

מקראות גדולות

The
COMMENTATORS'
BIBLE

THE JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

NUMBERS במדבר

*With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of
the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH, the questions of Abarbanel,
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides,
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of
Behor Shor, Kimhi, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno*

Edited, translated, and annotated by

MICHAEL CARASIK



2011 • 5771

NJPS ¹⁰And each shall retain his sacred donations: each priest shall keep what is given to him.

¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ¹²Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

If any man's wife has gone astray and broken faith with him ¹³in that a man has had carnal relations with her unbeknown to her husband, and she keeps secret the fact that she has defiled herself without being forced, and there is no witness against

RASHI **10 Each shall retain his sacred donations.** Since these donations belong to the priests and the Levites, you might think they could simply come and take them by force. In fact, the owners retain the right of conveying this benefit to the priest of their choice. The Sifrei and other texts have many midrashim on this subject. For example, one who withholds his tithes and does not contribute them "retains" only the tithes: eventually his field will produce only one-tenth of what it used to produce. **Each priest shall keep what is given to him.** Here too the midrash interprets the literal words, "whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his" (OJPS), to mean that whenever anyone gives the priest what is due him, great wealth shall be "his"—the original owner's.

12 If any man's wife has gone astray.

Notice what leads in to this topic: "each shall retain his sacred donations" (v. 10). "If you withhold the priest's donations, I swear you will be forced to come to him, in order to bring your straying wife for this ritual!" The Hebrew idiom for "any" man is "a man, a man," teaching you that in fact she is wronging two "men"—her husband, here on earth, and God, the "man of war" (Exod. 15:3) on high. The verb "to go astray" has the same letters as the verb "to be a fool" (but with *sin* instead of *shin*), which (according to the Sages) shows that people do not commit adultery without a spirit of foolishness having entered them: "He who commits adultery is devoid of sense" (Prov. 6:32). But the straightforward sense of the expression is as the English translations have it: [C] She has "deviated" from the paths of modesty and aroused suspicion in her husband. This too is evident from the use of the verb in Proverbs: "Turn away from it" (Prov. 4:15); "Let your mind not wander down her ways" (Prov. 7:25). **And broken faith with him.** What is the nature of this breaking of faith? "A man has had carnal relations with her" (v. 13).

13 A man has had carnal relations. A man, and not a boy or an animal. **With her.** It is her sexual activity that prohibits her to her husband. If her husband has relations with

[C] The text from "The Hebrew idiom" to this point is missing in some texts and marked as an addition in others.

NAHMANIDES **10 Each shall retain his sacred donations.** The correct translation is that of OJPS: "every man's hallowed things shall be his." Any of them that he does not instruct to be given to a priest remains his, and he is permitted to use them even though they have been designated "sacred." **Each priest shall keep what is given to him.** Again OJPS translates the Hebrew more precisely: "Whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his." Even after he has given donations to a priest, the original owner still retains some right to them—if only to insist that they are the personal property of the priest to whom he gave them and of no other. The second tithe, the fruit of the fourth year, and the animal tithes, [B] which the text says are "holy to the LORD" (Lev. 27:32), all remain the owner's property. But the other sacred donations (those specified in ch. 18) belong to the priests to whom they are given. Again, it is not that the priest has any right to seize them. We must therefore deduce that the owner enjoys the right to give them to whichever priest he likes. This is the straightforward sense of the verse; this is the opinion of Onkelos; and this is how it is explained in the Sifrei.

[B] Lev. 27:30, 19:24, and 27:32, respectively.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **10 And each shall retain his sacred donations.** Each priest. Priests have the right to go to Jerusalem and offer their own sacrifices; they do not have to give them to the priests on duty at the time (Bekhor Shor).

12 If any man's wife has gone astray and broken faith with him. This passage also is part of banishing dispute and contention; as political philosophy makes clear, peace in the family is a prerequisite for peace among the people as a whole (Gersonides). "Gone astray" from modest behavior (Sforno).

13 She has defiled herself. The third person feminine singular pronoun "she" is ordinarily written in the Torah like the masculine pronoun והיא; this is one of only 11 cases where it is spelled הוּיא, as it normally is in the Bible and elsewhere in Hebrew. See also

OJPS ¹⁰And every man's hallowed things shall be his: whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his.

