

Chapter Seven

“Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.” This verse presupposes that God had been watching Noah’s progress carefully while constructing the ark, perhaps giving advice here and there. There had to come a time when Noah realized he was finished, difficult to communicate to others, let alone his family. Certainly there were times when Noah would take a break from his work, for example, evenings, and would go out for a walk with God (cf. 6.9). During such times both would discuss the impending worldwide flood as well as particulars of the ark’s construction. God must have confided in Noah his immense frustration and unwillingness to take out his wrath on humanity, though he was being forced to do so. That’s the essential difference between Noah and Abraham who bargained with God for deliverance of Sodom and Gomorrah. Noah had first-hand experience from God himself whereas Abraham, despite his compassion for the two cities, did not. In addition to asking Noah to enter the ark, specifically the Lord commanded his household, that is, Noah’s three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, along with their respective wives and Noah’s unknown wife (cf. 6.18). One can only surmise what was going on in each person’s mind, namely, the prospect of leaving solid, dry ground for a large, dark and ominous-looking vessel that lacked any means of propulsion. On top of it, the ark was filled with every imaginable creature within a confined space. As just noted, an ark isn’t designed for movement but for floating upon water. It took courage for Noah’s family who presented him with their anxieties which increased as the day drew closer for entering the ark. Something which Noah said convinced them...perhaps it was the docility of the animals boarding the ark, a sight they had never seen. Besides, they were about to become the sole survivors of the human race, the last to have tread upon the earth before it was destroyed and hence renewed by the flood waters.

“For I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.” Here we have the second half of vs. 1 which refers to Noah alone as being *tsadyq*, not necessarily applicable to his family. They must have had an intimation of this as well, that they were coming along for the ride chiefly as agents to propagate the human race within the new creation. Noah must have had some misgivings about his three sons of whom nothing is said of their relationship with their father. Would at least one turn out to be like him, *tsadyq*, and walk with God? If not them, one of their sons? The task fell to them, not their wives nor their female daughters, for women were considered unworthy for such an honor. God took a gamble choosing just one man with some misgivings about his family; however, he was determined to stick with Noah. Besides, there had been no one else on the earth with whom to walk (cf. 6.9). Similar thoughts filled Noah’s mind knowing that he would be stuck on the ark for an indefinite period of time. He had to work out some *modus vivendi* with regard to his family or end up in despair. Without such a plan, all would have been at each other’s throats within the tight confines of the ark, let alone the tension from so many cooped-up animals. The words “in this generation” (*dor*) highlight the special relationship Noah enjoyed with God which had been put in terms of the two walking together. That, in turn, means they talked things over with each other on an informal basis “as a man speaks to his friend” [Ex 33.11]. Even if Noah’s family overheard these words of God (‘that you are righteous before me in this generation’), they would not have been jealous, so contaminated as they had been by the corruption around them...not necessarily corrupt themselves but deadened to any divine communication. To their credit these people went along with Noah’s scheme and entered the ark. Beyond that we can attribute them with nothing special.

Vs. 2 has God telling Noah to take “seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate,” the same being applied to unclean animals. The word *behemah* is used, first noted in 6.20 (‘of the animals of their kinds’), which generally applies to domestic animals. This is different from the “wild animals” of 3.14 (*chayah* or living things) which is more inclusive. Because Noah had to bring on board *behemah*

—and that includes animals considered wild and dangerous—automatically all became domestic and subservient to him just like with the first man in the garden. Not only that, the *behemah* would be on their best behavior within the ark which would form a second garden of Eden, albeit a floating one, because they would be confined for an indefinite period of time. As for the number animals, it is seven or *shivhah*, usually considered a sacred number and from the verbal root *shavah*, to swear an oath. As for “these pairs,” this is rendered literally as “the man and his woman,” the latter being rendered as “mate.”

The first group of animals are clean or *tahor*, whose verbal root means to shine, be bright. “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever” [Ps 19.9]. Noah must have been confused at this distinction between clean and unclean animals, the first such distinction made. However, a basis exists for Noah to make the distinction; he was alone among a corrupt generation and was qualified to differentiate between clean and unclean human beings. And so we have an important element in place which would apply to future sacrifices, the first one occurring when Noah, his family and all the animals disembarked from the ark (cf. 8.20). Once the initial confusion of loading all the animals was over, Noah went ahead with taking seven animals from both types, clean and unclean. As for the latter, they lacked that brightness or *tahor* and thus didn’t stand out but remained hidden in the shadows. While the task was easy, Noah had to hasten because the flood waters were ready to be let loose at God’s command. The division between two classes of animals applied as well to the “birds of the air”...“to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth” [vs. 3]. Again, the birds weren’t difficult to catch because they had the same docility as the *behemah* attributable to the first man and were placed without difficulty in that second Eden, the ark. With regard to the birds, the Lord distinguishes them from *behemah* by “upon the face of the earth.” After all, both a raven and dove were destined to have important roles on the ark as to discerning whether or not land had appeared.

At last the Lord gives a definite time for arrival of the rains, “in seven days.” Here’s another reference to “seven” or *shivhah*, the same number applied to the pairs of clean and unclean animals. Besides, “on the seventh day God finished his work...and he rested on the seventh day” [2.2]. Memory of that rest had sunken deep within human consciousness as we know from the keeping of the Sabbath. While nothing is recorded about memory of that particular rest in the generations after Adam’s banishment from Eden, we can assume some vestige of it remained, else we would hear of it even today. And so the seven days or time when God spoke and their soon-to-be fulfilment is an image of that first creation which took six days; the seventh would be an extended rest...Sabbath...within the ark. However, there would be no Sabbath for humanity upon the earth, for “I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights.” This is the first mention of the familiar measurement forty days as applicable later to Moses on Mount Sinai and Jesus in the desert. Addition of “nights” tends to lengthen the perception of duration. At the same time, forty is like the number seven (and seventy), a round number. For example, there are four points of the compass and four elements comprising physical creation, earth, air, fire and water. Thus forty days and forty nights, despite the long period of time involved, sets a boundary and duration for Noah. During this period the Lord plans to “blot out every living thing that I have made from the face of the ground.” The verb for “blot out” is *machah* as found in 6.7, the verse at hand being a re-phrasing of the former. The major difference is that vs. 4 specifies *machah*, through incessant rain. The Lord adds here “every living thing that I have made” which has a tinge of regret, for he had spent six long days fashioning the earth, firmament and living beings which culminate in making man in the divine image and likeness. As for that insight, Cain and his descendants lost sight of it almost immediately because it isn’t mentioned. Similarly it appears absent from the Lord who intends to *machah* every living being “from the face of the ground” (*‘adamah* as in 6.7) with the further intent that the flooded earth will *machah* Abel’s blood beneath the earth so it will no longer cry out from there. Vs. 5 concludes this section of Chapter Seven with

the same words that had concluded Chapter Six, “And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.” Nothing is said about Noah’s sons whom you’d presume would help out. However, this was a task laid out by the Lord, and only Noah could fulfill it.

“Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth.” In 5.32 we have Noah at the age of five hundred when he became the father of his three sons. That statement comes at the end of Chapter Five which means one hundred years had passed between the time when men became corrupt and the day when Noah entered the ark. At first glance the span of one hundred years offered sufficient time for people to turn to God. However, it did not turn out to be so because Noah was alone and couldn’t accomplish such a large conversion task. Noah may have realized this early on, so he turned his energy into building the ark...not at his instigation but at God’s command. He must have suffered tinges of regret and considered every bang of the hammer as one more into the collective coffin of his fellow men and women who would be wiped out in a flood.

So after having celebrated his six-hundredth birthday, “Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood” [vs. 7]. No mention is made of the three sons having any children, so we can presume all were childless. Actually this wasn’t the best of times to beget children, on the verge of a worldwide flood. Then again, if children had been born, any more passengers on the ark would have meant overcrowding it; even more important, the more people on board, the greater the chance of the world’s corruption sneaking on board and re-infecting the earth after the flood. At the occasion of Noah’s birthday quite a few guests must have attended the celebration. They were enjoying themselves, yet the huge ark looming in the background couldn’t help but make them feel uneasy. How do you bring up the subject in conversation? The ark must have been a source of embarrassment for Noah and his family as well. How could you justify its existence right laying there on dry ground? Given the uniqueness of the ark, some may have thought to hold the celebration in it, but this was strictly off limits, even to Noah’s family and the animals. No one and no creature was to enter until the last minute, and that time was approaching quickly. Then suddenly Noah and his family walked on board along with the animals. As for the animals, earlier they had been assembled into pens right outside the ark, so getting them on the ark was no problem. After all, they were transformed into *behemah* or domestic animals as noted with regard to 7.2.

This sudden entrance into the ark must have taken the guests invited to Noah’s six-hundredth birthday by surprise, and undoubtedly some sharp exchanges took place between the two parties. After all, the family of Noah invited people who had a right to expect common courtesy from their host. At this juncture no floods nor rain had started, just this sudden and inexplicable entry of Noah and his family into the ark along with a whole slew of animals. Noah intuited that it was the proper time and quietly passed word around to his family without letting the guests know. It turned out that Noah and his family were on board for a full seven days before anything happened, a long week full of tension. Guests at Noah’s birthday party must have hung around or drifted by later, puzzled as there were at this strange sight. Surely there must have been more than a few heated arguments between those on land and those on the ark who were looking down upon their former friends now turned enemies. You can’t blame those on the ground for having been left clueless. As for the actual appearance of water, it didn’t begin until after seven days when “the waters of the flood came upon the earth.” Note the words “water of the flood” which does not mean from the sky above. The phenomenon of rain itself was unheard of until this time; water as a source of nourishment for plants, drinking and cleaning welled up from beneath the surface. In fact, it took God himself to reveal the existence of rain: “in seven days I will send rain upon the earth” [vs. 4]. Now people found themselves caught in between rain from above and water from below. Everyone began to panic at the dry land, so taken for granted and barely given a thought, suddenly starting to dissolve and turn into water. Perhaps as the

rain intensified they realized in full that they were standing on land which earlier had covered and absorbed the blood of Abel which continuously cried out to the Lord since the time of Cain.

Throughout this saga and Noah's building of the ark we have a close connection between it and several mentions of his age which reveal an inseparable bond between the two. For example, vs. 6 has Noah at six hundred years of age when the flood waters came upon the earth. Compare that with vs. 11, Noah still at six hundred yet "in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month" when the water erupted in full force. That means a span of two months and seventeen days had passed since Noah had entered the ark. By no means does it conflict with the seven days of vs. 10, for that period of time refers to when the flood of waters began. And so we have "on that day" or literally, "in that day" or when Noah turned six hundred years old. Such is the specific time when the waters started to cover the earth, rapidly at that, once the fountains (*mahyan*) let loose. "You cleaved open springs and brooks; you dried up ever-flowing streams" [Ps 74.15]. As for the verb at hand ('burst forth'), it is *baqah* which means to cleave asunder, divide. "By his knowledge the deeps broke forth and the clouds drop down the dew" [Prov 3.20]. An even more graphic verse is 2Kg 8.12: "And dash in pieces their little ones and rip up their women with child." Thus we have the Lord bringing together the waters from beneath and the waters from above; both met, if you will, to form one solid block of water indistinguishable from each other. As for the "windows of heaven," the word at hand is *'arubah*, window in the sense of closed with lattice-work giving a net-like appearance. "For the windows of heaven are opened and the foundations of the earth tremble" [Is 24.18]. That means the *'aruboth* are like skylights; hitherto the lattice-work was both strong enough and of sufficiently thick weave as to prevent the water from cascading down upon the earth. But when the *'aruboth* gave way, a solid mass of water was formed as it combined with the water from *mahyan* or fountains below. The major difference between the two waters is that the latter forms a *tehom* ('deep') or a new *tohu* as when the earth had been "without form and void" of 1.2. In other words, the cry of Abel's blood was so loud and persistent over such a long period of time that it required silencing by an eruption not just of water but of water from *tohu*. For good measure the water from above came crashing down upon Abel's blood that hopefully it would silence its screams once and for all.

As for the rain from above—through the lattice-work windows—it fell for "forty days and forty nights," that familiar biblical time span which not only means a long time but a fixed period of time bound by the number four, symbolic of the four elements, four winds and four corners of the earth (refer to *'arubah* or 'window' in the last paragraph: that word is from the same verbal root from which 'four' is derived). "On the very same day Noah (and his family)...entered the ark." *Behetsem* is the word here, the preposition *b-* (in) used with the genitive prefaced to *hetsem* meaning "itself;" as a noun this word means bone by reason of its firmness and strength. So we could read *behetsem* as something like "in itself the day," a way of specifying with exactitude the occurrence of an event. Compare this verse (13) with vs. 7 when Noah and his family entered the ark and had to wait seven days for the flood to arrive. That pertained to the flood whereas vs. 12 refers to rain. The flood was bad enough, and some of the earth's inhabitants could have survived, but certainly not when the flood was coupled with the rain. Emphasis upon Noah and his family entering the ark is repeated several times with various nuances in order to show how great is that break with the world of the past with that laying in the future. After this has been recounted we have another mention of the animals, just as important, who came on board. In vs. 15 the animals are described as having one thing in common, "the breath of life." *Ruach* is the word for "breath" first used in 1.30 where God gives the animals to man. With this in mind, it wasn't difficult to get the animals on board, for it reads literally, "And (they) came to Noah to the ark." That is to say, first the animals came to Noah; he didn't have to go out tracking them down. Immediately afterwards the animals came to the ark. Thus their coming was two-fold, Noah and the ark being indistinguishable.

Finally, the corruption which for generations had been so prevalent upon the earth until now, comes to an end with the finality of the words “and the Lord shut him (Noah) in.” The verb is *sagar* which is used with *behad*, “behind” or “after,” this preposition adding to the sense of finality. *Sagar* is used later on in Genesis or shortly before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: “But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them and shut the door” (19.10). We have the Lord himself who had walked with Noah upon the corrupt earth (cf. 6.9) present all along even though he went unnoticed by Noah’s family, let alone the people with whom Noah associated. There’s an urgency to vs. 16 as the Lord stood outside making sure that everyone was on board, including the animals. This must have caused him intense sorrow at the rising water as he saw people beginning to drown. It was too late even for the Lord to do anything at this stage. Plenty opportunities had been offered. Besides, the Lord was weary of hearing Abel’s blood crying out from the earth.

Vs. 17 re-states vs. 12 saying that the flood continued forty days but lacks the addition of forty nights. As expected, the waters “bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.” At first everyone on board held their collective breath: would this thing be seaworthy? Then came a barely perceptible moment when everyone knew they had lifted off the earth and were on the water, that a break with the past had come to pass. As far as the Lord and Noah were concerned, the ark couldn’t rise high enough to put as much distance as possible between them and the cry of Abel’s blood. At least the incessant sound of rain from above and water gushing from below muffled that cry until it ceased, the real purpose of this worldwide flood. Only one part of the earth remained untouched by the flood, Eden. Recall that Adam had been banished from there, not his wife (cf. 3.24). She remained safely ensconced within the garden immune not only from the corruption that spread throughout “the land of Nod, east of Eden” (4.16) but from the flood itself. All along through the generations leading up to and including Noah Eve had been watching with repulsion the gradual dissolution of the human race until God himself had to blot it out of existence. At the same time Eve knew that Noah and his family eventually would set down upon dry ground. By the time the forty days and forty nights had passed, it was impossible to locate with accuracy the land of Eden. If it weren’t for Eden remaining untouched by the primal flood and intense rain, the dove wouldn’t have returned to the ark with an olive leaf in its mouth (cf. 8.11), for this leaf had to come from somewhere. So from the time the ark rose upon the waters until it set down, Noah and his descendants lost sight of Eden. However, its memory remained strong despite the corruption stemming from Cain’s murder of Abel to the flood and the re-settlement of the earth. That’s why ever since that distant time people of every land have been trying to locate and re-enter the garden of Eden. Finally, God had to send his son, Jesus Christ, to open the way. This formed an entrance but so unlike the original one that people did the same thing to him as Cain did to Abel. They murdered him.

“The waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered.” The verb for “prevailed” is *gavar*, to be strong, and from which is derived *gever* or man (opposed to woman). For an alternate meaning of the same verb, see Ps 117.2: For great is his steadfast love toward us.” *Gavar* is used with the verb *ravah*, to increase, along with the adverb *me’od* indicating strength almost to an excessive manner as in 1.31. Thus the verse at hand can read literally “the waters prevailed and increased excessively.” Afterwards “the ark went on the face of the waters.” A verb suggesting to float or to rise isn’t used, just the common *halak* (to go). This must have brought some satisfaction to the Lord who had just tucked away Noah, his family and the animals, for the ark now was on its own. Where it would float is anyone’s guess, but that wasn’t an issue. Noah had been commissioned to build an ark or *tevah* which is more like a gigantic basket lacking any means of propulsion. The idea was to rescue both the human race and animals from the earth which had become corrupt and the blood of Abel crying out from beneath. Where the *tevah* would land

makes no difference.

Vs. 19 uses the verb *gavar* yet again as “the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth.” All this mention of the coming threat of the flood, the strength of waters when they do come is repeated for the benefit of readers of Genesis not to fall into the corruption originating in the murder of Abel by Cain. More specifically, the Lord doesn’t want future generations to be cursed by Abel’s blood. He has had enough of it crying from the earth. Another way of describing this abrupt and final cut with the former creation is that all the high mountains were covered under the whole heaven...every high point Eden excepted, of course. Actually the waters prevailed (*gavar* again in vs. 20) fifteen cubits over the highest peaks, one cubit (*amah*) being the forearm. As vs. 21 and 22 say, every form of life had perished or more specifically, “all flesh that moved upon the earth” which includes birds but has no mention of fish. They didn’t just die but as the verb *gawah* intimates as used in 6.17, the breath of life departed from their nostrils. That gives a finality to life on earth. Here the picture is of water pushing out this breath of life, the water of *tehom* (cf. 7.11) which is equivalent to saying that the chaos represented by the watery *tehom* has superseded life as represented by air or breath.

In verses 21-3 we have several words pertaining to the earth which just now has been covered by the flood waters: “upon the earth” (*erets*), “dry land” (*charavah*), “face of the ground” (*adamah*) and “on the earth” (*erets*). The one not dealt with thus far is *charavah* which pertains to a dry place (*charav* being the verbal root and of the same meaning). Until recently all had been places where living beings had thrived. As for these verses, one gets the impression that more emphasis is put upon the destruction of animals than the beasts. “Only Noah was left and those that were with him in the ark.” Thus ends vs. 23 with emphasis more upon Noah. “Those left” (*sha’ar*) connotes being a survivor which certainly is the case and is a fitting end to the disaster depicted in Chapter Seven. The picture garnered from *sha’ar* is that of the ark floating on the flood waters, recently stopped, yet awaiting an outcome. Noah alone is singled out for mention; the others are thrown in as an after-thought, as necessary only for future propagation of the human race.

