



PARASHA FOR THIS WEEK

BERESHIT

בְּרֵאשִׁית

PARASHA OVERVIEW: GENESIS 1:1-6:8

In the beginning, G-d creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days.

On the seventh day, G-d rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbat, which returns to us every seven days.

Adam and Chava - the Human pair - are placed in the Garden of Eden.

Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," and in turn gives the fruit to Adam.

By absorbing "sin," Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished.

Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain in childbirth.

Now begins the plan of salvation G-d established to save

humanity from sins, salvation will come from an offspring of the women, known later as the Mashiach. This salvation will be the main subject of world history.

Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to G-d. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth.

The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach.

After the death of Seth, Mankind descends into evil, and G-d decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with G-d.

BERESHIT

The Jewish tradition have given to each *Parashah* or Torah portion a title or name. This name of the *Parashah* comes from one of the first words of the *Parashah*. Most of the parashot are called after the first word of the portion read, as in *Bereishit*. The first section of the reading starts on Genesis 1, and the text says: *Bere'shit bara' Elohim et hash'amayim we'et ha'aretz*. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) The first word is *Bereishit*, that is why it is the name of this portion of the Torah.

The word *Bereishit* is composed of two elements, the preposition *Be* which among other meaning can be translated as "In" and the second element *Reishit*, with similar words, *Rishon* "first" *Rosh* "head" "chief" and then *Reishit* is translated as "beginning." That is why most of the translations have translated the word *Bereishit* as "In the beginning."

In the first verse of the Bible, *Hashem* (Hebrew expression used by Jews to designate God. This word means literally "the name." This is done in order to avoid using the name of God in vain, and to break the 3rd commandment) creates the entire universe. Not only the galaxies, but also the time itself. It is a creation *ex-nihilo* (out of nothing).

Rabbi Yeruchem Halevi Levovitz (1873-1936) says: "As soon as we start studying Torah, right from the first verse we become aware that there is a Creator and Ruler of the universe. This first awareness already makes a major change in you for the rest of your life. You realize that there is a reason for everything. The world has meaning and purpose." (aish.com).

CREATION'S PURPOSE: THE COMING OF MESSIAH

Thus, the Jewish sages asked the question of the purpose of the creation: Why God created the world? Many answers were given to this question, however, in the Jewish tradition, the Talmud, it is written "Rab said: The world was created only on David's account. Rabbi Samuel said: On Moses account. And Rabbi Johanan said: For the sake of the Messiah. (Sanhedrin 98b). Thus, for the Jewish people one reason of the purpose of this creation is the coming of the Messiah. Jewish commentators say that this purpose was expressed at the beginning of creation: "And the spirit of God hovered over the waters." (Genesis 1:2). The Sages of Israel comment: "This refers to the spirit of Mashiach." (Midrash Rabbah 2:4, quoted by Rashi). One of the talmidim of Yeshua who wrote the *Besora lefi Yochanan* "gospel according to John" has seen the presence of Mashiach at the creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3), this "Word" is Yeshua *haMashiach* who came in this world in flesh "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (14).

WHAT CREATION TEACHES ABOUT GOD

The narration of the creation arouses some questions about God, His being, His existence. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan asks this question: "How do we, as believers, define God? We find the answer in the very first verse of the Torah. It says, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." Here we have a definition of God. God is the Creator of all things. He is the One who brought all things into existence...



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The third Hebrew word of the first verse of the Bible is *Elohim*, which is one of the names of God in the Bible. *Elohim* is the plural form of *Eloha*. Rabbi Hirsch says that the root of *Eloha* occurs in the plural of the demonstrative pronoun *Eleh* "These", a pronoun that denotes a plurality of things joined together into a unity. And he adds that "Judaism therefore, unites all the attributes of power that were separated by paganism. The unification of these attributes is the one God raises the one God of Israel above any notion of a mere natural power. For only the free and omnipotent Will of single Being can create a world of contrasts only He can unite these contrasts into one great purpose." And he adds, "Some people think that God created the world and then forgot about it... that His existence has no bearing on their lives. When God introduced Himself in the Ten Commandments, He said, 'I am the Lord your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage' (Exodus 20:2). God was telling us that He is involved in the affairs of man and has a profound interest in what we do. (2002, 4).