¹¹And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: ¹²Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them:

If any man's wife go aside, and act unfaithfully against him, ¹³and a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of her husband, she being defiled secretly, and there be no witness against her, neither she

אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרִיבוּ לְכַתֵּן לוֹ יְהוָה: 10 וְאִישׁ
אֶת-קַדְשׁוֹ לוֹ יְהוָה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִתֵּן לְכַתֵּן
לוֹ יְהוָה: פ רביעי

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: 12 דַּבֵּר
אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי-יִתְשָׁטֵף אִשְׁתּוֹ וּמַעַלָּה בּוֹ
מַעַל: 13 וְשָׁכַב אִישׁ אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה שְׁכַבְתָּ-וֹרֵעַ
וְנֶעְלַם מֵעֵינָי אִישָׁהּ וְנִסְתַּרְתָּה וְהָיָה
נִסְמָאָה וְעַל אֵין זָכָה וְהוּא לֹא נִתְפָּשָׁה:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + What is the connection between the earlier part of this chapter and the wife who has "gone astray" (v. 12)? (This too would seem to belong in Leviticus rather than in Numbers.) + How can the Torah assert that this woman has "broken faith" (v. 12) with her husband, and that "she has defiled herself" (v. 13), when this is all "unbeknown to her husband ... and there is no witness against her"?

RASHBAM **10 Each priest shall keep what is given to him.** Literally, "whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his" (OJPS). "His" being "the priest's"; the reference is to donations of a voluntary nature, such as things that are "proscribed for the Lord" and the like, when they are not fit for sacrifice. These are to be given directly to a priest. But the midrash understands the phrase to refer to obligatory gifts. Whatever one gives to the priest "shall be his," that is, his own—it will return to him in the form of great wealth. Since the expression "it shall be his" appears superfluous according to a straightforward understanding of the text, they interpreted it midrashically in this way.

12 If any man's wife has gone astray. "Avoid it; do not pass through it; turn away from it; pass it by" (Prov. 4:15). Hosea has a noun from the same root: "They that fall away are gone deep in making slaughter" (Hosea 5:2).

13 Without being forced. Literally, "neither she be taken in the act" (OJPS), but

IBN EZRA **10 And each shall retain his sacred donations.** That is, whatever "sacred donations" (v. 9) anyone sets aside remain "his" in that he retains the right to give them to whichever priest he likes.

12 If any man's wife has gone astray. Literally the verb means to "go aside" from the straight path (see Prov. 4:15). This topic follows naturally from the previous one because a woman who strays has **broken faith** with her husband just as the transgressor of the previous passage did with the Lord.

13 Carnal relations. Literally, "seed" relations—those relations whose essential

NJPS her—¹⁴but a fit of jealousy comes over him and he is wrought up about the wife who has defiled herself; or if a fit of jealousy comes over one and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself—¹⁵the man shall bring his wife to the priest. And he shall bring as an offering for her one-tenth of an ephah of barley flour. No oil shall be poured upon it and no frankincense shall be laid on it, for it is a meal offering of jealousy, a meal offering of remembrance which recalls wrongdoing.

RASHI another woman—even with her sister, though that is prohibited—that does not prohibit him from having relations with her. **Unbeknown to her husband.** Literally, “it be hid from the eyes of her husband” (OJPS)—exempting a woman whose husband is blind. [D] We learn further that if he actually sees it and turns a blind eye to it, the water of bitterness will simply fail to test her. **And she keeps secret the fact that she has defiled herself.** Rather, “and she has met secretly with the other man for a long enough time to have defiled herself.” **Without being forced.** Literally, “she was not seized.” But NJPS is correct that this does not apply if she was “seized” by the other man. Compare “he seizes her and lies with her” (Deut. 22:28). **There is no witness against her.** There is no witness that she is defiled, but there are witnesses that she met the other man secretly. But if there is even one witness that she is defiled, we do not bother making her drink. In such a case, even a single witness is believed.

14 A fit of jealousy comes over him. Before his wife meets secretly with another man. **He is wrought up about the wife who has defiled herself.** Literally, “he jealoused his wife.” Our Sages understand this to mean that he warns her, “Do not meet secretly with So-and-So.” **Or if a fit of jealousy comes over one and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself.** In this case, he is wrought up because she has ignored his warning. But it is not known whether or not she has defiled herself.

15 Barley flour. Not of wheat, and not of the fine flour from which meal offerings are ordinarily brought. She acted like an animal, so her offering is brought from animal food. **No oil shall be poured upon it.** Nothing should be done to embellish her offering. For oil gives light and she did what she did in darkness. **No frankincense shall be laid on it.** The Matriarchs are called “frankincense”—“I will betake me to the mount of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense” (Song 4:6)—and she has departed from their ways. [E] **It is a meal offering of jealousy.** Literally, “of jealousies.” She has aroused two jealousies—that of

[D] This much of the comment to v. 13 may also possibly be an addition. [E] In rabbinic thinking, “mount” can refer to the Patriarchs and “hill” to the Matriarchs.