“And the waters prevailed (*gavar*) upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.” This period of time differs from the forty days after which the flood waters stopped. Nevertheless, the waters kept their grip...*gavar*...for approximately four months. One gets the impression that after this time the “grip” of the waters relented a bit. So if we add forty days to these one hundred and fifty we get a hundred and ninety days, the better part of a year. Noah must have perceived the relaxation of *gavar*, the first sign that the worst was over, despite not having any further clues about the waters receding and what he would find there. As for the Lord, in vs. 16 he had shut Noah in the ark and remained on the earth under water in order to determine how much water the fountains below and rain above should give forth. Once done, he allowed the waters to settle a while not to make sure every living being was dead—that was certain—but to allow Noah and his family time to ponder what had transpired, a very momentous occasion indeed. Since the earth was an entire globe of water with the exception of Eden, there were no storms. The all-pervasiveness of water didn’t allow for currents nor storms, just monotonous calm.

Chapter Eight

“But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.” So begins a new chapter where the English “but” is the Hebrew “and” (*w-*) used throughout as a connective between most sentences which makes the action string together as a single unbroken unit. Here we have the very first mention of “remember” in the Bible; up to now there wasn’t any need for God to have people recollect anything. Obviously remembrance was useless in Eden due to God’s immediate presence and later was close to impossible due to the corruption that soon ran rampant

over the earth after Cain's murder of Abel. The only two people who had the capacity to keep God's presence in mind were Enoch and Noah. For God to take the initiative and actually remember someone (Noah) was unheard of until now. The verb is *zakar* from which is derived the noun (same spelling) "male," the implication being that a male is a type of memory...monument...to one's family and heritage. A male thus embodies the past of his particular family within his generation and ensures its projection into the future. In the case at hand, not just one person is involved but the entire human race in a nutshell. Thus we could say that Chapter Eight spells out this divine remembering as well as its lack. Note that God remembers two types of animals in addition to Noah, beasts (*chayah*) and cattle (*behemah*). No mention is made of his wife (whose name eludes us) nor his three sons. This intimates that they were passive instruments as bearers of the human race, pretty much nothing else, an important role yet one any person could perform simply by being human in the physical sense. As for the difference, *chayah* is first found in 1.20 which applies to those living in the water and later in vs. 24 as those living upon the earth. Thus *chayah* (an adjective) is a generic term. On the other hand, *behemah* applies to cattle or domestic four-footed beasts used for both food, clothing and transport. Obviously there were plenty of other animals in the ark, but the Lord singles out these two as being "with him" (Noah) and thus worthy of *zakar*, of being remembered.

One day while Noah, his family and the animals were drifting aimlessly upon the waters, God decided enough. All living beings had perished in the worldwide flood and at last the blood of Abel had been silenced. A new problem presented itself. How to get rid of so much water? "God made a wind blow over the earth." God effected this by imparting a self-sustaining power to the wind (*ruach*) so it could blow by itself. The verb for this action is *havar*, to pass over, to pass through. Compare this *havar* with the Spirit of God which "was moving over the face of the waters" right at the beginning of Genesis. There the Spirit was *rachaph*—hovering as a bird over its young in the nest—not touching the waters directly but just over "the face of the waters." Both waters, however, were the primal ones present before the appearance of the dry land. *Rachaph* was done once and for all, not to be repeated, and suggests stationary hovering over a particular spot whereas *havar* is a continuous back and forth motion intended to sweep back the waters. In this way the land may now appear, a land which had no need of being created a second time. Note that vs. 1 has this *havar* passing "over the earth," not the water. Of course, there was no earth to be seen except for the garden of Eden sticking out as an island, yet that was clearly out of sight. The *ruach* at work here did *havar* the water itself with the earth laying beneath. It was the special intent of God to make sure Abel's blood did not continue to cry out in the second creation, so mention of earth is God's way of including the added power of the divine *ruach* to make certain no cries were heard.

So if the *ruach* made the waters recede, where did they go? Some returned to the oceans and lakes, but too much of it remained. Because the water came from both the "fountains of the great deep" and "windows of heaven" (7.11), they had to return through those same entrances to the *tohu wabohu* of 1.2, that formless void upon which the earth rests. That means some of the water rose upward and some went back under the earth, i.e., the fountains laying there. No specific number of fountains nor windows in heaven are given; what's important is the endless amount of water present up there ready to be released at a simple divine command. People told stories about its awesome power but never realized it was so fearful until the flood waters came. Withdrawal of the waters must have been quite a sight for Noah and his family on the ark witnessing a phenomenon never seen before. While it was transpiring, their whole world was a watery one with no visibility. Although no landmark existed, they could hear the divine *ruach* at work which must have been very loud combined with all that water rushing both upward and downward. Such was the two-fold action of *havar*, of the *ruach* incessantly passing over the waters.

“And the waters subsided,” the verb is *shakak* which alternately means to incline oneself, to stoop, to appease. Only several other biblical references are used, one of which is Num 17.5: “Thus I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the people against you.” The idea is that the waters were appeased...quieted down...in their rage which covered the entire the earth. Vs. 2 continues as part of the pervious verse with “the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained.” No direct divine action is given; all three occurred on their own, if you will. *Sakar* (to shut up) is the verb used in connection with fountains and the windows of heaven; there are only two other uses, Is 19.4 and Ps 63.11, the latter being quoted here: “For the mouths of liars will be stopped.” *Sakar* thus means that the ever threatening waters of the deep (*tehom*) began to withdraw. Though they were present before the creation of the earth and later destroyed it, a threat of their return always remained. That’s why later on the Lord had to put to rest this primaevial fear once and for all: “neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done” [vs. 21]. As for the rain (*geshem*: first mentioned in 7.12 and applies to heavy or violent rain), it was restrained or *kala’*, a verb which means to close, shut up. “So the people were restrained from bringing (offerings to the sanctuary)” [Ex 36.6]. Obviously Noah and his family welcomed this cessation of torrential flood waters; nevertheless, their situation remained pretty much the same, floating upon the waters with literally no place to go.

Finally “the waters receded from the earth continually” [vs. 3]. The adverb “finally” isn’t in the Hebrew text; the verb *halak* (to go) is used instead which conveys more or the less the same sense coupled with *shuv* (to turn about, return) used twice in this same verse. Next we have a specific time as to how long the flood waters remained upon the earth, one hundred and fifty days. *Chasar* is the verb here meaning to be devoid of anything, to lack. “A land...in which you will lack nothing” [Dt 8.9]. While this *chasar* continued approximately three and a half months, those on board the ark weren’t aware that they were descending or getting closer to the earth. They didn’t perceive this over one hundred and fifty days because they lacked a reference point against the unlimited vista of sea and sky. As for the exact time when the ark settled upon the earth, it was the seventh month and seventeenth day, both words finding their root in *shavah* (seven) used as with the day of divine rest. And so the ark coming to rest (*nuach*) is symbolic of the beginning of the new creation. “The Lord...rested on the seventh day” [Ex 20.11]. Here *nuach* is used for *shavath*, the verb found in 2.3. As for the place of *nuach*, it is “upon the mountains of Ararat” or in Armenia. Note the plural “mountains;” the ark rested not upon one mountain or more accurately, in the midst of a mountain range. Despite this *nuach* upon dry ground, the earth remained quite filled with water, for “the waters continued to abate until the tenth month” when “the tops of the mountains were seen.” That means three more months were required for the mountaintops only, not the entire earth. As for the word “abate,” the text runs literally “went to recede,” *chasar* being the verb as in vs. 3.

“At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made” [vs. 6]. Taken in the context of the preceding verses, this event occurred forty days or after a specific period of time. It refers to a time after the constant rain when Noah waited to make sure that the flood waters wouldn’t resume, a kind of safety check. As for the mountains of Ararat (which is jumping ahead a little when the flood waters receded totally), this is the first recognizable place mentioned after the flood. Now after forty days—it was more difficult to keep track of time on the ark due to the monotony so close attention had to be paid to the sun and moon’s phases—Noah knew the time had come to open the window or *chalon*. This word is derived from the verbal root *chalal*, to perforate, pierce through: “Gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice” [Sg 2.9]. It would be inaccurate to equate *chalon* with a porthole because that evokes the image of a self-propelled ship instead of a large unseaworthy vessel designed simply to float, nothing more. Compare *chalon* with *tsohar* of 2.16, the latter covering the entire top of the ark. When Noah opened the *chalon*, it was as though he had

pierced...*chalal*...the ark itself for the very first time, thereby unsealing it.

Noah had added just one *chalon* for the specific purpose of releasing a raven which “went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth” [vs. 7]. In other words, the *chalon* was small, just enough room for the bird to fit through. In order to get the raven, Noah had to go down into the ark and find a bird he deemed suitable for this task of drying up the water. We don’t know whether he took the male or female raven; regardless, that meant the raven left on board was the only single animal compared with the mated pairs of all other species. No indication is given of how long the raven flew back and forth over the flood waters, but we can assume that it lasted quite a while (cf. vs. 13). So from the time Noah released the raven until the ark touched down upon dry ground, the raven or *horev* was in constant motion, imitative of the Spirit’s hovering or *rachaph* in 1.2. *Harav* is the verbal root meaning to pledge as well as to set (as the sun). And so the *horev* acted as a pledge in its constant flying back and forth which in actuality caused the waters to recede.

Next Noah released a dove “to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground” [vs. 8]. Compared with the *horev* of the last paragraph, a dove is an archetypal example of simplicity and innocence whereas a raven lacks this favorable symbolism. *Yonah* is the proper name for Jonah the prophet who had been swallowed by fish, after which he preached repentance to Nineveh. As with the *horev* send forth, Noah lets go this *yonah* from its mate thereby leaving it behind, but that would be temporary, unlike the raven. Noah had faith in this dove because he felt it could determine whether there was dry ground out there or not. Actually for the first time since the flood vs. 8 has ‘*adamah* for “earth,” itself a good sign for the future. As for the verb “subsided,” it is *qalal* meaning to be diminished, to be swift as well as to curse. “Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves” [Hab 1.8]. Supposedly the last definition applies to the rapidity of uttering profanities as they fly out of one’s mouth. *Qalal* as applied to the flood waters means that they are receding rapidly, a fact Noah could see as the mountains of Ararat revealed themselves more and more. Perhaps Noah thought that such a docile bird would fare better under these circumstances, but it had to watch out for that raven going to and fro. We don’t know if the path of the two birds crossed, but chances are they did since they were on the same mission and not terribly distant from the ark itself.

Vs. 9 has the dove returning safely to the ark but no mention of the raven either here or in the following verses; he was fated not to return but to stick with his vital task of blowing away the flood waters. The text says that dove “found no place to set her foot” on any dry ground, so it had no choice but to return home. Perhaps the dove had some difficulty locating the ark floating aimlessly upon the water which covered the entire earth. However, it did find the ark or more importantly, Noah who “put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him.” So with the dove safely on board and knowing that the flood waters still prevailed, Noah required more time to assess the situation. As for the dove, its mate must have been glad at the reunion.

The time for Noah to reassess his situation—for by now he and his family were getting restless—was seven days, the same time the flood came upon the earth (cf. 7.10). That time must have passed slowly and was tense for everyone on board, including the animals who were getting weary of being penned up. However, Noah had in mind the seven days of creation, Day Seven being the one on which God had rested and the day in which he put his trust. *Yachal* is the verb for “waited” which also means to expect and to hope as in 1Sam 10.8: “Seven days you shall wait until I come to you.” Note that vs. 11 has the dove returning in the evening of the seventh day or literally “at the time of evening” or *herev* which is from the same verbal root as “raven” meaning to pledge. So in a sense the *horev* (raven) does return to the ark transformed into a different type of bird bringing the *herev* or pledge, if you will, of “a freshly plucked olive leaf (*zayth*).” This *zayth* didn’t come from any grove

before the flood but from the garden of Eden which, as noted earlier, escaped the flood. It was a sign from Eve—who never had been banished from the garden—that all would turn out well for the ark's passengers. Though she suffered the consequences of aging, she lived much longer than anyone from her son Cain's descendants. Eve was aware of the flood waters gradually surrounding the garden yet was confident they wouldn't swallow it up. As a sign of that confidence, she put the *zayth* in the dove's mouth as the best possible testimony for Noah. After another seven days (totally fourteen) Noah let the dove go again. That means the raven, who continuously had been flying back and forth to dry up the flood, caught the dove, for "she did not return to him anymore." Unfortunate as this had been, the good news is that almost all the waters had disappeared or more accurately, returned to their normal places such as the ocean.

Vs. 13 gives a specific time when "the waters were dried (*charav*: cf. 7.22, 'dry land') from off the earth." You'd think Noah and his family would be looking outside for this as they saw various mountains and higher ground coming into view. Instead, we have Noah firmly locked inside as indicated by the words he "removed the covering of the ark." *Mikseh* is the word for "covering" belonging to the *tsohar* which, in the context of 7.16, covered the entire length or top of the ark. Removing this *mikseh* was not unlike taking away the entire flight deck of an aircraft carrier, no mean feat, and had the potential of destroying the ark's integrity. Now all the decks below were subject to the elements. Removing the *mikseh* demonstrates Noah's faith in God, that no rain would fall and capsize the ark. By that time Noah realized he was about to land on dry ground so wasn't concerned with the ark itself which had performed admirably. All he wanted was to touch down safely on dry ground. *Mikseh* appears a number of times in Exodus in reference to an object with some parallel to the ark, namely, the tent where God dwelt. "And you shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins" [Ex 26.14]. Immediately afterwards Noah "looked and behold, the face of the ground was dry." First comes the act of looking (the common verb *ra'ah*) followed by *hineh* or astonishment not unlike 6.12. One gets the impression that before this point Noah was unaware that at last the ark came to rest upon the ground. As noted several times above, the ark had no means of propulsion, not being a ship but an oversized, unwieldily basket that would touch down anywhere the currents of the withdrawing water would lead it. It was sucked downward by one of the "fountains of the deep" (vs. 2) much like water draining from a tub. The experience was more frightful than being raised by the waters because the passengers on the ark feared they might be sucked down and never appear. That's why ancient peoples had an instinctive fear of the ocean: if it did once, it can do so again.

The words of vs. 15 are short but noteworthy, this being the first time God spoke with Noah since early on in Chapter Seven: "Then God said to Noah." The significance lies in the fact that no communication took place between the two while Noah, his family and animals had floated upon the flood waters. This must have been trying for Noah who was used to walking with God, a privilege that had been swept under the flood waters. As for God, perhaps he was reluctant to communicate with Noah within the confines of the ark thereby upsetting his family who surely wouldn't understand. After all, it could lead to a mutiny. While Noah would retain divine intimacy, God was interested only in getting the earth re-populated.

The words which God uttered once the waters had receded are "Go forth from the ark" [vs. 16]. Even though the earth was in plain sight, it took a direct divine intervention to coax Noah and his family outside, followed by all the animals. As for these animals, God spoke works akin to 1.20-25 when they first came into existence...after all, this was a new or second creation. In many ways to create anew is more difficult than at first. The excitement and adventure of the first endeavor is diminished; besides, there's a certain tension to get the second creation just right and to be in accord with the first...not

only that but to improve upon it. Surely God was pondering these matters while Noah was floating upon the waters: in other words, how would he actually go about bringing this second creation to fruition? The tension must have been building as the waters gradually retreated and the dry ground came into sight. As for that dry ground, already it was in existence, geologically speaking, so God was fortunate to have it as a foundation upon which all other beings would come into existence, minus the heavenly luminaries, of course, which were immune to the flood waters. With all this in mind, it's not difficult to see the constraints facing God with the prospect of a new creation. Besides, humans and animals were about ready to leave the ark, and God considered the disembarkment for the ark as a re-colonization process and less a new creation. The inherited memory of the transgression in the garden of Eden was in his mind as well, so that complicated matters. As much as he wished, God couldn't undo that; if so, it would interfere with human free will.

As for the disembarkment of the animals, all went off "by families" or *mishpachah* which also can refer to kind and tribe. The idea is that the animals exited in order or in pairs, the same way they had entered the ark. The original power bestowed upon Adam (cf. 1.28) which remained in tact made all this proceed in order. Also the animals had a respect for Noah not unlike the time when they approached Adam for naming (cf. 1.19). Now with the flood over, the animals could exit—parade would not be inaccurate—off the ark. Once this fairly long parade which consisted of every living being came to an end, the animals didn't scatter. They stood there at a loss because the land had been devastated and was totally unfamiliar to them. Because no food was around, there was a danger that the carnivorous animals might attack the domestic ones. To prevent this, Noah continued to feed the animals with provisions stored on the ark, at least until vegetation re-emerged. So for a while all the animals stayed close by, understandably terrified by a landscape which had undergone so radical a change. The only identifying elements were topographical objects such as valleys, hills and mountains, not to mention lakes and oceans, the latter two as fresh remains of the flood.

So what happened to the ark after everyone and all the animals disembarked? Noah was to be congratulated for having built such a sturdy vessel that withstood the punishing flood waters from below and the incessant rain from above. With the experience of being surrounded by so much water behind them, Noah is to be thanked profusely for having listened to God's instructions to "cover it inside and out with pitch" [6.14], i.e., giving the ark a through job of waterproofing. This penetration of the gopher wood with pitch was key to the ark's survival and therefore all on board. Despite the torrential rain and flood, the ark didn't have to be made seaworthy in the conventional sense; all it had to do was float on the water, hence the greater importance on waterproofing. Everyone and the animals were relieved to leave the ark behind despite the barren earth before them. After Noah had used up the food stored on board for both his family and the animals, they used the ark for a dwelling; he knew full well that any dissembled timbers would be ideal for protection against rain which for them would seem insignificant after all they had go through. With time the ark's remains were forgotten and allowed to decay, so any attempt to locate it is irrelevant. Another reason for the futility of such a search is that this ark or *tevah* pales in significance with the one which contained the baby Moses. That *tevah* his mother made of bulrushes "and daubed it with bitumen and pitch" [Ex 2.3] pretty much along the lines of Noah's *tevah*. And so this *tevah* contained something far more precious than the human and animal survivors from before the flood: it bore the author of the Torah whose contents excel in every way that which is found in creation, either before or after the flood. So instead of wasting time and energy looking for the *tevah* of Noah, that of Moses should be sought for diligently; better yet, if you find the Torah, you have found everything there's worth looking for.

"Then Noah built an altar to the Lord" [vs. 20]. *Mizbeach* is the word used for the very first time implying that the world before the flood had no need to offer sacrifice. The offerings of Cain and Abel

(‘an offering of the fruit of the ground’ and ‘firstlings of his flock’ of 4.3-4) are recorded without any specifics as to how they were done, supposedly some kind of immolation being involved. An altar wasn’t necessary so early after their father’s banishment from the garden of Eden because familiarity with God, although significantly decreased, was still fresh in mind. This memory was transmitted to Cain’s descendants who, despite their folly and corruption, maintained some semblance of fidelity to this tradition. If they didn’t, God would have brought the flood crashing down upon the earth much earlier. As for *mizbeach*, its verbal root is *zavach*, to offer sacrifice in the sense of slaughtering animals, hence its purpose is clear. So where did Noah get this novel idea? Obviously from the tradition handed on from Cain who founded the city of Nod (cf. 4.16) and thus his descendants. However, Noah felt that something had gone awry over the years, that the idea of offering (*minchah*: alternately as gift, tribute, a sacrifice without blood) became so distorted, a new approach was required. Noah had time to ponder this while on the ark; he didn’t discuss it with his wife, three sons, let alone their wives. They wouldn’t have a clue about it because they were slightly less polluted than their recently destroyed generation. Thus Noah built upon the idea of *minchah*. While on the ark tending to all the animals, it came to mind that they might contribute in a manner satisfactory to God and not incite his wrath which might bring about another flood. This idea grew stronger as Noah fed the penned up animals below decks, wondering which ones might be a suitable gift for the Lord. Apart from Enoch, Noah had been the only person identified to have walked with God. And while God wasn’t walking with him on the decks of the ark, Noah recalled him with the hope that soon both would be walking upon the face of the new earth.