For Jews, believing in God is more than a mere creed or catechism. It is the basis of all meaning in life, for if the world does not have a creator, then what possible meaning can there be in existence! Man becomes nothing more than a complex physiochemical process, no more important than an ant or a grain of sand. Morality becomes a matter of convenience, or "might makes right." Again, it is the belief in God that gives life purpose and meaning. It is also what gives us a standard of right and wrong. If we know that God created the world, and did so for a purpose, then we also realize that everything that furthers this purpose is "good," and everything that runs counter to this purpose is "evil".

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Maybe the most important and profound verse in the first chapter of Genesis is the verse 27: "God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them." What is the meaning of "created humankind in His image?" We all know that God has no physical being, this is repeated in the Apostolic Writing: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24), thus, for the Jewish tradition being created in the image of *Hashem* means that we are endowed with free will, morality, reason and the ability to emulate God Who bestows kindness. The text also says: "in the image of God He created him [*Oto*], male and female He created them [*Otam*]" both sexes were created directly by God, and equally in His image. This is specially emphasized in our verse by the transition from the singular *Oto* "him" to the plural *Otam* "them." Created in the image of God, is one, and was created male and female, only both sexes, together, embody the concept of ADAM in its entirety.

This idea of a creation in the image of God is repeated several times, "So God created man in his own image" and again, "in the image of God

"G-d had formed every wild beast and every bird of heaven out of the ground. He [now] brought [them] to the man to see what he would name each one. Whatever the man called each living thing [would] remain its name." (Genesis 2:19)

he created him;" (Genesis 1:27), emphasizing that man's physical frame is worthy of God and of man's Godly purpose. The Psalmist says, "Yet You made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and majesty!" (Psalm 8:6)

The Torah therefore, request from us to recognize and appreciate the Divine dignity of the human body. Rabbi Nehama Leibowitz quoting the Mishnah wrote: "Therefore man was created on his own, to teach you that whoever destroys one person is regarded by the Torah as if he had destroyed a whole world and whoever saves one person, is regarded as if he had saved a whole world." (Bereshit, 3) Indeed, the Torah's purpose is not only to hallow the spirit, but also to hallow the body. This is the basis of all human morality: The human body, with all its drives and energies, was created in a form worthy of God and man's duty is to sanctify his body, in keeping with his Godly purpose. That is why the Bible is interested to keep our body in good health, saying what is good to eat and what is not good to eat (cf. Leviticus 11).

That is why also Rabbi Shaul, one of *Yeshua's Shaliach* wrote to the believers who were in the Greek city of Corinth, "don't you know that your body is a temple of the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Glorifying God is not only in our spirit (*Ruach*) but also in our body, which has been created at the image of God. Rabbi Hirsch reminds us that "Sanctification of the body and preservation of man's Divine form are the cornerstone of all moral refinement and the condition for all spiritual ennoblement and the higher the spirit seeks to ascend, the greater the demand for bodily sanctity. When God established a covenant with Israel and thus re-established human's purpose, He started with the *mitzvah of Milah* (circumcision), which was performed in the body, which means that the covenant is not only a matter of spirituality (spirit) but also involve the body and his sanctity as the temple of the *Ruach Hakodesh* "Holy Spirit".

THE NAME OF ADAM

According to Rabbi Hirsch, the term Adam is not derived from *Adamah*, but on the contrary: it is *Adamah* that derived from Adam. Moreover, man is not defined by his earthliness. For his earthly origin is what he has in common with the other creatures, whereas the uniqueness of man is that he is not created entirely from the earth: the breath of God, breathed into his earthly frame — that is what makes him into man. The very fact that a grand announcement is made here testifies that the term Adam

"She gave birth again, this time to his brother Abel. Abel became a shepherd, while Cain was a worker of the soil." (Genesis 4:2)

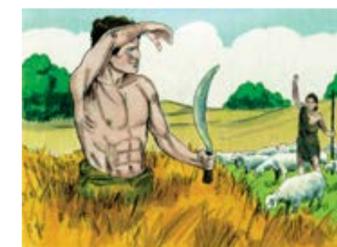
signifies man's exalted purpose. The prophet Ezekiel affirms "So you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are ADAM (human), and I am your God.' It is a declaration of *Hashem Elohim*." (Ezekiel 34:31) The term Adam is certainly not conceived of here as a mere block of earth.