NAHMANIDES **15 No oil shall be poured upon it and no frankincense shall be laid on it, for it is a meal offering of jealousy.** See Rashi’s comments, which are taken from rabbinic literature. As all the commentators point out, this offering is one of punishment and is therefore downgraded from wheat to barley and not accompanied by oil or frankincense, whereas a freewill meal offering is brought of choice wheat flour, with oil and frankincense, to have God look favorably upon it. In my opinion, however, the reference to it as “a meal offering of jealousy” alludes to the beginning of the verse. The husband brings this offering not “for” his wife (as the translations have it), but “on account of” her—because he wants to highlight her transgression. It is not right, therefore, for her to bring it from her own possessions. It is the husband who brings the offering, to have the Lord satisfy his jealousy and take his revenge for him. The use of barley, *se’orim*, is meant to evoke the storm, *se’arah*, of God’s anger—“Lo, the storm of the LORD goes forth in fury, a whirling storm, it shall whirl down upon the heads of the wicked” (Jer. 23:19)—as well as the “loaf of barley bread ... whirling through the Midianite camp” in the dream overheard by Gideon in Judg. 7:13, which too was interpreted as a symbol of stormy turmoil. The “earthen vessel” of v. 17 is likewise symbolic of the fact that the woman could be broken like a potter’s vessel, and the earth taken from the floor is symbolic of the fact that she is dust, and to dust she will return. Saying “it” using the masculine pronoun (rather than the feminine

OJPS be taken in the act; ¹⁴and the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled; or if the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be not defiled; ¹⁵then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest, and shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon; for it is a meal-offering of jealousy, a meal-offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance.

RASHBAM NJPS is correct that “taken” here does not mean “caught” but “forced.” If she was forced to have a private meeting with another man, this procedure does not apply. **There is no witness against her.** No witness that she has committed adultery.

IBN EZRA nature (as understood by all) involves “seed,” that is, the procreation of offspring. **She keeps secret the fact.** NJPS translates this phrase correctly. **Without being forced.** Rather, she was not “taken in the act” (OJPS). Note that NJPS must rearrange the clauses to permit its mistranslation: The phrase **there is no witness against her** precedes our phrase. This situation applies even if there is not a single witness to cast suspicion on her. But it presumes that she was not “taken in the act” by two (male) witnesses. Even if she had been caught by two women, that would be enough to put her under suspicion.

14 A fit of jealousy comes over him. A “fit” or “spirit” (OJPS) is usually feminine but here it is masculine. As 1 Kings 19:11 shows, this Hebrew word can have either or both genders. The fit “coming over him” means simply that it comes up in his thoughts.

15 The man shall bring his wife. Whether or not she is willing. **As an offering for her.** The Hebrew might also mean “as an offering along with her.” **Barley flour.** The Sages said: She acted in an animalistic fashion; let her offer animal food. Note that a freewill meal offering is brought of choice wheat flour to have God look favorably upon it. This offering, however, brings a transgression (if there was one) to

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS v. 14 (Masorah). Once she strays from modest behavior (v. 12), it is typical of the evil impulse that she goes from one evil to the next (*Sforno*). **Without being forced.** If she was forced, she is not forbidden to her husband—unless her husband is a priest (Bekhor Shor). **There is no witness against her.** The word “even” in Rashi’s comment “But if there is even one witness that she is defiled” is a scribal error, as the discussion in the Talmud confirms (Hizkuni).

15 He shall bring as an offering for her. This offering cannot possibly expiate a transgression that she has not admitted committing; “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination” (Prov. 21:27). The man is expiating his own sin of not reproving her for her loose behavior, leading to a situation where God’s awesome and honored Name is rubbed off into the water (Hizkuni). **Barley flour.** The

וְעֵבֶר עָלָיו רֹחַ-קִנְיָהּ וְקָנָא אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ
וְהָיָא נְטִמְמָהּ אוּ-עֵבֶר עָלָיו רֹחַ-קִנְיָהּ
וְקָנָא אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיָא לֹא נְטִמְמָהּ
וְהָבִיָא הָאִישׁ אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן
וְהָבִיָא אֶת-קִרְבָּנָהּ עָלֶיהָ עֲשִׂירֵת הָאֵיפָה
קִמַּח שְׁעָרִים לֹא-יֵצֵק עָלָיו שֶׁמֶן וְלֹא-יִתֵּן
עָלָיו לֶבְנֵה פִי-מִנְחָת קָנְאָת הוּא * מִנְחָת
וּפְרוֹן מִזְבַּחַת עֹן:

15. נ סבירין ומטעין "היא"

NJPS 16The priest shall bring her forward and have her stand before the LORD. 17The priest shall take sacral water in an earthen vessel and, taking some of the earth that is on the floor of the Tabernacle, the priest shall put it into the water. 18After he has made the woman stand before the LORD, the priest shall bare the woman's head and place upon her hands the meal offering of remembrance, which is a meal offering of jealousy. And in the priest's hands shall be the water of bitterness that

OJPS 16And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD. 17And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water. 18And the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and let the hair of the woman's head go loose, and put the meal-offering of memorial in her hands, which is the meal-offering of jealousy; and the priest shall have in his hand the water of bitterness that causeth

וְהִקְרִיב אֹתָהּ הַכֹּהֵן וְהִעֲמֶנּוּהָ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: 17 וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִיָּמִים קְדוּשִׁים בְּכֶלִי-חָרָשׁ וּמִיַּד הָעֶפֶר אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּקִרְקַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִקַּח הַכֹּהֵן וְנָתַן אֶל-הַיָּמִים: 18 וְהִעֲמִיד הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וּפְרַע אֶת-רֹאשׁ הָאִשָּׁה וְנָתַן עַל-בִּפְתִּיהָ אֶת מִנְחַת הַזִּבְחֹן מִנְחַת קִנְאָת הָרָא וּבְיַד הַכֹּהֵן יִהְיוּ מִי הַמַּרְרִים הַמְאֲרָרִים:

RASHI God and that of her husband. "It" refers to the laver, as is shown by the gender of the pronoun.