As for the animals Noah chose, he “took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” And so continues vs. 20. Because the animals had just paraded off the ark in families or *mispachah* and were looking for food, they hung around the ark making it easier for Noah to pick out clean animals. *Tahor* is the adjective for “clean” which connotes brightness as noted in 7.2. Thus they stood out from the unclean animals by reason of their brightness and were recognized easily. It was easy for Noah to know which animals were *tahor*, perfect candidates for sacrifice upon the altar, because they represented a divine spark carried over from the earth prior to the flood and worthy of being returned to God who had created it. As for the burnt offerings, the word is *holah* or that which is laid upon the altar. It is derived from the verbal root *halah*, to go up, as the offering (and scent) ascending to God in heaven. The verb “offered” is this verb. Such a gesture acknowledges that God is no longer walking with Noah upon the earth as he did with him and Enoch, that he is removed from this second creation or better, the re-colonization of the former earth. Despite the disobedience of the first man and first woman along with having need to destroy every living being with a flood, God couldn’t retain the same relationship with man as before; it was irreparably broken and couldn’t be restored until many generations later with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As for these burnt offerings, Noah could take animals which were *tahor*—and that involved a huge number of them—and sacrifice them. Seven pairs (cf. 7.2) were taken onboard the ark, so Noah had to exercise care in choosing the right amount so as not to depopulate these animals. In order to build a fire for the sacrifice, Noah used the ark’s wood. Being covered in pitch made it easy to burn. Chances are that given the large amount of animals to be sacrificed, Noah dissembled the ark in its entirety to provide fuel.

The point of reconciliation between the Lord, mankind, the earth and all living beings is expressed in vs. 21: “And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man.’” Note the interplay between “smelled” and “odor,” *reyach* and *reyach* (the former has a short ‘e’ and the latter, a long ‘e’). The alternate spelling of *reyach* is *ruach* from which comes “spirit,” “wind.” This “wind” wafted to the Lord above which gladdened him. As for the distance between the altar and God, it was difficult to access it in physical terms because Noah

had just embarked from the ark upon a newly cleansed earth. Being afloat upon the waters for so long confused him as far as the ability to tell distance, yet was familiar with smoke from cooking their meals on board. In this way Noah ingeniously figured that the *reyach* would reach God. And so, Noah completed the rigorous (and bloody) task of making burnt offerings. While watching the smoke waft up above—it traversed the earlier height where the ark has been located on the flood waters—Noah, his wife, three sons and their wives wondered how far it would have to go before reaching the Lord. Despite some anxiety, all were confident contact would be made because these burnt offers were pleasing to the Lord, *neychoach*. “It (ram) is a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the Lord” [Ex 29.18]. The odor itself (which must have been considerable smoke) was *neychoach* because it came from a mixture of all the clean animals and hence itself was clean or as in the paragraph above, *tahor* suggesting brightness.

“In his heart (*lev*)” reads literally as “to his heart” more in line with the ascending smoke as it reaches the Lord. Because *lev* is the inmost part of anyone, mention of it is a guarantee that the smoke affected the Lord in a way he hadn’t experienced before. That did the trick, the sacrifice having reached the divine heart which made him say “I will never again curse the ground because of man.” *Qalal* is the verb for “to curse” (cf. vs. 8 as ‘subsided’), a verb fundamentally meaning to be light. That means that when you *qalal* a person you make light of him, treat him lightly, which is a way of showing contempt. Here *qalal* is used with another verb, *yasaph* (to add) which literally reads something like “I will never increase to curse.”

“For the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Indeed, the Lord had plenty experience of that from the beginning yet decides to forego catastrophic punishment in this re-colonization of the first creation. *Yetser* is the word for “imagination” as found in 6.5: “that every imagination of his heart was only evil continually;” the verbal root is *yatsar* as in 2.7: “then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground.” So we have the same divine observation before and after the flood...unfortunately no difference which must have made God wonder if it was worth having wiped out all living things. Even if he did it a third time, same result. Note the two uses of *lev* (heart): first as “the Lord said in his heart” and second, “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” The words which follow are “neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.” An utterance pretty much of resignation, for the evil that would take root now would in every way surpass that of before the flood.

Chapter Eight concludes with a new verse which continues the sentiment of the previous one as far as God’s intent never to destroy the earth: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” These words echo the Book of Ecclesiastes (‘vanity of vanity’) where the alterations of natural rhythms, stable and necessary as they are, can become a seemingly endless stream of the same events. However, they aren’t intended for Noah but for his sons and their wives. Yes, the same familiar rhythms remain, and they must follow them in order to re-possess the land successfully. While these pioneers, if you will, heard God speak such words to Noah, they were relieved that as long as they and their descendants lived, things would be just fine. But they were more interested in the words “neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.” While they didn’t express it outwardly, that gave them a certain perverse confidence to go ahead and do things just as evil (if not more so) than people who lived before the flood: certainly not a good sign to end Chapter Eight and begin Chapter Nine.

Chapter Nine

“And God blessed Noah and his sons.” This first verse of a new chapter commences with “and” or *w-*

which has been used at the beginning of most verses thus far, a way of showing the close connection between events. Thus what had transpired in Chapter Eight continues seamlessly into Chapter Nine. This is the first time God blesses (*barak*) a person in a re-colonized earth, the original blessing having been bestowed upon Adam and Eve in 1.22 in the garden of Eden. In addition to Noah, God blesses only his sons, not their wives nor his own wife; they are destined to remain anonymous. “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” the blessing which mirrors that of 1.28 word for word. Certainly the memory of that first blessing was transmitted to Cain and his descendants who, in turn, passed it down to Noah; after all, he and Enoch were the only descendants whose memories were pure enough to receive it.

In the same breath as these words of blessing with respect to re-colonizing the earth God continues: “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth.” While they may encourage Noah and his family, they are tinged with sadness; the domestic relationship enjoyed with the animals on the ark is broken even though one could argue that it started with Noah’s sacrifice in 8.20. Even in English these words are unsettling: instead of something like “they will have dread of you and fear you,” the Hebrew has the more forceful “the fear of you and the dread of you” as though this fear and dread were part and parcel of the human constitution. The noun for “fear” is the more common *more’* (similar to *yire’ah*) and the noun “dread” is *chat*, derived from *chatah* which fundamentally means to take hold of, to seize. *Chat* has only three other references, 1Sam 2.4, Job 41.33 and Jer 46.5, the last being cited here: “They are dismayed and have turned backward.” God makes sure each and every species has this fear and dread drilled into them: beasts of the earth, birds of the air, things that creep on the ground and fish in the sea. All those animals which had been companions with Noah in the ark passed on this fear and dread not unlike the descendants of Cain who transmitted the memory of Abel’s murder. Thus one act of murder was sufficient to taint everything, even the re-colonization of earth, and had to wait until the coming of Jesus Christ to right the situation. While God’s words were re-assuring for Noah and his family, instinctively they realized that never would they be at peace with the animals and eventually would have to hunt them for food. “Into your hand they are delivered.” Such unsettling words conclude vs. 2.

The fear and dread newly instilled into the animals is modified by vs. 3: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” where *remes* is the word for “moving.” As first noted in 1.24, *remes* applies to smaller animals such as mice, lizards, crabs. In other words, God is speaking about less than desirable animals which have a certain creepiness about them. “So I went in and saw; and there portrayed upon the wall round about were all kinds of creeping things, loathsome beasts and all the idols of the house of Israel” [Ezk 8.10]. Animals which fall under the category of *remes* are easy to capture; some such as crabs and certain lizards are fairly appealing for food, so the situation isn’t that bad. Furthermore, their smallness precludes the strenuous act of hunting or the slaughtering of domestic four-footed beasts. Pretty much in the same breath as giving *remes* for food, God continues: “and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.” This hearkens back to the same *yereq* in 1.30 which God gives to animals for food. Note the two uses of “as” (*k-*) which show the relationship between *yereq* and “everything.” That is to say, *as* the Lord had given *yereq*, *so* he will give everything...and *kol* here pertains to animals in a general discussion about food.

“Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.” This verse hearkens back to pre-flood days and even further, to the murder of Abel by Cain. Above all else God wants to avoid the shedding of blood which brought back memories of Abel’s blood “crying to me from the ground” [4.10]. Not only did that blood require a worldwide flood to silence it, God would be forced to bring forth a second catastrophe. In other words, at some time the threat of punishment had to stop, and now was the best opportunity. As for the “life” in vs. 4, *nephesh* is the word which commonly applies to soul.

Thus the close connection between *nephesh* as animating principle, blood and the human body is spelled out so Noah's descendants may avoid the sin of Cain. "For your life-blood I will surely require a reckoning." That is to say, for the *nephesh* associated with blood—and the blood God has in mind is Abel's which had soaked the ground—he will seek or *darash* a reckoning, the same verbal root being used. In short, it reads that God will "seek a seeking." God narrows down this seeking in words reminiscent of Abel: "of every man's brother I will require the life (*nephesh*) of man." When a stringent reminder is laid on someone, it sets the stage for a fall or repetition of the original offense. That wasn't to be the case during the re-colonization of the earth, and God knew it full well which is why in vs. 11 he promises never to destroy the earth by a flood.

For the first time since 1.26, vs. 6 speaks of God having "made man in his own image" or *tselem* which as noted, means a shadow, a shadow being a counterpart or imitation with respect to the object upon which the sun shines. When God first made man thus, he had no need to be commanded because his home was the garden within Eden. By mentioning *tselem*, God reminds Noah and his family the true nature of man. However, he omits the word "likeness" which would be too much at this juncture; too much because given all humanity had experienced, including escaping the flood, human nature had lost the capacity to imitate God. It was simply too weak. The single person of Noah is stark testimony to that. So in vs. 7 God turns attention to "you" (second person plural) in order to "be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it." We have the verbs *parah* and *sharats*, the former first noted in 1.22 ('Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth') and the latter as in 1.20 ('Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures'). While both verbs apply to water creatures, in 1.28 *parah* applies to the first man and woman. In addition to *parah* and *sharats*, the verb *ravah* occurs twice and applies to growth, not just increase in numbers.

After a strict injunction about murder in order to prevent a re-occurrence of a tragedy akin to Abel's blood crying out from the earth, God says "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you." *Beryth* is the word for "covenant" used for the very first time in 6.18 and implies something cut. In both instances, the verb *qum* (to arise) is found in conjunction with the noun. In the first example the verb is the future tense whereas with the verse at hand, it's the present tense or time for fulfilment of what God had said prior to the flood. Between that time shortly before Noah and his family entered the ark and now, there must have been plenty of suspense and curiosity as to when and where the *beryth* would take place. They expected it would be while they were floating aimlessly upon the flood waters, but failure for God to intervene increased their anxiety, even privately entertaining thoughts that God had forsaken them. Then at the beginning of the earth's re-colonization, Noah had constructed an altar and offered sacrifice, the first ever. However, this was not the *beryth* God had promised prior to the flood. Noah built it on his own, an act which later generations would formalize. Thus making sacrifice is proper for the post (as opposed to pre-) flood world. Perhaps Noah got so anxious about the promised *beryth* that he anticipated it the best way he knew how. If he returned some of the clean animals to God, that could force God's hand and make him reveal himself.

At last in vs. 9 we have God speaking in the present tense introduced by the dramatic *hineh*: "Behold, I establish." No question this got the attention of Noah and his family because the tension begun in 6.18 with the promise of a covenant would be resolved shortly. However, details about this covenant remained hidden which only increased the tension. Surely they must have thought the *beryth* would be similar to Noah's recent sacrifice. This second time around God added a bit more drama by mentioning not just those present but "your descendants after you." That means the *beryth* would last in perpetuity compared with the occasional offering of a sacrifice and in the minds of Noah's

family, their private hope that never again would they experience a flood. Not just Noah and his family were involved but thrown in for good measure (vs. 10) are the birds, cattle, every beast of the earth...“as many as came out of the ark.” NB: the Hebrew of the last part of vs. 10 repeats “every beast of the earth” compared with the RSV “as many as came out of the ark.”

Vs. 11 repeats God’s intention soon to be implemented as to the *qum* (to rise) or establishment of the covenant. Here that verb assumes significance insofar as the *beryth* will continue to “arise” throughout future generations and therefore act like leaven. It’s a consolation for Noah and his family, that God wouldn’t destroy the earth by flood, words to that effect being uttered in the same verse: “never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood...to destroy the earth.” Two verbs pertinent to destruction by flood are mentioned: first *karath* (to cut, cut off) and *shachath* (to destroy; connotes wickedness). As for the former, it is the verbal root for *beryth*, as that which has been cut between God and man. And that cutting is viewed in terms of an animal sacrifice. As for the latter, its sense is captured in 6.11, “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight.” The flood or *mabul* related to both verbs comes in two forms: from below the earth (fountains) and from above (rain). Regardless of whether water comes from below or from above, *mabul* represents the letting loose of the primal flood waters upon which the earth rested...floated...not unlike the ark itself. This promise, however, doesn’t preclude a *karath* and *shachath* by God in the future by a means other than water. No small wonder that Noah and his family had a fear of large bodies of water such as the ocean and lakes, all too vivid reminders of what had happened. Such a fear remained instilled within people for thousands of years.

As noted earlier, a covenant or *beryth* is that which is cut. However, vs. 12 modifies this a bit by saying “This is the sign of the covenant.” The word for “sign” is *’oth*, often taken as a portent for something that will occur in the not too distant future. It occurs first in 1.14, “Let them (lights) be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.” As for the verse at hand, *’oth* enhances the visual nature of the *beryth* as opposed to action associated with it, i.e., the actual “cutting” of a sacrificial victim. That ties in nicely with the *beryth* made “between me and you and every living creature that is with you.” Note mention of a creature (*nephesh* or soul as in vs. 2) “with you.” That is to say, those “souls” or animals which decided to remain with Noah in contrast to those which ran off from the ark as soon as they could. As for the *beryth*, it’s in the form of a “bow in the cloud” or *qesheth*, one of the most advanced weapons of the day. Noah had no need to bring a *qesheth* into the ark; after all, the earth was about to be flooded and the animals on board were penned in securely enough. Actually, the *qesheth* at hand applies to a rainbow which is shaped in the general form of this military weapon. It reaches toward the heaven with both ends parallel to the earth thus implying that the arrow is shot from the ground into the heavens. And so the *qesheth* was a clearly visible sign (*’oth*) in man’s favor instead of God’s. It wasn’t visible all the time, only after rain as well as those occasions when the sun shone through the rain at a certain angle. Such is the association of *qesheth* with a cloud, the principle means of refracting the sunlight. That implies that rain, associated with the flood waters, is advantageous for mankind and the earth, not ready to let loose at it had done with the flood. If this *qesheth* were present all the time, people would tire of looking at it and hence lose sight of their connection with God. They knew that a *qesheth* might appear right after a rainstorm, so they had to be on the look-out for this dramatic, fleeting sight...the *’oth*...of the covenant between God and mankind.

Although vs. 11 reads “I establish my covenant with you,” vs. 13 has “it (the bow) shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” That is to say, the former is between God and man and the latter, between God and the earth (*’erets*). Both are crucial though mention of *’erets* is important here, the same *’erets* that had been covered totally by flood waters but now is revealed and ready for

re-colonization. Never would Noah trust God fully unless the covenant be with the earth.

“I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature” [vs. 15]. Here God stresses the importance of memory, the verb *zakar* having being discussed in 8.1 with reference to God and those in the ark. When the bow appears (and it is a fleeting one at that) in the clouds due to the presence of sunlight, its presence triggers God to remember his covenant. God has to be just as watchful for the rainbow’s appearance as people on earth; since the rainbow is so fleeting yet attractive, only a short time exists for both God and people to recall its significance. God takes this rainbow covenant seriously because he it is a sign that he won’t cause a flood. In fact, God continues to speak of this sign until vs. 17 after which the text speaks of Noah’s descendants. Surely there are times when the rainbow doesn’t occur. That can cause anxiety among Noah and his more recent descendants, that the gathering clouds would give forth torrential rain followed by the opening of the springs below the earth. As for these springs, nothing is said about a covenant being made with them; they were just as destructive in causing the worldwide flood if not more so. However, the rainbow in the sky is a visible sign or *’oth* than anything that God could inscribe upon the fountains.

“And from these (Shem, Ham and Japheth) the whole earth was peopled” [vs. 19]. Though Noah continues to play a role in the time immediately after the flood, mention of his three sons (nothing ever is said about Noah’s wife except that he had one) reveals that the action has shifted definitively from the pre- to the post flood world or from the world peopled directly by Adam’s descendants to the re-colonization of this same world by Noah’s descendants. *Naphats* is the verb for “peopled” which more accurately applies to a dispersing or scattering and connotes something wild and uncontrollable. Also it suggests violence as in Ps 137.9: “Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!” Thus *naphats* suggests a rapid, even explosive, dispersal of Shem, Ham and Japheth from the immediate vicinity of the ark and is a premonition of what happened after construction of the tower of Babel: “The Lord scattered (*puts*) them abroad from there.” So reading in between the lines, as it were, we can detect a tinge of regret on God’s part insofar as he had allowed the earth to be re-colonized. As for the three sons, right after such a devastating flood it was natural that they remain close to the ark just in case the waters returned and they needed to board again. Impact of that event was so overwhelming that fear of water became synonymous with one with regard to chaos and disorder. Once the covenant between God and Noah was established, they felt more at ease in their new-yet-old world and confident of leaving the ark’s immediate safety. Besides, the ark was a reminder of the old world from which they had come. It was dark in color due to the pitch (cf. 6.14) and cast a foreboding shadow over everyone, more so as it sat on the ground battered up than when new before the flood. The sooner Noah’s sons could get away from it, the better.

“Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard” [vs. 20]. This verse consisting of two short sentences as rendered by the RSV stands in stark contrast to the *naphats* or almost explosive getaway of Shem, Ham and Japheth in the previous verse. It sounds familiar, even makes us a bit uneasy, because it reminds us of Cain, “a tiller of the soil” (cf. 4.2). The latter has for “tiller” *hoved*, from the verbal root *havad*, to do or to make, to be engaged within a task. On the other hand, Noah is someone who (as it reads literally) “began (*chala*) the earth and planted a vineyard.” If Noah had imitated Cain by simply planting a vineyard, he would be in the same position as his murderous forebear. So while Noah “began” his work with respect to the earth (*’adamah*), he was mindful of the first man (*’adam*) who similarly cultivated the garden (cf. 2.15). An interesting contrast here: Noah stays put whereas his three sons scatter...run wild...upon the newly uncovered earth. He’s more interested in the *’adamah*, that soil from which Adam had been fashioned, and wished to appease it so no more blood might be spilled upon it as had been the case with Abel. Thus Noah “began” (*chala*) his cultivation of *’adamah* right away with a disappointment tinged with regret as his sons scattered in

three directions away from him.

