooses the mulberry—
A wood that does not rot—
Then seeks a skillful woodworker
To make a firm idol,
That will not topple.

²⁰ הַמְּסַכֵּן תְּרוּמָה
עֵץ לֹא-יִרְקַב יִבְחַר
חָרֵשׁ חָכֵם יִבְקֹשׁ-לוֹ
לְהַכִּין פֶּסֶל
לֹא יִמוּט:

²¹Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
Have you not been told

²¹ הֲלוֹא תִדְעוּ

From the very first?
Have you not discerned
How the earth was founded?

הֲלוֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ

הֲלוֹא הִגֵּד

מֵרֵאשׁ לָכֶם

²²It is He who is enthroned above the vault
of the earth,

הֲלוֹא הִבִּינְתֶם

מוֹסְדוֹת הָאָרֶץ:

So that its inhabitants seem as grasshoppers;
Who spread out the skies like gauze,
Stretched them out like a tent to dwell in.

²² הֵיטֵב עַל-חֹג הָאָרֶץ
וַיִּשְׁבֶּיהָ כַּחֲגוּבִים
הַנוֹטָה כְּדִק שָׁמַיִם
וַיִּמְתְּחֶם כְּאֹהֶל לְשֹׁבְתֵי:

directed against the notion in Genesis that man was created in the “likeness” (*d’muteinu*) of God and the angels.

the way of right Hebrew: *orah mishpat*. This apparently refers to the nature of the universe and its laws (Radak).

23He brings potentates to naught,
 Makes rulers of the earth as nothing.
 24Hardly are they planted,
 Hardly are they sown,
 Hardly has their stem
 Taken root in earth,
 When He blows upon them and they dry up,
 And the storm bears them off like straw.

הַנּוֹתֵן רוֹזְנִים לְאֵין 23
 שֹׁפְטֵי אֶרֶץ כְּתֹהוּ עָשָׂה:
 אֶף בְּלִנְטָעוֹ 24
 אֶף בְּלִזְרָעוֹ
 אֶף בְּלִשְׂרָשׁ
 בְּאֶרֶץ גִּזְעָם
 וְגַם־נִשֵּׁף בְּהֵם וַיִּבָּשׁוּ
 וַיִּסְעָרָהּ כִּקְשׁ תִּשְׂאָם: ס

25To whom, then, can you liken Me,
 To whom can I be compared?
 —says the Holy One.

וְאֵל־מִי תִדְמִיוּנִי 25
 וְאִשׁוּהָ

26Lift high your eyes and see:
 Who created these?
 He who sends out their host by count,
 Who calls them each by name:
 Because of His great might and vast power,
 Not one fails to appear.

יֹאמֶר קְדוֹשׁ:
 שְׂאוּ־מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם וּרְאוּ 26
 מִי־בָרָא אֱלֹהָ
 הַמוֹצֵיא בְּמִסְפָּר צְבָאָם
 לְכֹלֶם בְּשֵׁם יִקְרָא
 מְרֹב אוֹנִים וְאִמְיָץ כֹּחַ
 אִישׁ לֹא נֶעְדָּר: ס

25. the Holy One God is designated by the term *kadosh* (holy), which occurs frequently as *K'dosh Yisra-el*, “The Holy One of Israel” (see 41:14, 43:14, 54:5) and expresses the prophet’s theology of God’s utter sanctity and transcendence. The epithet provides a link to the first half

of the book, in which God is repeatedly called *K'dosh Yisra-el* (see 5:19, 10:20, 12:6). The theological emphasis echoes Isaiah’s numinous Temple vision, in which he heard the angelic host singing *kadosh* three times before God (6:3).