17 Sacral water. Water that has been sanctified by putting it in the laver. The laver was made of the copper "from the mirrors of the women who performed tasks at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (Exod. 38:8), and she has departed from their ways. For even as slaves in Egypt, they had relations with their husbands "under the apple tree" (Song 8:5). [F] But she broke faith with her husband and can be put to the test by this water. **An earthen vessel.** She gave the adulterer fancy wine to drink from fancy goblets. So she must drink the waters of bitterness from a cheap, cracked piece of earthenware.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + Why does v. 18 repeat the statement of v. 16 that the priest has the woman "stand before the LORD"? (See OJPS; NJPS is misleading here.)

18 After he has made the woman stand before the LORD. The text simply says again (as in v. 16) that he makes her stand before the Lord (see OJPS). They would move her from place to place to tire her out and disorient her so that she would confess. "Before the LORD" means in the Gate of Nicanor, the eastern gate of the court, the gate through which everyone enters the Temple. **The priest shall bare the woman's head.** Rather, he shall "let the hair of the woman's head go loose" (OJPS), unraveling her braids in order to make her look disheveled. It is from here that we learn that it is disgraceful for Jewish women to go about bareheaded. **And place upon her hands the meal offering.** Again, this is to tire her out so that she will become disoriented and confess. This would prevent the priest from having to desecrate God's name by rubbing it off into the water of bitterness (v. 23). **The water of bitterness.** That is, the water that would embitter her. **That induces the spell.** Literally, the "cursing" water; compare the "prickling briars and lacerating thorns" of Ezek. 28:24. It is definitely "cursing" water and not "cursed" water, for

RASHBAM 17 Sacral water. From the laver that the priests use for washing. [C] See Exod. 38:8 and the comments there.

IBN EZRA His attention, so it is downgraded from wheat to barley. Moreover, it is not accompanied by oil or frankincense.

16 The priest shall bring her forward. No! The priest shall bring "it," the meal offering, forward. **And have her stand before the LORD.** And set it in front of the altar.

17 Sacral water. From the laver, where it would already have been sanctified. **The earth that is on the floor.** Rather, "the" earth that was known to be "in the floor," that is, under a special spot in the floor.

18 The priest shall bare the woman's head. NJPS translates accurately, but I would say OJPS is a bit closer to what the Hebrew really means. **The water of bitterness.** In my opinion, this unusual phrase really reads "the water of bitter ..." with a word missing. If that is correct, it is obvious how the trick was done. [C] It might also be that the expression is intended to indicate that the water will *become* bitter if she proves to be guilty. Compare Job 22:6, "You strip the clothes off the naked," where of course they are not naked until after the clothes are stripped off. The evidence for

[C] In or with the earth from under the floor, something was added that caused this effect.

NAHMANIDES pronoun appropriate for a meal offering) means that "it" is the flour. There is a mystery to this, since in v. 18, when it is upon the woman's hands, the meal offering of jealousy is once again referred to with the appropriate feminine pronoun. Notice that in v. 18 the phrase is "the meal offering of remembrance, which is a meal offering of jealousy," reversing the order in our verse, which says that it "recalls wrongdoing."

17 An earthen vessel. See the previous comment.

18 And in the priest's hands shall be the water of bitterness that induces the spell. The commentators say this is called "water of bitterness" because it *will* be bitter for her (if she has indeed sinned)—the Lord will embitter her life and the water will "curse" her (see OJPS). The Sifrei says essentially the same thing. But the Gemara says that the priest puts something bitter into the water to "stir" her to repentance—as if the verse read *orror* with an *ו* rather than *arrer* ("spell-inducing") with an *א*. But if this were so, v. 24 should say not "the spell-inducing water ... to bring on bitterness" but "the bitter water ... to induce the spell." The Sifrei also understands v. 23 to mean that it is the written curse rubbed off into the water that makes it bitter. In my view,

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS straightforward explanation is that God "visits" guilt upon the sinner (Exod. 20:5), and this word is translated into Aramaic with the verb *sa'er*. Barley (*se'orim*) of our verse is a pun on that Aramaic word (Bekhor Shor). The man brings barley as her offering because he wants the Lord to be angry with her (Abarbanel).