Not only did Noah till this *'adamah* which had been under water until recently, the vineyard he planted was reminiscent of the one belonging to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. However, this, the first mention of a vineyard (*kerem*), differs from a garden, and is a place where grapes grow for producing wine, intimating that the world before the flood lacked it. We don't hear of God walking with Noah as he had done in 6.9 and presumably when building the ark. Though God blessed the earth with the covenant and gave a rainbow as a pledge of this covenant, no longer did he set foot upon it. Overjoyed with his new discovery of grapes from the vineyard, Noah crushed them into grapes for wine. Since he had no experience of intoxication, Noah drank the wine with abandon, so much that "he lay uncovered in his tent" [vs. 21]. This is the first human dwelling, albeit temporary, a technique originating with Jabal who "was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle" [4.20]. As for the form of this tent, perhaps it was not unlike the ark in shape, basket-like, only inverted.

Although the three brothers dispersed immediately while Noah remained close to the ark, they did return from time to time to check up on their father. Ham is the one who discovered Noah laying drunk inside the tent. He approached it, looked in and finally entered after he had looked for him in the vineyard. So instead of the Lord having found the man and woman naked in the garden, Ham came upon him naked in the tent. This brother is identified as the "father of Canaan" [vs. 22] or father of the inhabitants of that area destined to become the Jewish homeland, people hostile to that nation. Mention of Canaan is important because it identifies the location of the ark's rest, and with time that place name changed into Israel. Ham actually entered the tent and saw his father sprawled out naked after which he told Shem and Japheth outside the tent. Because this sight was disgraceful and embarrassing, the two "took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father." Just prior to entering, Ham held open the flaps of the tent's entrance in order to guide them to their father. Ham didn't have to look around for Noah laying in a drunken stupor because of the tent's small size. Noah was spread out there for any and all to see. The piece of clothing the brothers brought in *simlah* used by both men and woman which covered other pieces of clothes. It is the second time a garment is mentioned explicitly. Compared with the *kutoneth* originally made by God (cf. 3.21) for the first man and woman prior to their banishment from the garden, the *simlah* was made of skins as well. Because God could make a garment from animal skins, it was natural for Shem and Japheth to feel comfortable doing likewise. The animals they had slaughtered for this purpose had multiplied sufficiently now after their exit from the ark.

"Noah awoke from his wine." These words are an embarrassment to Noah insofar as they identify him, the man noted as having walked with God, as the first person who had become drunk, drunk from the wine of the first vineyard ever planted. Instinctively Noah knew it was Ham who discovered his nakedness, but instead of calling him by that pre-flood name, he uses the one of Canaan. Although that was the name of the place the ark had landed after the flood, it became a curse for Ham. So despite the re-colonization of the earth, it had not recovered fully, as had been expected, from the banishment of the man from Eden whose descendants through Noah's family transmitted the corruption of the pre-flood earth. God successfully withdrew the flood waters from the earth but was unable to undo the corruption of mankind which had been affected by the blood of Abel as it cried out from the earth over so many generations. That's a tough curse to eradicate, really, yet nothing is said about the first murder in this, the newly colonized earth.

Went Noah awoke, suddenly he found Ham/Canaan in the tent with him gazing upon his nakedness.

It was embarrassing for them all, so much that Noah cursed his son: “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” The verb for “cursed” is *‘arar*, first used by God with respect to the serpent in 3.14. Both curses take place within the context of human nakedness: the man and woman who became aware of theirs through the serpent’s deception and Noah after awaking from his drunken stupor. As for Ham, he lost that name and because of his father’s *‘arar*, was destined not to change it. If possible, he would be able to change his identity. This is line with the post-flood world: a new start yet one incapable of divesting itself of corruptive elements from the old. While God may have blotted out the blood of Abel which had seeped into the earth and along with all the earth’s people, even Noah’s family wasn’t exempt from a prolonged exposure to corruption. As for the newly transformed Ham (i.e., into Canaan), Noah laid on him a curse harsher than God, making him a “slave of slaves.” Up to that point slavery hadn’t existed but came into being with the change of names.

In distinction to the curse just imparted, Noah blesses Shem and Japheth. The **RSV** of vs. 26 reads “Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem,” but the Hebrew runs as “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.” As for that son and the other two, they stayed pretty much in the background up to this point. They were simply agents for repopulating the earth, the only advantage being that they were not as fouled by the pre-flood corruption as other people while at the same time lacking that familiarity enjoyed by Noah when he walked with God. Noah re-enforces the curse upon Canaan, namely, that Canaan will be Shem’s slave; the same applies to Japheth, a fact which must have upset Canaan considerably. The point now was how Canaan was able to live under both his brothers’ domination, no easy manner. It set up a deep disdain for his father Noah whom he must have been tempted to murder on more than one occasion. Still, Canaan did not because of that abiding memory of Abel’s blood in the earth. Why repeat the curse and bring on yet a second deluge?

As for Japheth, Noah bade God to “enlarge” him (*patah*), that verb being the root for his name. Although *patah* is used in the sense of spreading out, other biblical references employ the alternate meaning, to deceive. “If my heart has been deceived” [Job 31.9]. The idea is to open up a person sufficiently and seduce him with flattery, after which he’ll end up by being taken in or deceived. Furthermore, Noah wishes Japheth to “dwell in the tents of Shem.” It must have been difficult for Noah to utter these words referring to a tent, for just a moment ago Ham-turned-Canaan discovered him naked in one. Mention of Canaan being a slave after this suggests that Canaan won’t be living in a tent but outdoors and unsheltered.

“After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years” [vs. 28]. Certainly a long time for Canaan to live with his father and two brothers, that is, under the shadow of both a curse and enslavement. As for Noah at the time of his death—there’s no explicit mention of it but the fact is presumed—he was the first person to be buried in the re-colonized earth. Neither do we have a location of his grave let alone Noah’s wife whose name is not given. Surely she must have recounted to them memories of her husband, their wives and their children, awkward as that situation was: Ham’s name being changed to Canaan and put in subjection to his two brothers. With that in place, it was difficult for them all to keep in mind their father’s primary identity as the man who walked with God. All this sets the stage for a not so optimistic future of the post-flood world.

Chapter Ten

This chapter begins immediately with the “generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood.” *Toldoth* (generations) refers to the history of families or genealogical records around which are draped external events. They are important insofar as they seek to trace Noah’s lineage from that all-embracing event, the flood. The *toldoth* at hand continue

throughout the entirety of the chapter followed by the story of the tower of Babel. Both stories work together to form an introduction, if you will, to the real theme at hand, the call of Abraham. As for Babel, we get a hint of that story's theme in vs. 5: "each with his own language by their families, in their nations." The same applies to Ham in vs. 20 and Shem in vs. 31. That is to say, with regard to the sons of all three of those born to Noah, a division of languages exists in accord with families and nations. They are natural ways for a language to develop and shouldn't be construed with the confusion of languages depicted later (cf. 11.17).

As for Cush, one of Ham's sons, he "became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on the earth to be a mighty man (*gibor*)" [vs. 8]. This verse hearkens back to 6.4: "These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown." Such mighty men were the product of a union between the Nephilim who "were on the earth in those days" and the "sons of God." As for the Nephilim, reference was made with regard to 6.4 to Num 13.33, when the scouts sent by Moses into Canaan appeared "like grasshoppers." Actually it was Nimrod who founded Babel (cf. vs. 10), so the arrogance of constructing the tower can be traced directly back to him being a *gibor*. In addition to this, vs. 9 says that Nimrod was "a mighty hunter before the Lord," that is to say, he was a *gibor* at laying snares, *tsod* being the verbal root for "hunter." While *tsod* does apply to hunting, the verbal root suggests the passive waiting for game compared with someone who went out actively to track down game. "Esau was a cunning hunter" [Gen 25.27].

So despite the rapid dispersal of Noah's three sons which set in motion the re-colonization of the earth, each of these three main branches of the new humanity remained united as far as language goes. The only hint of future disturbance of this unity lay, as intimated in the last paragraph, with Nimrod who founded Babel and whose ancestry was not fully in line with that of Noah's offspring. Even though all living beings had been destroyed by the flood, there carried over to the re-colonization traces of the Nephilim, however small. Despite this apparent insignificance, it was enough to spread like a virus and cause the nations of the earth not to understand each other's language. The last verse of Chapter Ten is basically the same as the first, a statement as to the dispersal of Noah's sons. Note that "from these (three) the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood." The verb for "spread" is *parad*, to separate by breaking. "In their death they were not divided" [2Sam 1.23]. *Parad* is a word indicative of things to come, the fracture of humanity starting with the tower of Babel lasting all the way to the the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is quite different from the original divine injunction of 9.1, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." With greater distance between the flood and each succeeding generation, fear of the Lord diminished...fear that he would bring a second flood and wipe out humanity. So the shift from fear of God to a land where gradually his memory becomes absent is a kind of flood, a flooding of humanity's collective mind with amnesia for things divine. Although this took place gradually, still the verb *parad* is a good way to describe the process since it embodies swiftness as well as thoroughness as far as filling up that upon which it spreads.

Chapter Eleven

"Now the whole earth had one language and few words," a verse which applies to approximately three generations stemming from the three sons of Noah. What could have been that first language? As for the garden of Eden, there was no need for a language since the first man and woman required no words to communicate with each other due to the immediate presence of the Lord. What we have as far as anything recorded derive from Moses, the author of Genesis, who put words into their mouths. We have to look for a first language originating outside the garden of Eden with the banishment of the man and his need to communicate with his two sons, Cain and Abel. Adam was in between two worlds: the one of no language and the one of language. That is to say, he had to speak with Cain and

Abel yet not with his wife who, as noted in 3.23, did not suffer banishment from the garden. From time to time Adam met her at the gate of Eden, that is, close to the fiery revolving sword, not so much to utter words with her but to enjoy to some degree that communion which had been lost and hopefully could be transmitted to his two sons. Certainly that was a fervent wish on the woman's part. As for Adam's two sons Cain and Abel born outside the garden of Eden, they lacked this non-verbal ability to communicate and were reduced to just the basics of a rudimentary language. So that primitive tongue was marked by nostalgia for the days of uninterrupted communion the first man and woman enjoyed with God within Eden. Despite its tragic loss, a trace of it remained, the reason why the first verse of Chapter Eleven says that one language existed with few words. It was, of course, handed down to the inhabitants of the City of Enoch (cf. 4.17) and later survived the flood through the medium of eight speakers, those who were on the ark. This single language which sprang into existence after the man's expulsion from the garden in Eden and later survived the flood became the true unifying element among a disparate population. If it could survive those two calamities, people of the day felt reasonably confident they could continue communicating among each other with ease. However, that was soon not to be the case. The word for "language" is *saphah* which seems to apply more to the lips and speech. "Their libations of blood I will not pour out nor take their names upon my lips" [Ps 16.4]. As for "few words," the adjective *'achad* (one) is used, the same as "one" in this same verse. Use of *'achad* in both instances stresses unity of speech as opposed to primitive language carried over from pre-flood days. All the history from the pre-flood days to the present state of affairs was easy to pass on to future generations, a task that soon was to become significantly more complicated.

"And as men migrated from the east." Up until now the three chief strands of post-flood generations were concentrated in a fairly small area. The verb for "migrated" is *nasah* has a more forceful connotation meaning to pull up, pluck out and suggests a somewhat violent, sudden displacement from this location. "So when the people set out from their tents" [Jos 3.14]. "Men"—and the generic term is implied as in the Hebrew "they"—engaged in this *nasah* "from the east." No specific place is given, not even a reason for wanting to migrate, except the cardinal direction of east intimates an attachment with the garden of Eden. After all, the first man left the garden at that direction (cf. 3.24) and later Cain "dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (4.16). And so this general movement away from the east represents a movement away from Eden, a movement which can never be left behind permanently and always sought. Finally the flood came which wiped out all familiar places, so a new sense of belonging had to be cultivated. As noted elsewhere, the garden of Eden was the only place not affected by the worldwide flood. Yet in the post-flood world it remained so high above the rest of the earth that people weren't able to access it. However, they knew of its existence even if it were shrouded with clouds out of sight from prying human eyes. Thus the garden of Eden continued in the re-colonized world as a point of reference and devolved into so-called "high places" where gods were worshiped. The first post-flood generations were drawn naturally to the base of this highest of all peaks because it had been untouched by the waters from above and from below. Still, there came a time when the population increased sufficiently that the descendants of Noah's three sons had to break out and go elsewhere.

The place to which the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth came turned out to be "a plain in the land of Shinar." Vs. 2 says that they "found" (*matsa*) this place, intimating that they stumbled upon it with the intent of not remaining but of going elsewhere...and that elsewhere is not mentioned. The word for "plain" is *biq'ah* which also translates as "valley:" "The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land...of fountains and springs, flowing both in valley and hills." *Biq'ah* suggests that which is cleaved, and anything cut in half like this can be either a plain or a valley...or both together with one half being one and the other half, another. Regardless whether Shinar was a valley or plain, it is a geographical location and had been mentioned in 10.10: "the beginning of his (Nimrod) kingdom

was Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.” Thus Shinar is associated with the descendants of Ham and then Nimrod, “a mighty hunter before the Lord” [10.9]. By settling in Shinar, the descendants of Ham hoped to re-capture some of Nimrod’s “before-ness” with the Lord, far more valuable than any geographical locale. At the same time, Shinar, by reason of its openness, had a fine view of the towering mountain on top of which was located the garden of Eden untouched by the flood.

Obviously it was natural for these new settlers to emulate the mountain of Eden, an unfulfilled nostalgia which reached across all generations and remains to the present day. If they couldn’t ascend the mountain on which it was located, they hoped to copy what was beyond their reach. The people thought this plain of Shinar offered the ideal location and environment to at last undertake the enormous task of copying what was always in their view. As for such a herculean effort, no time is wasted between the settlement of Shinar and the construction of a city and tower. Two words stand out in vs. 3 (‘And they said, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly’) which occurs immediately after vs. 2. They “come” which means let’s gather together for a project even though we are scattered. At least we have “one language and few words,” an advantage which will enable us to accomplish our project in short order. The second word is “thoroughly” which in Hebrew comes off literally as “let us burn with fire to fire,” *saraph* being the verb at hand and implying baking. “And Joshua burned Ai” [Jos 8.28]. And so the sense here is of baking slowly and thoroughly in order to make the bricks as strong as possible to withstand the height of the tower under consideration. If Noah could have built such a might ark, surely his descendants could construct a tower. Only one essential ingredient was missing: Noah built the ark according to the Lord’s directive whereas the inhabitants of Shinar erected the tower on their own initiative minus divine guidance.

After uttering these collective words which revealed their impulse, vs. 3 adds that the builders had “brick for stone and bitumen for mortar.” The same word is used for both “bitumen” and “mortar” with a slight variation: *chemar* and *chomer*, the verbal root being *chamar*, to boil up, be red. They were used with the bricks that had been “baked thoroughly” thereby ensuring a strong, stable structure. They differed in quality from those bricks later used by the Israelites to build store-cities for the Egyptians (cf. Ex 14); the Israelites deliberately made them of shoddy construction ensuring that the buildings once erected would, in turn, be quite unstable. They might look great and last a while but eventually would crumble. After the inhabitants of Shinar got their materials ready they uttered their desire to “build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.” The story at hand is remembered best for the tower, not the city, which was just as important. Presumably the inhabitants, newly arrived on the plain in Shinar, were dwelling in tents and had yet not laid out a city, let alone construct one. Due to the tower’s importance to rival and perhaps surpass the garden of Eden, it took priority over building the city; people could continue living in tents until that was completed. Nevertheless, some elements of the city must have been put in place with the tower smack in the middle. Its centrality should be confused with the position of the tree “in the midst of the garden (of Eden),” 3.3. There the word *betok* can refer to that which is among other things or within a certain place as opposed to the center. This mis-identification was a yet another sign of arrogance, of presuming to have knowledge of the garden of Eden and wishing to emulate it. As for the tower or *migdal* (that word suggests fortifications), its top (*r’osh* or head) was intended to reach the heavens; the Hebrew text is more graphic, “in the heavens” (*shamym*) revealing the haughty confidence of the builders. They weren’t content with reaching the heavens but to place their tower in them and therefore appropriate the heavens, the first created thing by God. In fact, their efforts reads like a mockery of 1.1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The purpose of constructing the tower? That the people who settled in the plain of Shinar decided to

“make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” At first glance this sounds reasonable because the people had a tenuous grip on the land after their recent migration from the east. The presumption of reaching “in the heavens” noted just above is based in the fact that the people didn’t realize the value of their “one language and few words” (vs. 1), that this unity was sufficient to sustain them in their newly settled territory. If they assumed the onerous task of making a name, surely others would recognize it. As for these supposed others, if they weren’t in the general vicinity of the plain of Shinar, the tower’s great height was bound to catch their attention. This making of a name as embodied in the tower, so the people presumed, would prevent their being scattered, *puts* being the verb which implies being broken into pieces: “And let your enemies be scattered” [Num 10.35]. *Puts* conveys the notion of scattering not unlike *naphats* of 9.19: “and from these (Noah’s sons) the whole earth was peopled.” The builders of the tower had in mind this sudden and alarming scattering from the newly landed ark, hence they wished to prevent their dispersal from getting out of hand before distance would destroy that one language and few words. That’s why they stressed “upon the face of the whole earth:” not just the area close to the ark’s landing site but the entire globe. So instead of attempting to gain control over the new territory laid out before them, they should have copied their descendants’ father, Noah, that is, his walking with God. That would have precluded building a lofty structure “in the heavens,” and God would have obliged gladly. Noah was the man the people of Shinar should have held up as an example, not his sons, who were simply transmitters of the human race from the pre-to-post flood worlds. To follow their example would get them nowhere as they soon will discover.

“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” [vs. 5]. This is the first of two descents, the second being described in vs. 7. What does this coming down (*yarad*) consist of? Did anyone witness it? Chances are the descent took place on the city’s outskirts away from prying eyes. Actually, this is the first time the Lord appeared on earth since having walked with Noah in the pre-flood days, 6.9. It must have been strange for him experiencing a new yet at the same time old place as he compared the post with the pre-flood earth. Nothing is explicit about this walking, let alone his manner of descent and later, his ascent. Curiosity got the best of the Lord, so he wanted to see what was going on in the plain of Shinar. If he didn’t disguise himself, the sight of divine splendor would have dazzled people. The Lord must have pondered the dramatic words of Ps 19.9ff (‘He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet’) and realized that approach clearly was out of the question. And so the Lord had to assume a disguise to prevent his recognition which involved somehow contracting himself to fit within the confines of space and time. That’s tough enough, let alone the disguise itself. The one he settled upon was as an ordinary man, the best way to go incognito among the people. Some of the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth might have been able to pick him out from among the crowd, having recalled that their ancestor Noah walked with God, and were familiar with his disguise. If they did, they kept quiet; even if they had pointed him out, the people wouldn’t believe them.

