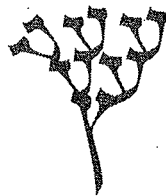


עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



Produced by THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

got sons and daughters. ²³All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. ²⁴Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him.

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

²⁸When Lamech had lived 182 years, he begot a son. ²⁹And he named him Noah, saying, "This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the LORD placed under a curse."

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

מֵתוּשֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָנָיִם
וּבָנוֹת: ²³וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי חֲנוּךְ חָמֵשׁ
וּשְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:
²⁴וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֵינָנוּ כִּי־
שָׁבִיעַ לָקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים: ²⁵פ
שֶׁבַע וּשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ
אֶת־לָמֶךְ: ²⁶וַיְחִי מֵתוּשֶׁלַח אַחֲרֵי
הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־לָמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה
וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָנָיִם וּבָנוֹת:
²⁷וַיְהִיו כָּל־יְמֵי מֵתוּשֶׁלַח תְּשַׁע וּשְׁשִׁים
שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: ²⁸פ
וַיְחִי־לָמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמֵאֵת
שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָּן: ²⁹וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ
לֵאמֹר זֶה יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִעֲצָבוֹן
יְדֵינוּ מִן־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְהוָה:
³⁰וַיְחִי־לָמֶךְ אַחֲרֵי הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־נֹחַ חָמֵשׁ
וּתְשַׁעִים שָׁנָה וּחָמֵשׁ מֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ
בָנָיִם וּבָנוֹת: ³¹וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי־לָמֶךְ שֶׁבַע
וּשְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת:

v. 29. שני טעמים

6:9, describes a life spent in closest intimacy with God.

24. Enoch walked with God The unusual idiom is repeated here, as Bekhor Shor noted, so that the brevity of Enoch's life would not be seen as a punishment for sin.

then he was no more A term used for an unexpected and unexplained disappearance.

for God took him The text is deliberately obscure, suggesting that Enoch did not die but rather ascended alive to heaven (see the nonbiblical yet ancient Book of Enoch).

METHUSELAH (vv. 25-27)

25. Methuselah . . . lived The man with the longest life span was fathered by the one with the shortest. Methuselah died at the onset of the Flood.

LAMECH (vv. 28-31)

28. Lamech See Gen. 4:18.

he begot a son The 10th generation is a critical turning point in human history and brings the list to an end.

29. Noah The name derives from the stem meaning "to rest" (נָח). The explanation given in the narrative is based on similarity of sound, not on etymology, because Noah cannot originate from the stem meaning "to comfort, give relief" (נָחַם).

relief This probably refers to a tradition about Noah as a culture hero. He was said to have invented the plow, initiating true agriculture, as opposed to hoe agriculture or horticulture. According to another tradition, he initiated a revolution in food production, effect-

24. Some commentators see Enoch as a saint. God "took" him to keep him from being corrupted by his wicked counterparts. Others

see him as morally deficient. He "walked with God" but would not deign to be involved in the concerns of less pious neighbors (Hatam Sofer).

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

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

ing an enormous saving of time and energy. Another tradition views him as the initiator of viticulture: the first to discover the soothing and enlivening effects of wine (see 9:20).

NOAH (v. 32)

32. Noah had lived 500 years The extraordinarily advanced age at which he begets a child, compared to his forebears, is required by the statement that he was 600 years old at the time of the Flood (according to 7:11), and there were no grandchildren in the ark.

Shem Meaning “name, fame, renown.”

Ham Possibly derived from the Hebrew word *ham*, “a wife’s father”; the Hebrew *ham*, “hot, dark skinned”; or the Egyptian *hm*, “servant.”

Japheth It is possibly the same name as Iapetus, found in Greek mythology, but with no known etymology.

CELESTIAL–TERRESTRIAL INTERMARRIAGE (6:1–4)

Legends about relationships among gods and mortal women and among goddesses and men, resulting in the propagation of demigods, are widespread and familiar subjects of pagan mythology. The version presented here, highly condensed from what was once a well-known and fuller story, adds to the ancient myths the Israelite notion that the offspring of such unnatural unions may possess heroic stature but are devoid of divine qualities. They are flesh and blood like all humans, and their life span is severely limited

ס ³²וַיְהִי־בֶן בְּרֵחַמֶּשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֹּלֶד
נָח אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת׃

וַיְהִי בֵּי־הַחַל הָאָדָם לְרַב עַל־פְּנֵי
הָאָדָמָה וּבָנוֹת יֻלְּדוּ לָהֶם׃ ²וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־
הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הָנָה
וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ׃
³וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לֹא־יִדּוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם
לְעַלְמָם בְּשַׁגְם הוּא בָשָׂר וְהָיוּ יָמָיו מֵאָה

compared to the individuals listed in chapter 5.