16 Have her stand before the LORD. More precisely, "have her stop." He would tell her, "Wait here until I come back!" Then he would go into the Tabernacle and get the earth for the water (Bekhor Shor). It is this phrase that means he brings the woman forward (Abarbanel).

17 Sacral water ... earth. The straightforward explanation of this combination is that water symbolizes life and earth symbolizes death—for if she has sinned she will return to dust. But a midrash adds that she is a creature made of water and earth (Bekhor Shor). The earth is taken from a sacred spot to increase the woman's fear and decrease the likelihood that she will treat it casually (Gersonides).

18 After he has made the woman stand before the LORD. Here, unlike v. 16, it simply means "he makes her stand before the Lord" (Bekhor Shor). He makes her stand east of the Holy of Holies, facing west, toward it (Gersonides). **The priest shall bare the woman's head.** R. Judah says that if she had beautiful hair the priest would not do this, lest he become attracted to her (Bekhor Shor). **The water of bitterness.** It is impossible that the expression is intended to indicate that the water will *become* bitter. What if she proves to be innocent? (Gersonides).

NJPS induces the spell. ¹⁹The priest shall adjure the woman, saying to her, "If no man has lain with you, if you have not gone astray in defilement while married to your husband, be immune to harm from this water of bitterness that induces the spell. ²⁰But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and have defiled yourself, if a man other than your husband has had carnal relations with you"—²¹here the priest shall administer the curse of adjuration to the woman, as the priest goes on to say to the woman—"may the LORD make you a curse and an imprecation among your people, as the LORD causes your thigh to sag and your

OJPS the curse. ¹⁹And the priest shall cause her to swear, and shall say unto the woman: "If no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness, being under thy husband, be thou free from this water of bitterness that causeth the curse; ²⁰but if thou hast gone aside, being under thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee besides thy husband—²¹then the priest shall cause the woman to swear with the oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman—the LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to fall away, and thy belly

וְהִשְׁבִּיעַ אֹתָהּ הַכֹּהֵן וְאָמַר אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה
אִם־לֹא שָׁכַב אִישׁ אֹתָךְ וְאִם־לֹא שָׁטִית
טְמֵאָה תַחַת אִישׁ הַנָּקִי מִמֵּנִי הַמְּרִים
הַמְּאַרְרִים הָאֵלֶּה: ²⁰ וְאָתָּ בִּי שָׁטִית תַּחַת
אִישׁ וְכִי נִטְמָאת וַיִּתֵּן אִישׁ בְּךָ אֶת־
שִׁכְבְּתוֹ מִבְּלַעְדֵי אִישׁ: ²¹ וְהִשְׁבִּיעַ
הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה בְּשֹׁבְעַת הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמַר
הַכֹּהֵן לְאִשָּׁה יִתֵּן יְהוָה אוֹתָךְ לְאֵלֶּה
וְלִשְׁבַּעַת בְּתוֹךְ עַמְּךָ בְּתַת יְהוָה אֶת־

RASHI it is "sacral" (v. 17). Onkelos too makes clear in his translation that it is "cursing" water and not "cursed" water. It makes its curse visible in her body.

19 The priest shall adjure the woman.

Literally, he shall "make her swear." And what does he make her swear? That no man has lain with her and so forth. **Be immune to harm.** "If you did not go astray, *hinnaki*, be immune to harm. But if you did go astray, *hinki*, be strangled." For we deduce the positive ("if you did go astray") from the negative stated here. But in capital cases, it is a commandment to start from the presumption of innocence.

20 But if you have gone astray. The word *ki* can sometimes mean "since," but here it clearly means "if."

21 The curse of adjuration. More precisely, "the oath that invokes the curse" (compare OJPS). **May the LORD make you a curse.** So that everyone will curse others by invoking your name. "May what happened to So-and-So happen to you!" **And an imprecation.** And they will invoke this imprecation on themselves. "If it is not so, may what happened to So-and-So happen to me!" It is like what Isaiah says: "You shall leave behind a name by which My chosen ones shall curse" (Isa. 65:15). For the righteous invoke imprecations by reference to the punishment of the wicked. Blessing works the same way. "All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you" (Gen. 12:3); "By you shall

RASHBAM **21 A curse and an imprecation.** When someone forces another to take an oath, he says to him, "I hereby

IBN EZRA this is that in v. 24 the waters "may enter into her to bring on bitterness"—the oaths of v. 23 turn it into "spell-inducing water," making it bitter after having originally been sweet.

19 The priest shall adjure the woman.

He shall make her say, "Amen, amen!" **If no man has lain with you.** No other man, forcibly. **If you have not gone astray.** Willingly. **Be immune to harm.** It is as much as to say, "You shall be immune" or "free" (OJPS) from guilt. Similarly, God tells Moses, "Die" (Deut. 32:50), meaning, as NJPS translates there, "You shall die."