When the Lord came upon the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, they hid themselves. Here in the city of Shinar there wasn’t any need to express shame while the Lord was among the people because they were pre-occupied with wild celebrations and congratulating themselves for such an accomplishment (as for the name Babel, that doesn’t happen until vs. 9). Note the words upon which this festivity rests, namely, “had built,” as referring to both city and tower. Just as Moses came down from Mt. Sinai (cf. Ex 32.7ff) at the Lord’s request and heard the “sound of singing” (Ex 32.18), something similar must have gotten the Lord’s attention which compelled him to descend to the city of Shinar. Even though he had been walking freely about the people there—certainly not as he had done with Noah and Enoch earlier—it was easy to hide right out in the open because people were more concerned about celebrating. Such dissolute behavior amazed the Lord as everyone about him

celebrated in “one language and few words.” Unfortunately Shinar turned out to be a precursor of Sodom and Gomorrah. So at long last the people who migrated from the east to the plain of Shinar founded not just a city but a tower which emulated the mountain on which the garden of Eden was located. The only thing it lacked was the cherubim and flaming, revolving sword (cf. 3.24). The people conveniently left them out of their plan so nothing would block their ascent to their new tower and prevent them from glorying in their achievement. With all this commotion about him, the Lord decided to do something and do it quickly else the people would come to ruin. So why not hit them where they were most vulnerable? The target? Their common language with few words. Easily we could read into the Lord’s mind something like Jesus said in a parable, “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it” [Lk 14.28]? The people who did erect their tower failed to follow any divine plan as Noah had done when building the ark.

“And behold, they are one people, and they have all one language” [vs. 6]. *Hen* (‘behold; similar to *hineh* as in 6.12) is a sign of astonishment which reveals the Lord’s state of mind when he came down to the city. Of course, he was aware of what was transpiring from his perch in heaven yet couldn’t get a first-hand view—one from that of a human being—unless he descended and walked incognito among the people. As noted above, the people did have one language, the first thing that struck the Lord, and that was vital for ease of communication. Unfortunately, much of this language was used in either shouting or profanity, given the timing of the Lord’s arrival. Note that the Lord himself says these words starting with *hen* and continuing for the rest of vs. 6. He was stating the obvious which got people’s attention immediately. That intimates he was a stranger, one who didn’t share their language, and had to do something as quickly as possible. Was he a spy sent to report on their city and tower? We don’t have any reaction simply because by now the Lord knew his disguise was wearing thin and couldn’t keep it up much longer.

Vs. 6 continues with “this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” The word expressing the Lord’s astonishment (*hen* or behold) now comes to a observation based upon reason, not emotion. The verb *chalal* is used for the noun “beginning” which had been commented upon earlier, essentially conveying the idea of to perforate, pierce through. Thus *chalal* is a perforation or an opening which, in turn, signals the start of an event. It’s different from *re’shyth* as in 1.1 (‘In the beginning’), the first of any kind. *Chalal* is appropriate because it intimates an opening—let’s say a small one—not unlike a nozzle behind which tremendous water pressure has been building up, so with its release, there’s no telling how powerful it will be and what manifestation it’ll assume. *Batsar* is the verb for the English “impossible” which can be rendered as to restrain as well as to cut off. It’s the opposite to *chalal*, that is, that there will be no means of cutting off this *chalal* once it is unleashed. The Hebrew thus reads “now nothing will be cut off from them all which they propose to do.” As for the verb “propose,” it’s *zamam* which suggests laying in wait, to plot. “As they plot to take my life” [Ps 31.13]. While out and about in the city, the Lord got wind of this *zamam*, that what the people were celebrating was the start of future, even grander projects. If they could construct such a city and erect such a tower which was as high as the mountain on which lay the garden of Eden, there was no limit what they could accomplish. The next tower would pierce the heavens which is really why the Lord had decided to come down and check things out. Use of the verb *zamam* is telling: because it applies more to scheming as opposed to planning, truly what the Lord heard in the streets was alarming. After all, the one language and few words the people enjoyed enabled information and therefore their building plans to be processed much more quickly without writing them down but passing them from mouth to mouth.

Vs. 7 restates the Lord’s descent in vs. 5: “Come, let us go down (*yarad*) and there confuse their

language.” *Havah* is an adverb of exhortation (‘come’) as used in vs. 4 when the inhabitants of the city rallied themselves together for building both the city and the tower. Here is a second descent by the Lord, the first one being in vs. 5. He saw how raucous was the celebration over completion of their impressive works, this being the first city built since the one constructed by Cain and named after his son, Enoch (cf. 4.17). The Lord didn’t come down to that city since it wasn’t raised imitation of the garden of Eden on the mountaintop and posed no threat of usurpation. He wanted to compare the both cities, the former having no tower. As for the first person plural (‘Come, let us go down’), two suggestions: a spontaneous desire on the Lord’s part to check things out. The Lord is not so much uttering these words aloud as pondering them, so there’s no one around to hear what he intends. Then again, it could refer to Moses, author of the Book of Genesis. The Lord wished Moses to come in order to make an accurate report of his findings.

Vs. 7 continues with “and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” The Lord determined this course of action during his first *yarad* (descent) when he saw the people’s wild celebration. He was struck especially by the unity of language which, as noted above, was a key factor enabling the people to complete the city and tower in record time. The verb for “confuse” is *balal* which means to mix or mingle, pour and doesn’t necessarily have a bad connotation. For example, the Book of Leviticus has it a number of times with reference to flour mingled with oil: “fine flour, mingled with oil” [2.4]. So if the people who came from the east had this “one language and few words,” what did this mingling consist of? It was a jumbling of the existing language which at this stage remained one yet instead of a “few words,” the Lord mingled them up to such an extent that the people couldn’t understand each other. It was a reverse Pentecost. Instead of the Lord descending this second time in the guise of a human being, he assumed the form of a wind...a *ruach*...which blew reversely, if you will, compared with the Holy Spirit who blew upon the disciples of Jesus Christ in the upper room. As for the resulting confusion or mingling, the Hebrew of vs. 7 reads literally, “(each) man could not hear the speech (*saphah* as in vs. 1) of his neighbor.” And so hearing became just as confused as speaking, another indicator of how necessary it was for Pentecost many years later to reverse this curse.

“So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city” [vs. 8]. *Puts* is the verb for “scatter abroad” used in vs. 4, the fear of being broken into pieces (the fundamental sense of *puts*) and the rationale behind constructing both the city and tower to emulate the garden of Eden. The Lord effected this scattering by the breathe of his mouth, his *ruach*, blowing them like so many leaves over the earth from the plain of Shinar. Vs. 8 concludes with “they left off building the city,” *chadal* being the verb which means just this, they ceased their work. When the Lord first descended under the guise of a man, both the city and tower were complete; more work remained with finishing and the city, even entertaining thoughts to go beyond the limits originally laid down. Nothing is said of the tower. It remained there for many years afterwards as a reminder to the former inhabitants’ hubris. The structure was so lofty that no matter where the people were scattered they could see it looming in the horizon as a reminder of their vain efforts. While looking back at it, everyone were unable to express their frustration; although they retained the one language, many words had been injected into it instead of the original few.

The city on the plain in the land of Shinar—no specific name had been given to it yet most likely went by Shinar—was called Babel “because there the Lord confused (*balal*) the language of all the earth.” Perhaps the tower had another name before this, tower of Shinar. Now it stood as a perpetual reminder of *balal* until the day of Pentecost. Vs. 10 to the end of Chapter Eleven recounts the descendants of Shem, the son whom Noah had blessed in 10.26, and ends with the birth of Abram. These intervening generations, having been scattered from the city of Shinar-turned-Babel, were in some ways worse off than the generations noted in Chapter Ten. At least they had that one language

and few words. The more the succeeding generations increased, the greater became their confusion of that one language, confused so much that in time other languages sprang from it. Finally there came a day when a descendant...Abram...arose, the first person to attempt ending this continuous scattering. First he had to remove himself from the land in which it had happened, rather, he needed to be removed by the Lord himself, hence Chapter Twelve begins with Abram leaving his native land.

Chapter Twelve

To date the Book of Genesis recounted ten major events: the days of creation, the expulsion of the man from the garden of Eden, the first murder, the city of Enoch, the worldwide flood, the re-colonization of the flooded earth, the settlement in the land of Shinar, the confusion of languages, the descendants of Shem and finally, the birth of Abram. All are a prelude to Abram presented against humanity which enjoyed communion with God, had lost it and regained it only to lose it once again. Abram emerges on the scene against the double whammy of the confusion of languages and scattering (*balal* and *puts*) of 11.7-8. At the conclusion of Chapter Eleven's notations it was remarked that God compelled Abram to leave his native land and get as far out of sight of the tower of Babel as possible. Despite his not being associated with it, the tower loomed over everyone and every place as a constant reminder of the confusion that had occurred there. That means Abram had to make a break with his direct ancestry, his father Terah (cf. 11.27), and left Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan (cf. 11.31). "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Three times God includes "your" to emphasize the attachment Abram had with his heritage, a radical break, one in line with the nomadic existence of 11.2: "as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar." Then again, perhaps this readiness to pick up and leave wasn't radical for Abram. After all, he was a nomad and very much used to moving around. What makes this change of locale significant is that Abram moved out of that orbit of nomadic territory for one completely beyond his familiarity.

As for the three-fold command to leave (*halak* is the verb, 'to go,' with the implication of walking), it is set against the background of *'erets*, *moldeleth* and *beyth* (country, kindred, house). Walking was the conventional mode of transportation along with four-footed animals for transport which means that Abram moved slowly from these three things so dear to him. It gave him plenty of time to reflect on what he was doing. En route Abram passed many people and places dear to him which must have given reason to pause as to what he was doing. All the while Abram was pondering the divine words uttered to him. His ready obedience must have come into question though we don't have any specifics. Thus Abram was not unlike Noah, the latter leaving familiar territory for a confined ark followed by a land that had been wiped out by flood waters. As he left his native land, did Abram witness that bow in the clouds promised to Noah, a reminder of God's covenant "between me and you and every living creature of all flesh" [9.15]? He must have on several occasions, for that gave him strength during his slow, tedious walking through his country, kindred and house until finally he left them behind, well out of sight. As for that bow, never do we hear of people referring to it as a covenant because other forms of this relationship with God supplanted it.

Abram's goal isn't clear to him, just the order to leave and leave at once, not unlike the Israelites later who left Egypt for a destination unknown to them. However, it turned out to be the land of Canaan (vs. 5) which wasn't mentioned in God's initial command. That became clearer as he left Haran because like his ancestors, Enoch and Noah, Abram was walking with God. Although Lot came along, he was unaware of this invisible companion and must have wondered why Abram walked with such lively steps at the age of seventy-five. The same applied to those in their retinue, not having a clue as to Abram walking (apparently) all alone and apart from their group. With hindsight Abram appears

heroic, though he must have jumped at the chance of leaving his native land which had been tainted by the confusion of language and scattering of his ancestors. Thus he welcomed the opportunity to leave that environment. With this in mind, the words addressed to Abram to go “to the land that I will show (the verb is the common *ra’ah*, to see) you” made him bolt even though he had to walk through the part of his own country, kindred and father’s house. Thus Abram’s walking was done in earnest. His family and relatives were glad to see him leave as well, not unlike the Israelites urged on by the Egyptians who “were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste” [Ex 12.33].

Another reason for Abram to depart was “I will make of you a great nation.” Who in their right mind wouldn’t want to be remembered for that? While the details aren’t clear, they do come from the Lord which is a sure-fire guarantee it will succeed. Furthermore, the Lord throws in three more benefits: first he will bless (*barak* being the common verb) Abram, make his name great and this with the purpose of him becoming a blessing (*berakah*). So sandwiched in between the Lord’s promise to bless Abram in the future and him becoming a recipient of this blessing, we have his name becoming great. The purpose of *barak* is for other people to find *berakah* in him, not especially for himself. In other words, this blessing is intended to set the previously corrupt and distorted history of mankind straight. While it doesn’t do so in a way to include all humanity at once, it is a start which will take root, flourish and persist despite the continued sinful behavior of humanity. Vs. 3 continues with “I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you I will curse.” In addition to *barak* the Lord introduces a curse, *qalal* being the verb as noted in 8.21 with regard to the Lord “never again cursing the ground because of man.” So with blessing and cursing, there’s an interchange between Abram and God. At the end of these promising verses God adds that all the earth’s families shall be blessed in him implying that he is a new Adam not being driven from the garden of Eden but being asked to forsake his country, kindred and father’s house. It was a kind of re-entry into the garden of Eden. After the tragedy of Adam’s expulsion, the flood and scattering of people God said enough is enough. You can pick up his determination that it will succeed not so much by what Abram said (i.e., nothing) but by his swift and decisive response: “So Abram went as the Lord had told him” [vs. 4].

Accompanying Abram is Lot (“Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot,” 11.27) who, by reason of being mentioned at the outset of Abram’s departure, is more important than his wife, Sarai. Lot was the only kinsman who grasped the uniqueness of Abram, that somehow God had communicated a wonderful message to him of which he desired to be a part. Furthermore, he saw Abram’s unhappiness with the people among who he had been living and was quick to pick up on this. They discussed it often which eventually lead to both being disposed to leave once and for all that people whose language had been confused and which showed no signs of being remedied. Vs. 4 throws in for good measure that Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. The next verse continues with Abram taking Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son. So if Abram was seventy-five, both Sarai and Lot were much younger, she being “very beautiful” [vs. 14] and he being Abram’s nephew. So it must have been quite a sight with these three principle characters leavening their homeland for places unknown. As typical of someone setting out on a journey, each man brought all their possessions, the Hebrew word being *rekush* which applies to that which had been acquired as well as earned. “And he (Jacob) drove away all his cattle, all his livestock which he had gained, the cattle in his possession” [31.18]. The other object of the verb *rakash* (from which *rekush* is derived) is “persons that they had gotten in Haran” where the singular noun *nephesh* (soul) is used for “person.”

The second part of lengthy vs. 5 says that Abram and Lot (plus their respective retinues) “set forth to go to the land of Canaan,” that is, made the journey from Haran in northwest Mesopotamia to Canaan. Immediately the third and final part of this same verse says that “when they had come to the land of

Canaan.” We have no information about this journey commencing from the northern part of the Fertile Crescent, not a lengthy distance, yet it involved considerable peril given the fact that Abram was an elderly man. Despite this age, it was reduced considerably from the time when Adam was expelled from the garden. Each succeeding generation decreased in years until what has become more or less the normal life span, and seventy-five was considered ancient for those days. While Abram and Lot walked part of the way, they must have ridden in carts to compensate for the former’s advanced age. Lack of information as to their journey contrasts with the detailed account of the Israelites who wandered in the desert after having departed Egypt. Unlike that lengthy wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, we have no mention of divine communication. Thus their journey was direct even though the two men had a definite clue as to their destination. Nothing of real value lay in between Haran and Canaan except that it was territory the two parties had to traverse, the sooner the better, which means putting as much distance between the ancestral land of Shinar and their descendants or the people which sought to emulate the garden of Eden perched on top of a mountain by their own image, the tower.

Even when Abram and Lot reached Canaan, they passed through it (the Hebrew has ‘in the land’) until they arrived at the “place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.” Again, no specifics were given to Abram when he left Haran, this place (*maqom*) being made know to him as God was walking with him from Haran. *Maqom* often applies to a habitation, so when Abram reached Shechem, he realized it was his destination...not just the end of a journey but the beginning of a new life for him and his ancestors. This would have to await a later date, for Abram was to move on. Vs. 6 adds somewhat ominously “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” That is to say, Abram, Lot and their families were in what was essentially hostile territory which made them wonder what they got themselves into despite Abram’s divine summons to go there. The journey which began in Haran gradually became more specific as time went on, that is, Abram and Lot arrived in Canaan, then the *maqom*, then Shechem (identical to *maqom* and to play a role with Jacob later on), and then the oak of Moreh. Such a specific location is not unlike the tree “in the midst of the garden” only the one at hand is specified as being an oak or *’elon* located at Moreh, the other two biblical references being Dt 11.30 and Jdg 7.1. As for the latter reference, it is the site of Gideon’s camp who defeated the Midianites with three hundred men.

Vs. 7 begins with “Then the Lord appeared to Abram” which contrasts with vs. 1 when the “Lord said to Abram.” In other words, first a speaking and then an appearing (*ra’ah*) which doesn’t preclude the Lord having walked with Abram from Haran to the oak of Moreh. Under what guise the Lord appeared we don’t know, but the main point is for Abram to hear the words “to your descendants I will give this land.” These words are to be seen against the somewhat ominous backdrop of vs. 6, “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” If it weren’t for the central location of the *’elon* (oak), Abram may have had second thoughts, for despite being in the land of Canaan, he could see from that *’elon* as from a mountaintop “all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb and the Plain, that is, the valley of Jericho the city of palm trees as far as Zoar” [Ex 34.2-3]. As with Moses who uttered these words, Abram wasn’t destined to occupy all these places; it was up to his descendants to whom the Lord “will give this land.” As for the word “descendants,” *zarah* means literally seed. Thus Abram, beginning with hearing the Lord who later appeared to him, translated both into a seed, if you will, which would be planted and reap a harvest but not in his lifetime, a fact that would frustrate Abram to his death.

Vs. 7 concludes with the words, “So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.” This is the second mention of *mizbeach* (altar), the first being erected by Noah immediately after the flood (cf. 8.20). Both were set up in a new land and were constructed not at a direct command from

God but spontaneously, more as a gesture of gratitude. No details are given as to the type of sacrifice Abram had offered compared with the animals Noah had taken from the ark and thus had survived the worldwide flood. We have no mention about the sacrifice Abram had offered, perhaps none at the time, just construction of the altar. The most important feature is that the altar is for the “Lord who had appeared to him.” Despite the appearance, emphasis is more upon the words addressed to Abram. This emphasis is in keeping with the summoning of Abram in vs. 1. Afterward having built the altar Abram continues to move in a southerly direction all the way to Egypt, his furthest point away from Haran, after which he returned to Canaan, this account spilling over into Chapter Thirteen. Thus the altar faced in a southerly direction upon which all these lands were to be offered, more important than any animal sacrifice.

From the oak of Moreh Abram “removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel” where he “built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.” Note the verb *hataq* for “removed” which suggests taking away as the removal of a tent. “And he moved from there and dug another well” [26.20]. The time gap between these two isn’t mentioned but apparently small; the same applies to the second altar Abram built or the last one before heading further south into the Negeb and then Egypt. As for this second altar, here Abram “called on the name of the Lord” compared with the first one where the Lord had appeared to him. The Hebrew is more graphic reading “called in (*b-*) the name of the Lord.” As for Abram’s march to the Negeb, the verb for “journeyed on” is *nasah* used in 11.2, “as men migrated from the east,” and is the first instance of this verb’s application to Abram and his travels originating in Haran. Since *nasah* is more suggestive of the use found in 11.2, as migration or the leaving of one’s home for another place, it applies to Abram at this stage of the journey because once in Egypt, he is in a completely foreign land, one that won’t allow the erection of foreign altars. Certainly while living in Haran Abram heard of Egypt and its customs, being the greatest power in the region. As for Lot, his brother’s son or nephew, we hear nothing of him once they arrived to the land of Canaan in vs. 5.