UNITY OF THE HUMAN RACE

Another point must be underlined here, even though the Torah is the foundation of Judaism and the most important revelation for Jews, it does not start with the story of Israel or the Hebrews or the Jewish people, but with the story of Creation. "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness!" (Genesis 1:26 TLV) All men, Jews and non-Jews are descendants of Adam and *Chavah*. There is an intrinsic unity of all mankind we cannot deny and make all distinction of "race" obsolete. Modern research, especially since the discovery of DNA, have demonstrated that the 19th century concept of race in anthropology is wrong. It is affirmed by the Bible, there is only one race on earth, the human race we are all coming from one common ancestor, and we are all sisters and brothers on the earth. As Leibowitz put it: "The Mishnah we have already referred to in Sanhedrin goes further and derives from the creation of the first man and woman the principle of brotherhood of man and the condemnation of any racial theory." (Bereishit, 5).

SEVENTH-DAY SHABBAT

The conclusion of the creation story is about the seventh day, Genesis 1 describes a process of creation continues for six days, which is understood by traditional Jews and Christians as six literal days of 24 hours. The seventh-day Shabbat is created, creating the spiritual and universal day of rest, the Shabbat. This day was given to Adam and Chava (Adam and Eve), the first human beings, and through them all their descendants. That is why Seventh-day Adventists keep the Shabbat from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, and celebrate the God creator on that day. They believe that the Shabbat was not given only to Jews as a Mosaic law, but to all humanity as a universal law of spiritual recreation. Then the universal aspect of the Shabbat was underlined when God wrote the 4th commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) in the tablets of the Ten Commandments. And also in the prophets. Isaiah wrote under the inspiration: "Blessed is the one who does this, the son of man who takes hold of it, who keeps from profaning Shabbat," (Isaiah 56:2), this text about the Shabbat is in direct relation with our creation text, the expression "son of man" is in Hebrew: *Ben-Adam*, son of Adam, that means son of the ancestor of all human being, the Shabbat is for all *ben-Adam* not only for Jews, this is again confirmed when Isaiah says: "Also the foreigners who join themselves to Hashem, to minister to Him, and to love the Name of Hashem, and to be His servants— all who keep from profaning Shabbat, and hold fast to My covenant— these I will bring to My holy mountain, and let them rejoice in My House of Prayer." (Isaiah 56:6-7).



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APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

JOHN 1:1-14

There is a strong parallel between the *Bereishit* of Genesis and the *Bereishit* of the *Besorat* Yochanan (Gospel of John) both of them give us the story of the Creation which starts with the Hebrew word *Bereishit* (in the beginning).

Genesis 1 starts saying: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). Yochanan 1 starts saying: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). Yochanan wrote an inspired interpretation of the *Parashah Bereishit*. This interpretation is in harmony with the Jewish tradition which speaks about the Word, saying that the universe was created by the Word of God. That is why for Yochanan, who was a Jew raised by Rabbis, God's Word was so important, it is coming from God and being beside God led the creation of the world.

In fact, Genesis 1 affirms that the universe was created by the Word of God: "And God said..." Analyzing the text of Genesis, the Rabbis have noticed that the universe was created by ten sayings (Word) of God. (Genesis. 1:3; 1:6; 1:9; 1:11; 1:14; 1:20; 1:24; 1:26; 1:28; 1:29). They have noticed too this same pattern that when God spoke to the entire nation of Israel, giving the ten Commandments, that's why the Jewish tradition has made a strong connection between the ten sayings of the creation and the ten sayings of Sinai for the Commandments.

A parallel can be made also with the "prologue of John" that means the first 14 verses of his *Besorah* (Gospel). The creation can exist and subsist only if men and women accept to submit themselves to the ten commandments. These commandments are the basic laws to live in harmony with God — first four commandments or first table — and with our neighbors — next sixth commandments or second table.

Yochanan completed his inspired interpretation saying that the Word, which was with God, was the Messiah. Thus, since the rabbis affirm that the creation was made by the Word of God, the Messiah participated to the creation: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men." (John 1:3-4). This idea of the presence of the Messiah at the creation is also a Jewish idea. The text of Genesis says that "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2), The *Midrash Rabbah* (2:4) says: "And the spirit of God hovered: this alludes to the spirit of *Mashiach*, as you read, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him" (Isaiah 11: 2).