20 But if you have gone astray. "In defilement" (v. 19).

21 The priest shall administer the curse of adjuration. "Administer" is the same Hebrew verb as "adjure" in v. 19 (see OJPS). The difference seems to be that in v. 19 he makes her swear by the Name and here he makes her swear in order to invoke the curse. **As the LORD causes your thigh to sag and your belly to distend.** The belly and the thigh are anatomical neighbors

NAHMANIDES the straightforward sense of the procedure described here is that when the woman drinks the water, it tastes like ordinary water to her. It is only after the water enters her system that, if she has defiled herself, the water "stirs her up" and she experiences the bitterness, both in her belly and in her mouth. V. 27 says this plainly. The water acts like other liquids that bring on uneasiness and vomiting in those who drink them, causing them to experience extreme bitterness. Then "her belly shall distend and her thigh shall sag." They are called waters "that cause the curse" (again, see OJPS) because of the writing of v. 23, which "curses" her. The commentators understand the construct form "waters of" here to be used in place of the absolute form (the reverse phenomenon is found in "the water was knee deep" of Ezek. 47:4). Ibn Ezra takes the construct form literally, but I think v. 24, which says that the water will "become" bitter, demonstrates that he is incorrect.

19 If no man has lain with you, if you have not gone astray in defilement. These are not two separate conditions but a single condition repeated in other words. (Her husband, after all, is a man and has lain with her.) In order to read them as two different conditions, we must assume that "man" of the first phrase is to be read as if it had the definite article: if "the" man has not lain with you, and further if you have not gone astray with any other man. This is how our Sages read "Amen, amen!" of v. 22—"I have not lain with him, I have not lain with any other man."

20 But if you have gone astray. As NJPS makes clear, the priest's words continue with "may the LORD make you a curse" of v. 21. The beginning of v. 21, which interrupts the priest's words, repeats the beginning of v. 19 as a result of the length of the conditions given in our verse. They directly introduce the priest's words in that verse, which are the curse.

21 The priest shall administer the curse of adjuration. Ibn Ezra's comment is not correct. One does not swear by the Name to a conditional "if."

Nowhere but here in all of the rulings of the Torah is there anything that is dependent on a miracle. But this is indeed miraculous and supernatural, though it is done for Israel on a regular basis—when most of the Jews do fulfill God's will. For "the Lord desires, for

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 The priest shall adjure the woman, saying to her.** More precisely, "the priest shall cause her to swear" (OJPS)—her and her alone, not together with another suspected woman nor even with her own maidservant, to prevent them from encouraging each other to be defiant (Bekhor Shor). **If no man has lain with you.** On this occasion (Sforno). **If you have not gone astray.** One is required to start with the presumption of innocence, which she certainly deserves (Gersonides). And you have not gone astray on previous occasions (Sforno).

21 Causes your thigh to sag and your belly to distend. The thigh is mentioned first, since it began the sin—when she spread her legs for this adulterer (Gersonides). "Causes your thigh to sag" means causing it to fall, so that she cannot walk (Abarbanel).

NJPS belly to distend; ²²may this water that induces the spell enter your body, causing the belly to distend and the thigh to sag." And the woman shall say, "Amen, amen!"

²³The priest shall put these curses down in writing and rub it off into the water of bitterness. ²⁴He is to make the woman drink the water of bitterness that induces the spell, so that the spell-inducing water may enter into her to bring on bitterness. ²⁵Then the priest shall take from the woman's hand the meal offering of jealousy, elevate the meal offering before the LORD, and present it on the altar. ²⁶The priest shall scoop out of the meal offering a token part of it and turn it into smoke on the altar. Last, he shall make the woman drink the water.

RASHI Israel invoke blessings, saying: "God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh" (Gen. 48:20). **Your thigh.** In this verse, the curse, the thigh precedes the belly, because that was where she began the transgression.

22 Causing the belly to distend and the thigh to sag. The water will distend the belly and cause the thigh to sag. But since this curse has already been invoked against the woman in v. 21, the belly and thigh in this verse must be those of the man who had sex with her. The *patah* under the ל of the two infinitives shows that they are in fact Hiphil, causative, forms. You will find comparable forms in Exod. 13:21 and Deut. 1:33. **Amen, amen!** This represents her acceptance. Amen to the curse and amen to the imprecation; amen with regard to this man with whom I am accused of committing adultery, and amen with regard to any other man.

24 He is to make the woman drink. The procedure is not performed in this order, for the meal offering is presented first. The text is telling you the *reason* he makes the woman drink: **So that the spell-inducing water may enter into her.** Up to this point only the belly and thigh have been mentioned; now we realize that the water enters "into her"—all of her. Why then are the belly and thigh singled out for specific mention? Since the transgression began with them, the punishment too begins with them. **To bring on bitterness.** Rather, to "become bitter" (OJPS).