1. men The Hebrew word *ha-adam*, literally, “the man,” is here a collective: humankind.

2. the divine beings The definite article points to a familiar term. The context in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7 indicates that the reference is to the angelic host, the celestial entourage of God, an image drawn from human kings surrounded by their courtiers.

The Hebrew for “divine beings” here is *b’nei* (which also can mean “sons of” or “children of”) *elohim* (which usually is translated as “God”). The word *b’nei* often means “members of a category,” so that the Hebrew phrase here means “members of the category of divine beings” (*elohim*). Similarly, *b’nei yisra-el* does not mean “the children of Israel,” but Israelites.

saw how beautiful Driven by lust, their only criterion in the selection of mates was external beauty, not character.

took wives The Hebrew phrase לקח אשה is the regular term for the beginning of the marriage relationship. There is no hint of violent possession, nor is there any condemnation of the women involved.

3. My breath The “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7) that issues from God. Its presence or absence determines life and death.

in man The reference here is not only to the offspring of these unnatural unions but also to all humankind, because disorder has been introduced into God’s creation.

flesh They are not divine, despite their non-human paternity. “Flesh” connotes human frailty.

CHAPTER 6

2. the divine beings . . . took wives Traditional commentators (Onkelos, Rashi, Hirsch)

strive to avoid the mythologic implications of this account. They understand the “divine beings” to be the noble descendants of Seth, intermarrying with the descendants of Cain

one hundred and twenty years.”⁴ It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth—when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.

⁵The LORD saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. ⁶And the LORD regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. ⁷The LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them.” ⁸But Noah found favor with the LORD.

one hundred and twenty years The duration of human life is reduced, a mark of moral and spiritual degeneration.

4. the Nephilim appeared on earth The offspring of the divine beings. These Nephilim—the etymology of the word is unknown—generated other Nephilim in the course of their married lives. Some suggest that the term means “fallen ones,” a reference to the later myth of “the fallen angels.”

heroes of old Their heroic exploits were the subject of many popular tales.

PROLOGUE TO THE FLOOD (vv. 5–8)

Humankind has abused God’s gift of life and is now deep in moral decadence. The narrator asserts that the universal cataclysm into which the

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

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

world is about to be plunged is not the result of blind fate or divine caprice but of God’s judgment made inevitable by human evil.

5. every plan devised by his mind Literally, “every product of the thoughts of his heart.” In the Bible, the heart is not only the organ of feeling but also of thought, understanding, and volition.

6. regretted The ascription of human emotions to God is a feature of biblical narrative.

saddened God’s decision is made in sorrow, not in anger.

8. Noah Mention of him without further detail presupposes the reader’s knowledge of 5:28–29.

found favor The reason for this is given in verse 9 and in 7:1.

who offered physical attractiveness but no moral standards. Whatever the ancient roots of this story, no Jewish commentator accepts the notion of a sexual union between divine beings and mortals, giving rise to a semidivine race.

3. one hundred and twenty years The purpose of this verse may be to anticipate the question “Why don’t people here live as long as people did in earlier chapters?” The ideal, ulti-

mate lifespan remains 120, exemplified by Moses (Deut. 34:7) and retained in the blessing “May you live a full life, to 120.”

In the opening verses of this *parashah*, God created a pristine, orderly world and declared it “very good.” By the end of the *parashah*, 10 generations later, that world has been so defiled by human depravity that God sees no alternative but to wash it clean and begin the human race anew with Noah.

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

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

9 אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדֵת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צְדִיק תָּמִים
הָיָה בְּדוֹרֵתוֹ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ:
10 וַיּוֹלֵד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנָיִם אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־
חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת׃
11 וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא

NOAH AND THE FLOOD (6:9–9:17)

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

THE INDICTMENT (6:9–13)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

הָאָרֶץ חָמָס: ¹²וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה בִּיַד־בְּשָׂר אֶת־דִּרְכוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: ¹³ס וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַץ בְּלִבְשָׂר בָּא לִפְנֵי פִי־מַלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: ¹⁴עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי־גֹפֶר קָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְכִפַּרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבִּיַת וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר: ¹⁵וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אַמָּה אָרְךָ הַתֵּבָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה רְחֹבָהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אַמָּה

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

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

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

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

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

INSTRUCTIONS FOR BUILDING THE ARK

(vv. 14–16)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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