Once in the Negeb Abram can’t remain long because “there was a famine in the land” [vs. 10]. Thus out of need to provide food for him, his family, servants and livestock, he was forced to travel into Egypt, a kind of prefigure of Joseph’s brothers. “Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die” [42.2]. Surely Abram and his retinue weren’t the only ones who make the trek; the roads leading into Egypt must have been jammed with desperate people. Although the famine motivated Abram, the words “to sojourn there” suggest that he may have wanted to go to Egypt anyway, thinking that was the final destination the Lord had in mind. *Gur* is the verb at hand and applies to being fully conscious of not belonging to the land in which one is dwelling. Thus it implies a kind of failure (or inability or even unwillingness) to assimilate. “Go into Egypt to sojourn there” [Jer 42.15]. *Gur* is the opposite thing God had in mind when he summoned Abram in vs. 1 because there he mentions *‘erets* (land) suggestive of a place native to oneself or one about to become such.

Vs. 11 begins with “when he was about to enter Egypt” which means he was in its vicinity, its northwestern boarder. With the sea to the right and desert of Sinai to the left, roads converged which meant that people making their way to Egypt for food must have clogged the highways. They were on top of each other, so much that Abram got the idea of disguising the beauty of his wife, Sarai, in preparation for entering that country. He could have picked up this idea from fellow travelers with previous bad experiences; best to act now before it was too late. Once at the border he would run the gamut of customs and military posts who were exceptionally selective as whom to let into their borders during this time of crisis. If they saw that Sarai was so stunning, they would “kill me” [vs. 12] but let her live. Things might have improved once past this frontier area and into the big cities, but

still the risk of her abduction was ever present. "Say you are my sister" Abram says to her in vs. 13, words uttered more from self-interest than for the well-being of his wife. It was a lie Abram had to sustain for some time, a lie in which his retinue must have been complicit and had to sustain just as much as Abram.

We don't have any location within Egypt to which Abram finally stopped, but must have been the capitol because the princes of Pharaoh "praised her (Sarai)" [vs. 5] and took her to Pharaoh's house. Was it against Abram's wish that his wife was taken? Did he consent in order to maintain that lie mentioned in the last paragraph? As Abram predicted, his life was spared. Now for the first time in vs. 16 we have a description of his immense wealth which made the trek all the way from Haran through Canaan down into the Negeb and finally, Egypt. It must have impressed everyone along the way, given that the "famine was severe" [vs. 10]. To see such a large contingent on the move was impressive by any standards, and the Egyptians must have gotten wind of it well before Abram reached their border. Abram's decision to lie about Sarai must have been motivated in some part by these possessions which was welcomed by the Egyptians. Instead of some poor migrant seeking food and possibly living in their country, here was a man with a vast train of mobile wealth that could be put to good use.

As for Sarai, once she had been taken into Pharaoh's house, she was treated well due to her beauty. Whether or not she was relegated to a harem or the like, we don't know; possibly Sarai was elevated to the rank of a princess. "But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai" [vs. 17]. This verse sounds not unlike something lifted from the Book of Exodus, chapters seven through eleven. *Nagah* is the word for "afflicted" which means to touch and is not applied to the ten plagues. This verb has intimate connotations and in Leviticus applies to contact with clean and unclean objects, for example, "If a soul touches any unclean thing" [5.2]. The nature of such "touchings" isn't given, but they were sent by the Lord "because of Sarai, Abram's wife." It is to Pharaoh's credit, however, that he recognized the source of the problem and moved to remedy it. He relented and gave Sarai back to Abram after which he told him to leave Egypt at once. This departure was as sudden as the Israelites under Moses who must have reflected upon this story. The big difference is that Abram returned directly to the Negeb whereas Israel wandered in the Sinai desert for forty years. Both were generally the same as well as the same distance from major roadways between them and Egypt.

Chapter Thirteen

"So Abram went up from Egypt...and Lot with him, into the Negeb." This going-up was an immediate result of Abram having afflicted Pharaoh and his house with unspecified plagues. It was Pharaoh's agents who carried out his wish, men to whom "he gave orders concerning him" [12.20]. These men didn't care at all where Abram went, just as long as he left and do so as soon as possible. En route back to the Negeb Abram passed many people who continued to stream into Egypt in search of food as a result of the famine (cf. 12.10). So here we have Abram with his wife and "all that he had" [vs. 1] going in a direction opposite to the throng headed southwest, giving the wrong impression that Egypt was not a land of bounty. Those who saw Abram reasoned, if that fellow made out so well, why not us? They mistook the favor Pharaoh showed Abram not out of respect but out of lust for his wife, Sarai. Such misinformation travels quickly, so most people on the trek to Egypt got wind of it, and Abram did his best cautioning against getting their hope up beyond expectation. In this opening verse to Chapter Thirteen Lot is mentioned for the first time since 12.5, that is, in the land of Canaan. Somewhere in that land the two split up for reasons which have gone unrecorded, perhaps because the land couldn't support them as noted in vs. 6. Vs. 1 implies that Lot had continued with Abram

from Canaan through the Negeb and into Egypt. However, Lot could have stopped somewhere along the line and awaited his uncle's return. If Abram didn't come back from Egypt, Lot would go down after him.

Vs. 2 briefly describes Abram's retinue which he took from Egypt as "very rich in cattle, silver and gold," a comparison not unlike that of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus: "For they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold and clothing" [Ex 12.35]. Abram must have obtained these items in Egypt instead of bringing them because the text doesn't speak of what he brought there, just what he brought to Canaan, "all their possessions which they had gathered" [12.5]. Because of the famine, their possessions dwindled quickly either by having consumed them or by selling them off. As for Egypt, the Lord doesn't direct Abram to that country specifically but to "the land that I will show you" [12.1]. This showing is a continuous one which started off well for Abram and his retinue until they arrived at "Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning" [vs. 3], a place he naturally thought of as his final destination. It was, but considerable more traveling was in store for him. Bethel or House of God was mentioned in 12.8, so it was an obvious place—*maqom*—for Abram to aim for as the land which had been promised. It was here, the second time around at the same *maqom*, that Abram "called on the name of the Lord" or at the altar he built during his first visit. Though Abram lacked clear-cut confirmation that this was the place for him to settle, he recalled the Lord's words in 12.7 ('to your descendants I will give this land'). Despite erection of an altar, no response came from God; besides, a famine was raging, so he had no choice but pick up and leave. This came as a disappointment after having made his way from Haran and having heard the Lord say that this—Canaan—was the place destined for him.

Vs. 5 again mentions Lot who was wealthy though in a way different from Abram, wealthy in terms of "flocks, herds and tents." Addition of tents suggests that Lot was of a more nomadic cast than his uncle even though both came from the same background. Besides, Lot was much younger and therefore more mobile. The great wealth put in nomadic terms is why the land could not support them both "dwelling together" [vs. 6]. Their relationship was not unlike the nomadic Abel and the stationary Cain. While Abram and Lot didn't come to blows, their different ways of life required splitting up despite having come all the way from Haran to Canaan to the Negeb to Egypt and from Egypt to the Negeb and finally, to Canaan. Surely Abram and Lot had ample time to size each other up. However, they came to this decision only after having completed a hazardous journey along with their respective households. There was nothing at fault with the land which "could not support both of them dwelling together." Each man had vast possessions, so a decision had to be made else that famine which they escaped by fleeing into Egypt would catch up with them. This tension is revealed in vs. 7 where strife existed "between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle." *Ryv* is the word for strife or contention though it doesn't apply to an especially violent conflict. "You delivered me from strife with the people" [Ps 18.43]. Mention of the word "cattle" suggests this *ryv* was over water and grazing rights, fairly typical for nomadic people in the desert. The second sentence of vs. 7 mirrors 12.6 reading "At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt in the land." Addition of these two native peoples suggests that the herdsmen came into conflict with them over means of sustaining their herds of cattle. So if *ryv* existed between Abram and Lot, the external threaten from these native inhabitants threatened their very existence.

To avoid the *ryv* just mentioned and not allow the Canaanites and Perizzites to take advantage of it, Abram demonstrates his grasp of the situation in vs. 8: "Let there be no contention between you and me...for we are kinsmen." The Hebrew for "kinsmen" reads here literally as "men brothers we are." Abram is shrewd enough to set Lot on his way, trusting in the original divine summons to leave his native land. That would free him up considerably, a sentiment he'd never let Lot know about. "Is not

the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me” [vs. 9]. Even these words have an air of artificiality about them, of trying to pull the wool over Lot’s eyes. Both had the opportunity to explore Canaan en route to the Negeb as well as upon their return from Egypt, so they had a pretty good idea of what it was like. Thus the separation or *parad* either to the left of to the right as Abram proposed was of a much lesser degree from that *parad* of 10.32 after the flood: “and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth.” Chances are the families of each man had no say in the matter and kept apart...*parad*...from each other, including the herdsmen whose task was tending after the mobile wealth of their masters. They plus their masters couldn’t help but recall that *parad* which later gave rise to the city in the land of Shinar and the tower of Babel. If this got out of hand, they would continue the division of tongues and peoples that has plagued us for so long.

“And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord” [vs. 10]. The lifting up of eyes in this instance implies that Lot had been downcast and worried about the conflict between his herdsmen and those of Abram (cf. vs. 14, the same regarding Abram). Both were trying their best to work out a deal when suddenly he beheld the Jordan valley stretching out before him. Surely Lot was aware of this beforehand, had his eyes on it, so jumped at the chance of settling there. The Hebrew for “valley” is *kikar*, more a tract of land roughly circular in shape; perhaps the term “valley” was applied due to its bowl-like nature which encircled the land about it. “Talent” is another translation for *kikar* due to its circular shape. “In the plain of Jordan” [2Chron 4.17] (NB: often *kikar* means both ‘valley’ and ‘plain’ due more to the territory both places encompass). Lot was attracted to the *kikar* of the Jordan with Jericho being the chief city, an ideal choice, really. This area reminded Lot of the “garden of the Lord” which means Eden. That image endured the first man’s expulsion, the growing corruption upon the earth, the worldwide flood, confusion of a single language and finally a dispersal of people throughout the world. It was handed down in oral fashion yet retained its strength despite the passage of time. That’s because it was transmitted from one person to another, not written and therefore not personal. In addition to the Eden comparison, there is one based upon very recent experience, “like the land of Egypt” which means the Nile River. We don’t have explicit mention of Lot having accompanied Abram there, but that isn’t the issue because Abram could have related his experiences at a later time. So despite the promising sight which lay open to Lot, vs. 10 qualifies it with a premonition of the future: “this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.” *Shachat* is the verb which also means to act wickedly, the same used in 6.13: “I have determined to make an end of all flesh.” And so the worldwide *shachat* applied to one of a lesser though even more violent scale, the two cities and surrounding areas. As for Sodom and Gomorrah, they were already in place prior to Lot’s acquisition of that territory, and word must have reached him about the horrors that went on there.

With reports about Sodom and Gomorrah in mind, Abram got the better deal who “dwelt in the land of Canaan” [vs. 12]. Stories about them proved true because after Lot “moved his tent as far as Sodom,” the next verse says “that the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.” The verb *’ahal* (‘moved his tent;’ only two other references to it) means that Lot didn’t dwell in Sodom but *had* Sodom, that preposition signifying “to,” “right up to” it without entering the city. Early on Lot got wind of the wickedness going on there though it remains unspecified; this is another example of how quickly news spread in a city where oral transmission of information was paramount. Furthermore, only Sodom is mentioned, not Gomorrah, which may at the time had been the lesser of the two evils. As for *’ahal*, it was only natural for Lot to pitch tent since he had “flocks and herds and tents” [vs. 5] whereas tents aren’t attributed to Abram. Despite Lot’s proximity to cities, he retained a nomadic-like lifestyle due not just to his upbringing but out of safety concerns. At any time the native inhabitants could have risen upon against Lot and overpowered him as well as Abram. Perhaps Lot had a premonition that the Lord would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (he’d have a role though yet

was unaware of it) so he wanted to be ready to move out at a moment's notice. In this Lot may have thought of Noah who knew the worldwide flood was coming and had to prepare an exit strategy.

Vs. 14 has the Lord speaking to Abram for the first time since 12.1 when he ordered him to leave his native land of Haran (12.7 has the Lord appearing to Abram), so the intervening time included his migration to Canaan, the Negeb, Egypt and back into Canaan. It was a fairly long interval so Abram welcomed the divine intervention. Note that on this second occasion the Lord speaks only after Lot "had separated (*parad*; cf. vs. 9) from him." In other words, Abram willingly allowed Lot to take what seemed the more welcome, fertile valley of the Jordan River trusting that the Lord would speak with him shortly. As for Lot, he was delighted at apparently come off the better. At the same time Abram was curious when his nephew descended to the Jordan area and wanted to see if the Lord would provide for him...a sort of comparison between the two men and their retinues. "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are." This lifting up of Abram's eyes differs from Lot ('and Lot lifted up his eyes' to see the Jordan River area, vs. 10) in that it was divinely commanded. The place (*maqom*) at hand is where Abram "had made an altar at the first" [vs. 13] or Shechem, the oak of Moreh (12.6). It was here that Abram and Lot had their quarrel and decided to separate from each other.

At this *maqom* situated in Shechem by the oak of Moreh the Lord had Abram look to all four points of the compass. From this central point or point within a square which was determined by Abram's clear-sightedness he said in vs. 15 "for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants forever." As noted with regard to 12.7, *zerah* for "descendants" translates literally as seed, that Abram is planting the land not for himself but for the future. In the next verse this seed will be "as the dust of the earth," *haphar* being the word for "dust," a fine powdery substance compared with the more substantial '*adamah* of which Adam was fashioned. "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground" [2.7]. Note that *haphar* can be compared with sand in 22.17 regarding these descendants. However, *haphar* suggests the forming of a new man in terms of a new nation, not an individual person. Abram's descendants put in terms of this powdery substance, destined to inhabit the land which Abram now is gazing upon, always will refer back to that moment to establish their identity. By so doing, this dust which cannot be counted (cf. vs. 16) becomes unified despite any separation marked in terms of distance of time.

"Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you" [vs. 18]. The Lord bids Abram to arise, implying that he was laying on the ground out of reverence and gratitude, even with disbelief at the words that had been addressed to him because they were too wonderful to be true. So instead of the Lord asking Abram to just look as in vss. 14 & 15, he tells him to actually walk (*halak*) through this '*erets*. Walking was very familiar to him, having come on foot from Haran into Egypt and back into Canaan. Abram didn't have to walk physically but in his spirit (cf. vs. 18 below) as the Lord bade him to look and follows the length and breadth which the Lord had laid out. He began this journey in spirit from the point in which he was, the oak of Moreh at Shechem. In other words, this oak tree was the axis point from which the land would be inhabited. While reconnoitering of the land sounds fine, Abram had to pass a number of Canaanites and Perizzites who "dwelt in the land" [vs. 7], a bit unnerving despite the divine promise.

The text does not say explicitly that Abram walked through the land, for vs. 18 or end of Chapter Thirteen concludes with "So Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre which are at Hebron." In other words, the way Abram effects reconnoitering is by moving from the oak ('*elon*) of Moreh at Shechem to the '*eloney* (plural, oaks) at Hebron, a short distant and easy to accomplish. So despite the move, Abram chose to live by '*elon*, a symbol of strength and sturdiness

and also reminiscent of the garden of Eden. “There (*sham*) he built an altar to the Lord,” this being the third altar Abram had constructed. Nothing is said about sacrifices offered on all three, suggesting that they were more as memorials for the Lord’s appearance and promise. They were practice-runs, if you will, for the one later in 22.9 when Abraham (he name was changed later) was prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

Chapter Fourteen

This chapter recounts an alliance of four kings against Abram as well as presenting us with a whole series of kings and their wars up until vs. 11 when four of them (noted in vs. 9) “took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way.” The noun “goods” (*rekush*) was mentioned in 12.5 with respect to Abram’s possessions which he took from Haran into Canaan and suggests, as 2Chron 21.14 reads, that which is most valuable to an individual or a group: “The Lord will bring a great plague on your people, your children, you wives and all your possessions.” And so to lose *rekush* is equivalent of losing one’s livelihood. The places from which *rekush* were taken are Sodom and Gomorrah which gets automatically gets one’s attention due to the disaster that will overtake both. 13.13 gave a premonition of this: “Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.” Did the four kings pillage them because of this sordid reputation? Possibly not; they were more interested in booty and captives instead of taking vengeance upon two cities renowned for their immoral customs and behavior. This sack took place just after the four kings drove those of Sodom and Gomorrah into the Valley of Siddim where they fell into bitumen pits (cf. vs. 10). With their leaders out of the way, the cities were more vulnerable than ever. Nothing is said about leveling the two cities, just that the kings “went their way.” While their only desire was for booty, they knew from previous contact with the cities that the wickedness in them was so great only some divine power could bring this to a final resolution. This incident is noteworthy by reason of the four kings having taken Lot. Vs. 12 also mentions the *rekush* belonging to him which must have been substantial going all the way back to his departure with Abram from Haran (cf. 12.4). Not only that, Lot’s *rekush*—especially in the form of herds of animals—increased further in Canaan which is why his herdsmen and those of Abram quarreled which forced their separation. Surely the four kings knew of these two strangers in the land of Canaan wandering about with such an abundance of possessions. Perhaps rumor of Lot dwelling in Sodom motivated them to attack the city. As for Lot choosing Sodom, infamous not so much in wickedness but in sexual deviation, there’s not explicit reason to associate him with that city. Lot opted for the Jordan valley which meant he descended close to the lowest place on the earth, a hostile environment whose border was the Dead or Salt Sea, and Sodom (as well as Gomorrah) were the two largest cities there, a natural place to make his base. He used them to explore the territory, still mobile as 13.12 intimates: “and moved his tent as far as Sodom.” Mention of tent suggests that Lot was dwelling “as far as Sodom,” not necessarily within that city’s walls. Besides, nothing in Genesis is said that would implicate Lot by reason of his actions or character. He happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Word of Lot’s capture reached his uncle Abram through “one who had escaped” [vs. 13]. Abram is described here as “the Hebrew,” a word prefiguring the future inhabitants of Canaan, those who had sprung from Abram. Actually this is the very first mention of “Hebrew” which we’ve taken as synonymous with that area even though the current time frame is well before that future period. The person who was fortunate to have escaped the four kings was part of Lot’s *rekush*, for that word can apply to humans as well as animals, etc. Despite being among foreigners—the retinue of Lot and by implication, Abram—he heard them both talk of their adventures all the way back to Haran, then Canaan followed by Egypt and back into Canaan. As it became known later, to be a Hebrew means to be one who has crossed over, *havar* being the verbal root. In the case at hand, that crossing-over

intimates Abram and Lot's *havar* from Haran which had its origin in a divine summons. This person luck enough to have escaped came to Abram "who was living by the oaks of Mamre" [vs 13] which at first glance seems like the place where he had moved his tent after separating from Lot (cf. 13.18). However, now Mamre is transformed into a person, "the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner" [vs. 13].