The first creation was the light: "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light." (Genesis 1:3). Yochanan explains "In him (the Word) was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." (John 1:4-5). If there was no light before the verse 3 of Genesis 1, that means there was darkness. The primitive darkness became the type or symbol of the darkness that will be on earth when the *Mashiach* revealed himself to this world. God was the witness of this light at the creation, that is why he sent a witness, to testify who was the light of the world, who was *Mashiach*: "There came a man sent from God, whose name was Yochanan. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that

through him everyone might believe. He was not the light, but he came to bear witness concerning the light." (John 1:6-8).

However, *Mashiach* was not recognized, the darkness was so deep, that the people of God did not recognize him. Not only his people but the whole world: "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him." (John 1:9-10). The Word or Light came into the world in the flesh: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14), the world has not recognized him but Yeshua the *Mashiach* promised that he would come back: "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3).

The question we could ask and meditate on is: How deep will be the darkness on earth when He will come back? This world is dark, only violence, spiritualism, false religions and crises are dominating and lead the world. Yeshua said: "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places." (Matthew 24:4-7).

The sentence: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14) is about the incarnation of Yeshua on earth. It is interesting to notice the special word used in Greek about this dwelling of Yeshua, it is written: *eskēnōsen*, which means "to pitch a tent" or to "dwell in a tent" this is a direct allusion to *Sukkot*, the feast of the Tabernacles, when Jews pitch their tent and dwell in a tent for seven days. This is certainly an indication about the time of the year when Yeshua was born on earth. He was not born on the day of Christmas, but on *Sukkot*. That is why dying at *Pesach* (spring time) we say that he was 33 and a half years old. This half year go back in the period of *Sukkot*, when Yeshua pitched his tent on earth.

The text of John 1 speaks about two categories of people: those who will not recognize him and those who will accept him: "He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him. But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God. They were born not of a bloodline, nor of human desire, nor of man's will, but of God." (John 1:11-13). The characters of the Bible have very often a name in connection with their mission, the mission of Yochanan (known as John) was to announce the coming of *Mashiach* as the light of the world, but also the one who will bring "grace" in this world, the name "Yochanan" means "God's grace" "Out of His fullness, we have all received grace on top of grace. Torah was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Yeshua the Messiah." (John 1:16-17).

Accepting Yeshua is a grace from God, it is by the will of God that we are accepting the Messiah. The question asked to each one of us is: Are we ready to receive him? Are we ready to recognize in him the glory of God as it is said: "and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14).

HAFTARAH

ISAIAH 42:5 - 43:10

This Haftarah of Isaiah is read in parallel with the *parashat Bereishit* to remind God's people why the earth and heavens have been created and also why God has created His people.

But let's remember the context of this text. Isaiah 42:5 is part of what the scholars call the first "servant song," one of at least four such songs in Isaiah. The first servant song is 42:1-9, the second is 49:1-13, the third one is 50:4-9 and the last one is the famous song of the suffering servant in 52:13 through 53:12.

Every person on earth is part of the creation of God; everyone receives the breath of God and His spirit. "Thus says God, Hashem, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and what comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, and Ruach to those who walk in it." (Isaiah 42:5).

His people have been given a special covenant—a great privilege—but also a commission to be a Light to the nations: "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." (Isaiah 42:6). However in this verse it seems that the servant is a different character than the people, "I will give you as a covenant for the people"—not peoples (plural), but people (singular): the people of Israel. That is why all the nations are going to sing to the Lord and praise Him for His goodness. The goodness of the Lord will be discovered through the mission and ministry of the Servant who will be evidently the Messiah. "Sing to Hashem a new song, His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea with all its fullness, islands and their inhabitants." (Isaiah 42:10). The blessings of the Messiah will not be only for Israel but for all the nations wherever they are, in countries that are near and in distant islands. That was the promise made by God to Abraham, "My heart's desire is to make you into a great nation, to bless you, to make your name great so that you may be a blessing. My desire is to bless those who bless you, but whoever curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3). All the families of the earth will be blessed—that means all the nations will be blessed. This is even clearer in chapter 18: "when Hashem said, "Should I keep secret from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham will most certainly become a great and mighty nation and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?" (Genesis 18:17-18)