25 Elevate the meal offering. Rather, "wave" it (OJPS). He moves it back and forth, up and down. She too "waves" it with him, for her hands are resting on the priest's. **Present it.** This refers to bringing it to the southwest corner of the altar, as with all other meal offerings, before the token part is scooped out.

26 A token part of it. By being turned into smoke on the altar, the part that is scooped out causes the offering to be noticed on high.

NAHMANIDES righteousness' sake" (Isa. 42:21) to discipline women so that they do not behave promiscuously (as they do among the other peoples) and to cleanse Israel of bastardy so that they can be worthy of having the Shekhinah rest upon them. But He decreed a halt to this process once they began to transgress. Our tradition says that this ritual of the waters of bitterness was halted when adultery became common. Hosea 4:14 says, "I will not punish their daughters for fornicating nor their daughters-in-law for committing adultery; for they themselves turn aside with whores and sacrifice with prostitutes," but this does not mean that women are cleared of transgression simply because their husbands are also committing adultery. What it means is that God would no longer perform the great miracle that is the essential part of this ritual, which was done for them because of their status as a holy people—though they did not comprehend God's graciousness in doing it for them and had no desire for it. That is why the Hosea verse ends by saying, "A people that is without sense must stumble," that is, such a people is ensnared by its own foolishness. This is the point of the rabbinic reading of v. 31: Not "The man shall be clear of guilt; but that woman shall suffer for her guilt" but "if the man is clear of guilt then the woman shall suffer for her guilt"—the water does miraculously determine whether or not she is guilty. But if he is not himself clear of guilt, it doesn't. For the man to be "clear of guilt" means not having intercourse with her once he has accused her. Others explain it more broadly—if the man himself has ever performed a forbidden sexual act, then the water of bitterness has no effect on his wife. The law would seem to indicate that even if his children committed adultery and he did not rebuke them, the water has no effect on his wife. The bottom line is that the action of this water is miraculous, a mark of great honor to the Jews.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **22 Amen, amen!** This expression also occurs only in Neh. 8:6 (Masorah). "Amen" to "causing the belly to distend" and "Amen" to "causing the thigh to sag" (Hizkuni). "Amen," let it be as you say if I am defiled, and "Amen," let it be as you say that I be immune to harm if I am not defiled. If she will not say "Amen, amen!" it is as much as admitting the charge (Abarbanel). **24 The water of bitterness.** It may be that it is bitter because of the ink from the curses that were rubbed off into it (Abarbanel).

OJPS to swell; ²²and this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, and make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to fall away"; and the woman shall say: "Amen, Amen."

²³And the priest shall write these curses in a scroll, and he shall blot them out into the water of bitterness. ²⁴And he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that causeth the curse; and the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her and become bitter. ²⁵And the priest shall take the meal-offering of jealousy out of the woman's hand, and shall wave the meal-offering before the LORD, and bring it unto the altar. ²⁶And the priest shall take a handful of the meal-offering, as the memorial-part thereof, and make it smoke upon the altar, and afterward shall make the woman drink the water.

RASHBAM adjure you by the name of God to swear that you are telling the truth in this matter, so that if you lie to me, you shall be cursed like So-and-So whose belly distended and whose thigh sagged!"

IBN EZRA of the scene of the crime. "Distend" means that it shall be bloated. But the Hebrew word is not found anywhere in the Bible but in this passage (see also v. 22 and v. 27).

22 Causing ... to sag. The normal form *l'hanpil* is contracted to *lanpil*. You will find a comparable form in Isa. 23:11. **Amen, amen!** The repetition serves to strengthen her agreement.

23 The priest shall put these curses down in writing. Literally, "in the scroll" (contrast OJPS). They had a special scroll reserved for the purpose of writing these curses.

26 A token part. More literally, "the memorial-part" (OJPS). The part that brings her to God's attention, whether for good or ill, according to her deeds.

יִרְכֹּב וְנָפְלָת וְאֶת־בִּטְנוֹךָ צָבָה: ²²וְכָאוּ
הַמַּיִם הַמְאָרְרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּמַעֲיָה לְצַבּוֹת
בָּטֶן וְלִנְפֹל יָרֵךְ וְאִמְרָה הָאִשָּׁה אָמֵן |
אָמֵן:
²³וְכָתַב אֶת־הָאֵלֶּת הָאֵלֶּה הַפֶּהוֹן בְּסֵפֶר
וּמָחָה אֶל־מִי הַמְרִים: ²⁴וְהִשְׁקֶה אֶת־
הָאִשָּׁה אֶת־יְמֵי הַמְרִים הַמְאָרְרִים וְכָאוּ
בָּה הַמַּיִם הַמְאָרְרִים לְמַרִּים: ²⁵וְלָקַח
הַפֶּהוֹן מִיַּד הָאִשָּׁה אֶת מִנְחַת הַקִּנְיָאֹת
וְהִנִּיף אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְהִקְרִיב
אֹתָה אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: ²⁶וְקָמַץ הַפֶּהוֹן מִן־
הַמִּנְחָה אֶת־אֶזְבֵּיכָה וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
וְאָחַר יִשְׁקֶה אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֶת־הַמַּיִם:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + Why is the water described variously as "the water of bitterness that induces the spell" (v. 18), then simply as "the water of bitterness" (v. 23), and finally as "the spell-inducing water" (v. 24)?