How did this transition from a place to a person take place? The answer is easy because 13.18 (Mamre as a place) is associated with Abram's building of an altar to the Lord, this after he had walked throughout the land the Lord was about to give him. Association of Mamre with Abram's reconnoitering of Canaan and the altar suffice to transform Mamre not just into a person but into an ally. After all, the Lord said he would give the land to Abram and his descendants. If this were true, why not change Mamre from a place (and place as noted earlier in the sense of *maqom* as a place of habitation) into a human being? It was in accord with the divine promise and thus an easy task to accomplish. Word of this remarkable transition got out quickly, even to the person who had escaped the clutches of the four kings, and he knew whom to go. It was not unusual among the human *rekush* of Lot to be privy to such things, especially in a mobile or semi-nomadic society where it's virtually impossible to keep a secret. And so the escapee made his or her way all the way up from the lowest point on earth to Abram, an uphill climb all the way. As for the now-human Mamre and his two brothers (Eshcol and Aner), they were natural allies of Abram, partaking, if you will, of that altar where he had built in 13.18. To have such men aligned with Abram makes him virtually invincible by reason of the Lord having transformed Mamre from a place into a person. The word "ally" in Hebrew runs here as "masters of a covenant-Abram," the two key words being *bahal* and *beryth* (covenant was last noted in 9.15 as a rainbow but not yet associated with Abram). It should be noted that this is the only occasion where *bahal* is used as ally; the usual meaning is either husband or master as in Prov 12.4: "A good wife is the crown of her husband."

"When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men who had been born in his house" [vs. 14]. *Ruq* is the verb for "led forth" which means to be empty, pour (lead) out: "I will draw my sword" [Ex 15.9]. Abram doesn't simply muster an army but empties it out onto the field in one sudden rush of attack as the verb implies. As for those he had mustered, they are *chanyk*-trained or dedicated for a given purpose—this being the only adjective in the Bible derived from the verbal root *chanak*, to dedicate: "So the king (Solomon) dedicated the house of the Lord" [2Kg 8.63]. The men who have been dedicated fits in well with that altar of Mamre in 13.18 which presumably had been dedicated. The text doesn't say that Mamre the Amorite as well as Eshcol and Aner (i.e., the allies) were among the "dedicated" men who were "born in his house" and numbering three hundred and eighteen. "Born in his house" is a way of saying the men were either family members or part of that *rekush* or possessions belonging to Abram. First and foremost was that escapee who wanted just as much revenge upon the captors of Lot, and he knew the direction they had taken, Dan.

Despite the small number of soldiers (three hundred and eighteen of them), Abram divided them in half and did so "by night" [vs. 15] or literally, "divided upon them at night." That is to say, Abram choose the cover of darkness to make this *chalaq* (division) to protect against the enemy who might be spying as well as any local Canaanite informer. No artificial light was required, for the single-mindedness of the *chanyk* or dedicated men offered sufficient illumination. The verb *chalaq* intimates the casting of lots by smooth stones to make the proper choice, so the choice was made by feel of these stones. It was an easy task, really, for those under Abram's command were *chanyk*-dedicated—and had one goal in mind, to rescue Lot. As for the results of this *chalaq*, both divisions comprising one hundred and fifty-nine men were unaware of it until dawn. When night had passed, they were at

their commander's bidding for a two-pronged attack. So despite the smallness of these forces confronting a much larger army, Abram was able to effect a defeat just as impressive as Gideon's in Judges 7. Surely Gideon had in mind his illustrious predecessor when confronting Midian. It should be noted that *chalaq* wasn't done by Abram alone but together with "his servants" who were privy to their master's intent. These servants were close to the people, a kind of intermediary, and thus had a better idea of how they felt about a daring rescue mission. Once this important step had been taken, Abram "routed them (i.e., King Chedorlaomer and his associates) and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus." Nothing is said about this battle, of how one of Abram's servants had rescued Lot except that it happened, bringing him home along with "his goods (*rekush* as noted in vs. 12 above) and the women and the people" [vs. 16]. Additional mention of "women and people" suggests more than *rekush* had been taken and reported by the escapee in vs. 13. Lot's fate would have become obvious in a short time because Abram would not have heard anything from these two groups.

Such are The opening words of vs. 17 are "After his return" meaning the oaks of Mamre of 13.18 which, as had been noted in vs. 13, had undergone a transformation into Mamre the Amorite. And so Abram returned to that place where at the Lord's bidding he had walked through the length and breadth of the land (cf. 13.17). It wasn't his yet—the same can be argued regard the oaks of Mamre—for Abram was still a stranger among the Canaanites. As for Lot, nothing is said of him after Abram had rescued him nor do we know specifically where he went. He seems to have passed off the scene unceremoniously to somewhere in the "cities of the valley" [13.12] near Sodom where we find him later at the beginning of Chapter Nineteen. Until then attention is focused upon Abram.

"The king of Sodom went out to meet him (Abram) at the Valley of Shaveh." The name of this king isn't given, perhaps out of embarrassment, because "the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord" [13.13]. Still, the king was eager to find about this renowned foreigner, Abram, and taken Lot back under his wing (cf. 13.12). It must have been difficult negotiating with such a person whose city, along with Gomorrah, soon would be obliterated. Then again, Abram wondered if his expedition to rescue his nephew had been worth the risk since Lot was returning to a place known for its way of life. Perhaps Abram had in mind a temporary truce with this king of Sodom...entrust Lot to his protection and rescue him at a later time. That's what happened, at least in essence, through the mysterious visitors to Abram who moved on to Sodom. As for the Valley of Shaveh or the King's Valley, that is mentioned in 2Kg 18.18 where David's son, Absalom, erected a pillar or a memorial in his name.

There is a redeeming aspect to this rescue of Lot and handing him over to the king of Sodom through the medium of Melchizedek, king of Salem who "brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God the Most High" [vs. 18]. As his very name intimates ('righteousness is my king'), Melchizedek is very different from the anonymous king of Sodom, being a priest (*kohen*) besides. This is the first mention of "priest" in the Bible, and Melchizedek is an archetype of priests that will follow in his footsteps. Not only was Melchizedek a priest but was one of "God the Most High (*helyon*)." He received this honor from the Lord which was included in the land of Canaan set aside for Abram. If the Lord can make Canaan as Abram's future inheritance, it's just as easy for him to insert only one king who held righteousness in high regard and who would recognized Abram as the future inheritor. Thus Melchizedek is similar to Enoch and Noah before him, two men singled out for having walked with God while the multitude among which they had lived hadn't a clue as to what was going on. The Epistle to the Hebrews puts this divine walking in terms not dissimilar to that theme: "He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life" [7.3]. By comparison, the king of Sodom brought no offering to Abram; he could have been a priest but certainly not of God Most High, given the already tarnished reputation of his city. Salem refers to

shalom or peace and refers to the future Jerusalem where Melchizedek reigned. Surely from that high vantage point he and his subjects were able to witness the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that was to come. The offerings of Melchizedek (bread and wine) are modest but significant insofar as they are representative of that the fruit of that land Abram was to inherit, especially Salem which later would become so important.

In vs. 19-20 the king/priest Melchizedek blessed (*barak*; cf. 9.1 where God blesses Noah and his sons) Abram and does so by “God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” This short but significant *barak* has the preposition *l* prefaced to “God.” That is to say, it reads literally “to God,” that Abram is “to” him, a direct relationship with God, the first divine relationship acknowledged by a person. Despite the summons to leave his native Haran, take the journey into Canaan and then unexpectedly flee into Egypt and back to Canaan, Abram received no confirmation from a fellow human being about this mission. That means Abram had to live by the initial divine summons even though it was re-confirmed while in Canaan. How does Abram share this...or can he? Is there anyone among his family who can comprehend his actions such as erecting an altar? And so Abram is not unlike his predecessor Noah who pretty much kept to himself. The person closest to him is his nephew Lot though he emerges more as an opportunist or hanger-on to Abram than anything else. Even his first rescue just recounted and his more dramatic one from Sodom later on isn’t especially flattering.

Returning to the blessing of vs. 19, we have for “maker” (of heaven and earth) the verb *qanah* which more fundamentally means to acquire, to purchase, as noted earlier with reference to the proper name Cain. In the verse at hand, *qanah* implies that God had acquired heaven and earth meaning that it pre-existed or was just as eternal as he and thus sharing in some type of divine life. It’s a sentiment not entirely unlike the Spirit hovering over the waters in the opening verses of Genesis discussed in that context. We can expect someone like Melchizedek and his predecessors to have an idea like this, quite in line with a proper understanding of the biblical divinity for a person; he and they had lived in relative isolation yet kept the primeval understanding of God alive throughout so many generations. While Melchizedek lacks genealogy (cf. Heb 7.3 already cited), definitely he is a descendant from one of Noah’s three sons and had maintained some semblance of the Lord with whom Noah had walked. That means his descendants going back that far managed to keep alive a spark of divine awareness. Just the fact that human relations with God became so problematic due to the increase of sin and corruption is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in which Abram found himself. At the same time this narrow focus upon a single individual here and there within Genesis is exciting, the reason why it captures our attention.

The second half of Melchizedek’s blessing is a reminder to Abram not to glory in his recent triumph of having rescued Lot but to attribute it to the Lord: “Blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” *Magan* is the verb for “deliver” which occurs two other times in the Bible, Prov 4.9 and Hos 11.8; from it is derived the noun “shield.” In the context at hand Melchizedek wishes Abram to acknowledge that God had acted as his shield...perhaps not so much to destroy his enemies but to protect him from them which accounts for the lack of details concerning how Abram got Lot (i.e., by not slaying his captors). That would tie in nicely with Abram’s earlier division of his forces into two parties, a division that took place deliberately at night or in secret. In sum, Abram would snatch Lot away under cover of darkness with his captors being unaware of what had transpired.

Abram’s meeting with Melchizedek took place with the intent of handing over Lot to the jurisdiction of the king of Sodom in whose territory he had resided (cf. 13.12). Once Abram gave him a tenth of his possessions—and this was no mean sum chiefly consisting of animals and perhaps slaves—Melchizedek was overstepped by the king who was observing closely the blessing just pronounced. He

intervenes with “Give me the persons but take the goods for yourself” [vs. 21]. Melchizedek is forced out of the picture by the king who demanded Abram’s possessions or *rekush* noted in vs. 12: “they also took Lot...and his goods and departed.” As for the word “persons,” the Hebrew has *nephesh* or literally, “soul” which pertains to breath, a fact noted earlier in this document. And so we see a distinction here, one not found in vs. 12, between *rekush* and persons. This king wanted human beings, not *rekush*, to bring back to Sodom for reasons all too easily associated with the name of the city. Since he had the power to do what he wanted and Melchizedek was unable to counter him, the situation became tense very quickly. Melchizedek didn’t want to do the king’s bidding, trying his best to prevent the handover of these persons...*nephesh*...into his possession. Because *nephesh* implies the very essence of a person, the king wanted to put his intended prey totally under his control and his alone. By saying to Abram that the Lord “has delivered your enemies into your hand,” he was hoping that Abram would get the hint, that one of these enemies was the king of Sodom, a man never to be trusted.

So here we have Melchizedek and the king of Sodom, two diametrically opposed characters, coming out to meet Abram, each with a different purpose. Melchizedek takes the initiative by pronouncing his blessing, thereby hoping to work in Abram’s favor. Although his words sounded noble in comparison with the king, his offerings of bread and wine must have looked pathetic to such an ignominious character. Both the blessing and offering didn’t work because the king of Sodom had his mind set on taking *nephesh*, not *rekush*. Then we have Lot who remains silent awaiting the fate that will be meted out to him shortly. Vss. 22-23 break the tension of this short but tense situation, a struggle between Abram and a less than desirable representative of the land he had entered and was destined to inherit. Abram says to the king of Sodom with confidence, most likely emboldened by his recent expedition to rescue his nephew, Lot, “I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” The verb for “sworn” is *rum* which fundamentally means to exalt, lift up, and here pertains to the lifting up of Abram’s hands in worship. “I have lifted up my voice and cried” [39.15]. That is to say, Abram lifts up his hands to the “acquirer (*qanah*) of heaven and earth,” this word being used by Melchizedek in his blessing.

The *rum* Abram speaks of boldly to the king of Sodom consists of “not taking a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is your, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’” [vs. 23]. Thus Abram pronounces his independence from the king and continues in vs. 25 by saying “I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten and the share of the men who went with me.” Abram generously offers Aner, Eschol and Mamre—allies who helped him re-take Lot (cf. vs. 13)—to take their share as well. *Cheleq* is the word for “share” which is derived from *chalaq* as noted in vs. 15, the dividing of Abram’s forces at night into two parts. This is a shrewd move insofar as it demonstrates Abram’s disinclination to associate with the native Canaanites more than necessary. Once their assistance has run its course, it is time to move on and get busy with the real task at hand, obtaining the land, the subject of the next chapter. As for these two concluding verses of Chapter Fourteen, we’re left with no explicit resolution of the tension between the king of Sodom, Melchizedek, Lot and Abram. While of no small importance, this incident pales in comparison to the importance of the divine covenant made with Abram in Chapter Fifteen. The only value it has—and this makes Lot out to be a kind of hapless individual not entirely unlike Noah’s sons—is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as representing divine judgment upon humankind.

Chapter Fifteen

NB: In Chapters One through Six the Hebrew term *selah* was inserted after each paragraph. Originally intended as a liturgical pause, it is used in this document to indicate a period of rest, of putting down

the text (both Genesis and these notations). This gesture does not signify a time for reflection, beneficial as it may be, but for resting in God's presence. Although *selah* was discontinued after Chapter Six, a note there stated that its spirit is to be continued throughout the rest of these notations. In brief, this paragraph is a reminder of the value of *selah* without which this text would be of no value. *Selah* had been used in the early chapters simply to acclimatize the reader as to the importance it signifies.

"After these things" are the opening words of this chapter and refer to the more immediate events of Abram's rescue of his nephew, Lot, and his interaction with both the king of Sodom and Melchizedek of Salem. The Hebrew for "things" is *davar* or word and can read "after these words (which had been spoken)." Certainly a lot had been "spoken" in Chapter Fourteen and much more will continue to be spoken as God is about to make a covenant with Abram at the end of this chapter.

"The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision." That is to say, the divine *davar* came to Abram "after these *devarym* (plural for *davar*)" or "after these words." Thus we have a close connection between "things" or events and the word which the Lord speaks. While *devarym* are in the past, they are not as far as God is concerned, for his *davar* transcends temporal measurement. A word is something heard whereas here the divine *davar* comes to Abram (the verb 'to be' is used) in a vision or in a *machazeh*. Two other uses of this word are found, Num 24.4 and Ezk 13.7, the former being cited here: "the oracle of him (Balaam) who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty." The verbal root (a more common noun for 'vision' exists) is *chazah* which means to see in the sense of behold or take in at a single glance and thus applies to prophetic vision. As in the case at hand, we have two senses working together: that of speaking (*davar*) and that of hearing (*chazah*). The sense of speaking is expressed through the sense of hearing, not the other way around. Verse one has the first vision (*machazeh* or otherwise) in the Bible even though the Lord had appeared to Abram as in 12.7. Before that, we have no instances of a person seeing God. The chief way of communicating with God is of walking with him, the archetypes being Enoch and Noah. Even back in the garden of Eden the relationship with God isn't put in terms of sight but words. For example, the dialogue between the Lord and the first man and woman is couched in terms of speaking-without-sight. This approach may be unfamiliar with English or readers of modern languages in general, but Hebrew stresses sound and therefore speaking over sight and vision.

The opening verse to the current chapter concludes with "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." There is reason for Abram to fear...who wouldn't be afraid of a *davar* or word making its presence felt through a vision or *machazeh*? Really, this is extraordinary for one sense-based communication put in terms of another, the first time it has occurred in history. Thus the Lord acting as Abram's shield or protection is the way he compensates for Abram's natural fear of how these two senses interact. Immediately afterwards the Lord speaks of Abram's reward or *sakar* whose verbal root (same spelling) applies to hiring. Another noun derived from *sakar* is "wages" which backs up this notion of hiring, and hiring involves paying another person to do work, often work which one cannot or doesn't want to do himself. In a sense, the Lord "hires" himself out to Abram; mention of "shield" with its military associations can mean this *sakar* by the Lord will take the form of protection against the likes of the king of Sodom and the Canaanites among whom Abram was living somewhat tenuously. Also, the notion behind *sakar* as hiring-out may apply to the Lord having hired Abram to make the trek from Haran to Canaan with an unintended trip to Egypt. In this way the Lord was employing Abram as a scout for future control of the land in which he found himself. Surely Mamre the Amorite, along with Eshcol and Aner (cf. 14.13), allies of Abram whom he may have hired, would understand the content of this vision.

“But Abram said.” Such are the opening words of vs. 2. That is to say, Abram employs speech in order to respond to this extraordinary divine communication put in terms of two senses interacting with each other. Usually when a person speaks we expect the recipient of his words to be present, but such has not been the case thus far concerning God’s interactions with human beings. This apparently one-way speaking may seem odd to modern sensibility, but reading these interactions in the Hebrew text preclude any such difficulties. There it is perfectly natural not to think in terms of a person being the object of someone’s speech as here between Abram and the Lord. It’s something the reader must do; get into the text and see what happens. That’s what Moses, author of Genesis would wish for us. Abram’s first words to the Lord are “What will you give me?” He is thinking of both the Lord as shield and his own *sakar* or reward. Interestingly, Abram has in mind having a child with his wife, Sarai. It’s the first time we know this fact after both have left Haran. Was Abram aware of Sarai’s infertility before their departure or en route to Canaan and later to Egypt followed by a return to Canaan where he finds himself at present? The words “I continue childless” are revealing. That is to say, the verb *halak* (to go) is coupled with “childless” or *haryry* (from the root *harar*). Three other references are found in the Bible. For Abram (and Sarai) to “go childless” means that they’ve been carrying...walking (*halak*)...with this affliction for a long time. After all, it’s the first thing Abram blurts out to the Lord. Being childless was considered one of the worst of all afflictions for ancients, and it was compounded by Abram’s presence in an alien land. While all those around him were flourishing, here he was, advanced in age with his barren wife wandering all over the place. In view of this plight, the Lord saying to him that his reward “shall be very great” sounds cruel: more so because these two words read literally “great excessively (*me’od*).” In other words, Abram won’t even begin to comprehend the divine reward. Surely this communication took place well out of sight from Sarai. For her to hear her husband express himself like this and without being able to hear what God communicated to him would be too much for her. Easily she could have died on the spot, so Abram had to be very delicate in this situation, keeping his dealing with God hidden from her.