Coming back to the text of the Haftarah we see that following the portrait of the true servant (1-9), of the waiting nations of the world (10-12) and of the eager Redeemer (13-17), we have the failure of God's messenger, unable to live up to its calling. God's servant is deaf and blind. Israel is not ready to deliver the message of the Almighty. "Hear, you deaf! Look, you blind, so you may see. Who is blind, but My servant? Or deaf as My messenger that I send? Who is so blind as the one in covenant with Me, blind as Hashem's servant?" (Isaiah 42:18-19). This text of the prophet is telling us that Israel is an inconstant servant, who never knows how to behave, who is never sure which direction to take. And Hashem will not let His people go unpunished: "So He poured out on him the fury of His anger, and the fierceness of battle. It blazed all around him, yet he did not understand it. It burned him, yet he did not take it to heart." (Isaiah 42:25).

But God is an unchanging God; He is always the same, faithful to His promise to His people. That is the beauty of chapter 43—from the first verse, God repeats His love for His people: "But now, thus says the Lord—the One who created you, O Yaakov, the One who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are Mine." (Isaiah 43:1).

STORIES AND TRADITIONS

SEEING G-D

The Roman Emperor Hadrian once asked the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yehoshua, "You claim that G-d is the creator and master of the universe. If that is true, why doesn't He reveal Himself to us at least a few times during the year so that we can all see Him?"

Rabbi Yehoshua replied, "G-d tells us in the Torah (Exodus 33:20), 'No man can see Me and live.'"

But Hadrian persisted, "If your claim that there is a G-d is true, I want you to show Him to me!"

Rabbi Yehoshua had no choice. He agreed to fulfill the Emperor's wish. At noon, Rabbi Yehoshua returned to the palace and asked the Emperor to come out to the courtyard, where he will show Hadrian the Master of the Universe. When the two men stepped outside, Rabbi Yehoshua said to Hadrian, "Now look straight up into the sun and you will see G-d!"

"Why, this is impossible! No one can stare at the blazing sun without becoming blind," exclaimed Hadrian. "You have answered your own question!" exclaimed Rabbi Yehoshua. "If, at the sun, which is only G-d's creation, you cannot look due to its great light, how can you even conceive of seeing G-d Himself whose light is infinitely greater than the glare of the sun!"

A HELPER FOR HIM

The Torah discussion on "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." (Genesis 2:18) between a Rav and his disciples Meir Simcha Hacoheh — the Rav was interrupted by the arrival of a young couple. The Rav

invited them into his private chamber while the disciple waited outside.

After a while the sound of singing and dancing came from the Rav's room, arousing the curiosity of his disciple who rushed to peek through the keyhole. To his surprise he saw the Rav and the couple singing and dancing around the table.

After the Rav came out of his room and bade the couple farewell he explained to his disciple what had transpired.

"Don't be surprised," he told him, "why I spent so much time with that couple. Their parents are the most respected people of the community and dear friends of mine. For some silly reason the husband came to me the other day asking for a divorce. I asked him to bring his wife to me, and when they arrived I spent a long time convincing the young man to abandon his idea of divorce. When I finally succeeded I decided to put the final touch on domestic peace by dancing around the table with them.

FIRST COMMUNISTS

Who were the first communists in history?" asked the teacher her first graders during the Soviet communist regime.

A little Jewish boy from the back of the class raised his hand, "It was Adam and Eve!"

"How do you know that?" asked the teacher.

"That's simple. They both had no clothes. They had no home. They only had one fruit between them. Yet they believed that they were living in paradise!"

INSPIRATIONAL CORNER

In his isolated home John was able to study more closely than ever before the manifestations of divine power as recorded in the book of nature and in the pages of inspiration. To him it was a delight to meditate on the work of creation and to adore the divine Architect. In former years his eyes had been greeted by the sight of forest-covered hills, green valleys, and fruitful plains; and in the beauties of nature it had ever been his delight to trace the wisdom and skill of the Creator.

(AA 571)

The man said, 'Now' this is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She shall be called Woman because she was taken from man.'"
((Genesis 2:23