Abram reveals the true plight of his predicament when saying that the only heir of his house is Eliezer of Damascus. That is to say, Eliezer (the first and only time he is mentioned) is part of Abram’s retinue whom he picked up either en route from Haran or passing by the vicinity of Damascus en route to Canaan which doesn’t alter the fact that this man is said to have been born in Abram’s house (cf. vs. 2). Regardless, Eliezer became the most trusted confidant of Abram else he wouldn’t be in the position of becoming his heir...which doesn’t say much of Abram’s retinue taken from Haran. Despite his high esteem, he was not family; if Abram’s inheritance were to slip into Eliezer’s hands, who knows what would happen to Sarai and those in his retinue. After all, this drama takes place in the midst of an alien (Canaanite) population. Even worse, if the king of Sodom had gotten wind of this, he might return in force demanding persons instead of goods (cf. 14.21). As for the word “heir” used here, it is *mesheq*, the only use in the Bible. While the origin is uncertain, this noun forms the essence of the proper name “Damascus” (*Damesheq*). With regard to the words “in my house (*bayith*),” this refers not so much to a physical dwelling but to one’s heritage. *Bayith* taken literally wouldn’t apply to Abram noted up to this point for his wandering.

“And Abram said.” Words which introduce vs. 2 as well as vs. 3 where Abram is speaking to the Lord with some desperation about Sarai’s barrenness and the potential of Eliezer gaining his inheritance. This desperation is compounded by the word “behold” or *hen* which intimates a sentiment something like “look at how desperate I am in this foreign land made worse by the fact that a foreigner will inherit everything I had brought from Haran.” This is borne out by Abram saying that the Lord has given him no offspring or *zerah* (i.e., seed) which had been promised before Abram descended into Egypt, 12.7. And that promise was in the larger context of the Canaanites being in the land, vs. 6. By reminding the Lord of his promise explicitly given, Abram was prodding him to make Sarai fertile.

Even though Lot was somewhere in the Jordan valley close to Sodom, he must have gotten wind of this and perhaps entertained the notion of becoming Abram's heir, that is, provided that Eliezer could be removed discreetly. Although Abram came this far, he shouldn't complain; at least Eliezer, despite the lowliness of being a slave and had the prospect of being exalted, belonged to Abram's inheritance. We don't hear from Eliezer directly but can surmise he was put on the spot. Surely Eliezer would be a better choice than Lot; Lot would have squandered everything in Sodom and Gomorrah. Sarai, too, must have felt the same though never expressed it. If Eliezer were to take over after Abram died, she would become his wife and from that point on would be recognized as having been wed to a slave.

This dialogue between the Lord and Abram was taking place presumably within a tent because vs. 5 says "And he brought him outside." Note that the same verb *yatsa'* (to go forth) for "brought" is used in vs. 4 as "goes" (from your loins). In other words, first a *yatsa'* with respect to Abram's reproductive capacity and future generations followed by a *yatsa'* with respect to having him exit his tent and stand outside. In a moment the Lord will speak of Abram's descendants being more numerous than the stars which means that the vision of vs. 1 occurred at night, possibly while Abram was sleeping. So what happens after this second *yatsa'*? The Lord has Abram look at the sky. The sky is traditionally associated with God's dwelling place; such isn't the case here because the Lord came to Abram in a vision at night while sleeping. The verb for "look" is *navat* which implies having regard or respect for someone or something. "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God" [Ps 13.4]. Abram is asked not simply to look at the heavens (*shamym*) but toward them which gives that word the form *hashamaymah*. That is to say, Abram's *navat* is aimed in that direction, away from the conversation he has been having with the Lord since the opening of Chapter Fifteen. His *navat* is directed from that vision (*machazeh*) of vs. 1 to the physical viewing of the night sky.

Once Abram's attention is fixed *hashamaymah* and away from the *machazeh* or vision within the tent, the Lord tells him to "number the stars" if he can. The verb is *saphar* implying that Abram is to write...inscribe...the number of stars which would be on parchment or a wax tablet. That involves a form of calculation, for example, units into fifty or a hundred stars at a time until the tablet or parchment were filled. The verse at hand is followed by another instance of "then he said" which acts as a pause or buffer between this impossible task of writing down all the stars and equating that impossibly large number with future descendants. The text doesn't say whether or not Abram undertakes this task but skips over to "And he believed in the Lord." As for the future generations, they must be born from those who came with Abram from Haran, not from among the locals. So what did Eliezer of Damascus, the destined heir, think about all this? Despite being a trusted servant, he must have been disappointed greatly. In an instant Eliezer saw a glorious future slip away and would remain a regular member of Abram's household. Perhaps he rebelled and left, having persuaded some servants and slaves to come with him, even back to Damascus, as far away as possible from Abram. From there they could regroup and attack Abram at some future time.

As for Abram's profession, "he (the Lord) reckoned it to him as righteousness." That is to say, the Lord did the reckoning or *chashav* which fundamentally means to impute, reckon. "Against those who are quiet in the land they conceive words of deceit" [Ps 35.20]. This verb involves some amount of conniving and intimates that the Lord himself was acting a bit craftily for Abram's advantage by equating his just expressed faith in God with righteousness, *tsedaqah*. The situation at hand was tense and needs to be taken into consideration. Here was Abram in the midst of a hostile, Canaanite population with a barren wife, a disgruntled servant (Eliezer) and his experience with Lot which brought about an encounter with the king of Sodom. And so it's not surprising that the Lord attributed righteousness or justice to Abram for having believed in him, the same Lord who appeared to him within the tent during a dream. There was no other choice, really, except for Abram to pick

up his belongings and return to Haran which would have been even more disgraceful in the eyes of his wife and retinue. It is from this encounter that Abram achieved a boldness he had lacked up until now, a boldness which enabled him later when he bargains over Sodom and Gomorrah. Such is his expression of *tседаqah*.

Without missing a beat, the Lord continues speaking with Abram in vs. 7: "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." The Lord felt it important to let Abram know who was in charge, and that he had admired his courage from the very beginning in Haran. For Abram to hear the Lord speak must have been painful; he had heard the Lord speak earlier followed by a trying situation. Would the same happen now? As far as inheriting the land of Canaan, in one way it's quite misplaced. Essentially Abram was in hostile territory...Canaan...and the locals weren't about to show favor to Abram, an outsider, as one intent upon usurping what rightly belonged to them. Such is the Canaanite point of view and perhaps even some within Abram's own people were fearful of the overwhelming number of local inhabitants who could crush them at a moment's notice. With that hostility established early on, it is no small wonder that for most of Israel's existence she would experience unceasing turmoil within her borders. The subject of inheritance is tricky to deal with because it's a fundamental principle governing ancient societies. Mess with it and you're in big trouble.

By the time vs. 8 comes around, there's a certain weariness with the dialogue because now Abram wants proof: "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" You'd think Abram would have been assured of the land from his initial dealing with the Lord back in Haran. While the Lord encountered him during key times of his sojourn, still that nagging question remained in Abram's mind. The Lord wishes to put an end to this tiresome dialogue and have Abram get on with it, so he proposes a sacrifice but a sacrifice minus an altar. "Bring me a heifer...a she-goat...a ram...a turtledove and a young pigeon." The first three (i.e., the larger animals) are each three years old meaning they are relatively young whereas no age is specified for the two birds. As for the young pigeon, it is a *gozal*; one other reference exists which is Dt 32.11: "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young (*gozal*)." The verbal root means to chirp; though the sound of a pigeon and eaglet certainly are unlike, their young make pretty much the same noise. All the offerings the Lord had required of Abram was readily accessible, so he brought them to the Lord without delay. The next step was to cut each of three animals (not the birds) in two and place each half "over against the other" [vs. 10]. *Batar* (this is the only use in the Bible) is the verb "to cut" which, as the context intimates, is a cutting with the intent to divide. A similar image is found in Jer 34.18: "And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant which they made before me, I will make like the calf with they cut in two and passed between its parts." As for the two birds—turtledove and pigeon—each was placed opposite each as undivided. The text doesn't say whether these sacrifices were placed on the ground or upon an altar though the former seems more likely. The text thus far has been clear as to when Abram had erected an altar, so there's no reason to omit mention of it again. The Lord wants Abram to place these animal pieces on the ground—upon that land *'erets* of Canaan—which is destined to become his inheritance. Putting the halved victims on an altar would have been fine, but upon the presumed *'erets* is a sure-fire guarantee for Abram so he doesn't have to worry any more.

Another indication that this sacrifice differed from a conventional one is that we hear of no immolation; the carcasses just laid there without being consumed or the like. "And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away" [vs. 11]. Here is Abram—after he had split in two the heifer, she-goat and ram as well as having prepared the offerings of a turtledove and pigeon—hanging around to see what would happen. *Hayt* is the word for "bird of prey" suggesting vultures or the like. "A ravenous bird from the east" [Is 46.10]. The verse at hand implies that Abram arranged

these animals as markers along a path with an unspecified intervening space between them, and that he did this during the evening or not long before sunset. It must have been a trying experience because Abram hadn't a clue as to when the Lord would accept the offerings, let alone know how he would do so. Chances are that Abram felt awkward, even a bit foolish, as he set the carcasses in order well out of sight of his family and retinue. If Abram knew that a fire would come down and consume the carcasses, well and good; he'd have an impressed audience. However, Abram hadn't a clue, so he arranged the offerings out sight to avoid embarrassment.

The next verse (12) speaks of sunset intimating the relatively late time of this preparation: "As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram." The birds of prey disappeared shortly after sunset leaving open the possibility of nighttime carnivorous animals which would be far more dangerous. The verse at hand has two types of darkness coming on: the natural one of sunset and the mysterious one which fell upon Abram. The noun for "deep sleep" is *tardemah* noted in 2.21: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man," that is, when he took a rib to create the first woman. Also as noted in conjunction with that verse, the noun is derived from the verbal root *radam*, to sleep heavily with the connotation of snoring. With that first incident in mind, one can't help but wonder if the Lord were about to perform a similar operation upon Abram; not that he was going to create a woman but a new kind of being. Regardless, Abram was knocked out cold and lay helpless on the ground without being able to protect the carcasses. No problem, because the Lord was close by. He even thought Abram might not be up to the task, hence the *tardemah*. As far as this *tardemah* is concerned, we know when the Lord brought it upon Abram but have no word as to when Abram woke up, for he was knocked out fully for the remainder of Chapter Fifteen.

In addition to this *tardemah*, vs. 12 says a "dread and great darkness fell upon him." The first word in Hebrew is a noun, *'eymah* or horror. "My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me" [Ps 55.4]. In addition to this *'eymah* we have *chashekah* (*choshek* is similar and more common, from the same verbal root). Thus Abram was subjected to three forms of darkness: the natural one, deep sleep and the last one which is akin to the lack of sunlight but can have moral or distressing overtones. The Lord wanted to make sure Abram was unconscious almost to the point of death before he was to communicate with him. And that communication is very familiar by now: "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs" [vs. 13]. "Of a surety" in Hebrew is given by a repetition of the verb *yadah*, to know...something like "know know." Repetition of the words is meant to for them to sink in as important. Good thing that Abram was stone-cold because what God was communicating wasn't what he had been expecting, especially after all his complaining (and justifiable at that) about having traveled so far and still not having an heir. Despite the *tardemah* of Abram, he retained the ability to receive communication from God and to remember it upon waking. We have nothing as to his response upon awakening.

Communication within the context of *tardemah* doesn't concerns not Abram directly (who, despite all he went through to date, came off quite well) but his descendants, *zarah* (i.e., seed). They were to be *ger* or strangers in a land or *'erets* not their own, a terrible fate for a settled people to whom identification of place is so important. However, Abram's descendants...sprung from the current generation that came from Haran-into-Canaan-into-Egypt-into-Canaan...didn't quite fit into this category. The reason? They grew accustomed to the continuous movement of nomadic existence, a fact heightened by living amid potentially hostile Canaanites who at any moment could wipe them out immediately. The sticking point here was that the Lord did not reveal to Abram the country in which his descendants would be *ger*, strangers. "A land not theirs" rules out Canaan and "will be slaves" suggests some other place. Those who came from Haran with Abram hadn't yet experienced slavery, so the place where that will take occur remains concealed from Abram. Furthermore, we haven't any

out-loud reflection by Abram as to where it might be. The most depressing part of this *tardemah*? “They will be slaves there (in the land not their own), and they will be oppressed for four hundred years.” That’s a very long time, a sentence Abram would have difficulty accepting if he were conscious. Immediately he’d cease complaining about his wife Sarai’s infertility and take it from there. Better to have Eliezar of Damascus (cf. vs. 2) be the inheritor than to be faced with such a long time.

Even the words which continue into vs. 14 aren’t consoling to Abram: “but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve.” That’s a projection well into the future, so far removed from Abram’s generation that it doesn’t affect him...or does it? Such a question remains to be worked out through the rest of Abram’s life and gets some resolution in 17.2, “And I will make my covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly.” Not knowing the nation about which the Lord is talking must have vexed Abram when he awoke from his *tardemah*. The only other option apart from Canaan based upon personal experience was Egypt to which he was forced to migrate due to a famine. Being there or anywhere other than a land supposedly theirs was bad enough, but reduced to be slaves? “And afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” Abram’s first thought at these supposedly consoling words must have been less than desirable, best unrecorded. *Rekush* is the word for “possessions” which was noted earlier and can involve acquired persons and/or slaves. The Lord says simply that a generation some four hundred years hence will come out of an unknown land and enter an equally unknown land. If Abram was in the three-fold state of *tardemah* (deep sleep), *eymah* (horror) and *chashekah* (darkness), what the Lord had just communicated was enough to wake the dead.

“As for yourself.” Such begins vs. 15 (in Hebrew, ‘and you’), almost treating Abram as an after-thought once the Lord had painted a dreary picture of his descendants several centuries in future. The Lord wanted Abram not to disregard that distant event because how he responds now will have direct implications on those generations. In the verse at hand, the Lord tells Abram that he “shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.” Abram’s fathers or predecessors are not from Canaan but from Haran, a reminder of his status of sojourner. Despite all the travails, Abram will die in peace...*shalom*...yet has a number of years ahead of him in Canaan and hopefully not a return to Egypt. Already he got a glimpse of life there, of how the Egyptians capitalized on the famine and raising prices on grain, etc. Abram must have communicated this to people in Canaan and so a tradition began viewing Egypt in a less than desirable light. Later generations, especially those who became slaves to the Egyptians, retained memory of this which must have made them have second thoughts about being there, all this a kind of prelude to the Exodus.

Right after the Lord communicates to Abram his fate, he returns to the matter at hand, the “fourth generation” which will “come back here” but leaves unspecified where those future generations will dwell. One important condition for their return to “here” which seems to imply Canaan: that “the iniquity of the Amorites (might be) complete.” This iniquity or *hawon*, a term often with sexual connotations, can be traced all the way back to the person of Canaan (the father of the Amorites, vs. 16) cursed by Noah right after the flood. Actually, it’s another name for Noah’s youngest son, Ham, who had covered the nakedness of his father: “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers” [9.25]. Despite the unfairness of such a curse, it stuck from that time right after the flood down to Abram’s day. The word for Noah’s curse is *‘arar* first used by God in 3.14 toward the serpent who deceived the woman and certainly was on his mind when dealing with Canaan. Over time that *‘arar* became a *hawon* or a curse resulting from sexual deviancy. From the Lord’s point of view, the *hawon* belonging to the descendants of Ham/Canaan is not quite full. *Shalom* is the word for “complete” which differs considerably from the *shalom* the Lord promised Abram upon his death. And so a time period of four hundred years was required for this *shalom* after which Abram’s descendants

will be liberated.

Vs. 17 interrupts the divine communication with Abram who during all this was under the three-fold unconsciousness of *tardemah*, *'eymah* and *chashekah* or deep sleep, dread and darkness (cf. vs. 12). Attention shifts to the three animals and two birds which had been divided and were laying (presumably) on the ground as opposed to upon an altar. "Behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces." This took place well after dark ('when the sun had gone down') and when the birds of prey had left yet before any threat of carnivorous animals. *Halatah* is the word for "dark" and has two other references, both in Ezekiel, in reference to the prophet going into exile: "In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder and carry it out in the dark" [12.6]. Use of *halatah* fits in well here with all the talk about the fourth generation going into slavery and later being freed. After all, the Hebrews left Egypt under the cover of darkness. As for vs. 17, presumably Abram was still knocked out and was unaware of what was transpiring. Where he was relative to all this isn't recorded; he wasn't in the between the pieces but more likely off to the side safely out of the way of the pot and torch which weren't borne by anyone but moved on their own accord. *Tanur* is the word for "fire pot" which is more like an oven, by no means small, which is used for cooking. "They shall burn as an oven" [Mal 4.1]. *Lapyd* is a torch or lamp—much smaller—and carried in one's hand. "And held lamps in their left hands" [Jdg 7.20]. It was easy to visualize some being in the darkness carrying a *lapyd*, but a *tanur*? That had to be self-propelled like the chariot of Ezekiel's vision which was marked by images of fire. Despite this presence of fire, nothing is said whether the *tanur* or *lapyd* were used to consume the offerings which Abram had presented. The main idea is that both passed in between these pieces or *gezer*, the only other reference being Ps 136.13: "To him who divided the Red Sea in sunder, for his steadfast love endures forever." Thus the *gezer* of Abram's offerings foretell the passing of the Israelites with "the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" [Ex 14.22].

"On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram" [vs. 18]. At last. The very words which Abram in his three-fold sleep wanted to hear ever since he left his home in Haran. "Day" [*yom*] doesn't apply to daylight hours but refers to when "the sun was going down" [vs. 12] and is akin to a *kairos* event, a unique occasion. The last time a *beryth* had been made was many generations ago right after the worldwide flood when Noah exited the ark, the sign of a bow in the sky, 9.17. The verb *karath* for "cut" suggests either chiseling into stone or inscribing on a tablet but here it assumes special significance because the offerings placed upon the ground were cut as well. As noted in vs. 10, the verb for "cut" is *batar*, cutting with the intent to divide. Yet again the Lord communicates the *beryth* to Abram in familiar terms: "To your descendants I give this land ('*erets*)." As the Lord made clear earlier, Abram has no part in the '*erets* in which he finds himself; that's reserved for his descendants. He spells this out by saying the '*erets*—and that means more than physical property but the place which defines an individual and a group—as extending from "the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates." Indeed, a fairly substantial piece of land which includes ten different tribes enumerated in vss. 20-21. With the western boundary defined by the "river of Egypt" or the Nile, that means Abram's descendants will be right on the border with a sophisticated though alien civilization. It also serves as clue to Abram as to the country in which his descendants will be slaves (cf. vs. 13). As for the ten tribes, they will be subjugated over time, and their collective might is no match for that of mighty Egypt.

And so Chapter Fifteen concludes with a promise of what Abram desired ardently. There is no actual resolution as to the animal and bird carcasses which he had cut, what the smoking fire pot and flaming torch did to them nor what happened next. The same applies to Abram's three-fold sleep. Presumably that lasted the entire night or from shortly after sunset until dawn. Similarly we hear

nothing of Abram's response upon awakening nor any doubt as to what he had experienced. The text has a larger picture in mind, extension of Abram's descendants with the birth of Ishmael. As things turned out later, Ishmael developed into a tribe not entirely unlike the native inhabitants of Canaan, that is, essentially at enmity with the descendants of Abram.