NJPS 27 Once he has made her drink the water—if she has defiled herself by breaking faith with her husband, the spell-inducing water shall enter into her to bring on bitterness, so that her belly shall distend and her thigh shall sag; and the woman shall become a curse among her people.

28 But if the woman has not defiled herself and is pure, she shall be unharmed and able to retain seed.

29 This is the ritual in cases of jealousy, when a woman goes astray while married to her husband and defiles herself, 30 or when a fit of jealousy comes over a man and he is wrought up over his wife: the woman shall be made to stand before the LORD and the priest shall carry out all this ritual with her. 31 The man shall be clear of guilt; but that woman shall suffer for her guilt.

RASHI 27 Once he has made her drink the water. The Hebrew simply repeats, "He makes her drink the water." The repetition indicates that if she refuses to

drink after the divine name has been rubbed off into the water, they insist and force her to drink, unless she admits her adultery by saying, "I am defiled." **Her belly shall distend and her thigh shall sag.** In the original curse, the thigh was mentioned first. But the water can only examine her in the same order that it enters her body. **The woman shall become a curse.** All will invoke her name as a curse, as I explained in my comment to v. 21. **Among her people.** There is no comparison between being disgraced in a place where you are known and being disgraced in a place where you are not known.

28 **But if the woman has not defiled herself.** When she met privately with the other man. **And is pure.** From any other such encounter. **She shall be unharmed.** Rather, "she shall be cleared" (OJPS). She shall not be harmed by the water of bitterness, and moreover, she shall be able to retain seed. The double form of the verb indicates that her childbearing capacity will actually increase. If she previously had difficult labor, now she will have easy labor. If she previously bore dark children, now she will bear fair ones.

30 **Or when a fit of jealousy comes over a man.** Rather, "if" a fit of jealousy comes over him. (Compare Exod. 21:36, where NJPS translates the same word as "if.") The verse is saying that if he is simply a jealous man by nature, still **the woman shall be made to stand before the LORD and the priest shall carry out all this ritual with her.**

31 **The man shall be clear of guilt.** If the water has revealed her guilt, he need not worry, "I am responsible for her death!" He shall be clear of guilt for it. Another reading: Once she has drunk the water and survived, she is again permitted to him and he is clear of guilt. For once he accuses her of adultery, she is forbidden to him.

her. If he did so, he would be guilty. After this ritual the prohibition ceases to apply. **That woman shall suffer for her guilt.** If she did indeed defile herself.

Some say the connection of this chapter with the next is that, if the suspected woman did not in fact defile herself, she will have a son who is a nazirite. In my opinion, it is a question of opposites: the woman who defiles herself is contrasted with the woman who takes a nazirite's vow. For most transgressions are caused by wine. And a woman who does not have her hair done (as a nazirite is forbidden to do) is not out looking for sex.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 27 Her thigh shall sag. Her sexual parts become disordered so that she can no longer have intercourse; it is a punishment of measure for measure (Hizkuni). **The woman shall become a curse among her people.** Those who know her (Bekhor Shor).

29 **Cases of jealousy.** The two "cases" are those where there was some basis for jealousy, as in the continuation of this verse, and those where there was none, as in v. 30, where he is so wrought up over nothing that he forbids his wife to be in the presence of some man (Sforno).

31 **The man shall be clear of guilt.** Either for causing her death (if she was guilty) or for putting her through the ordeal (if she was innocent). Under ordinary circumstances one is whipped for presenting a false accusation, but here he was trying to clear her in a situation where she was suspected of having committed a prohibited act (Bekhor Shor).

OJPS 27 And when he hath made her drink the water, then it shall come to pass, if she be defiled, and have acted unfaithfully against her husband, that the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall fall away; and the woman shall be a curse among her people.

28 And if the woman be not defiled, but be clean; then she shall be cleared, and shall conceive seed.

29 This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, being under her husband, goeth aside, and is defiled; 30 or when the spirit of jealousy cometh upon a man, and he be jealous over his wife; then shall he set the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute upon her all this law. 31 And the man shall be clear from iniquity, and that woman shall bear her iniquity.

RASHBAM 28 Able to retain seed. She will get pregnant.

31 **The man shall be clear of guilt.** He is clear of guilt despite causing her to undergo this ordeal as a result of his jealousy. Had he remained silent, he would not be clear of guilt, for if she has committed adultery he is actually forbidden to have intercourse with her. **But that woman shall suffer for her guilt.** For she betrayed him, and earned her punishment. But it seems to me that the reason the man is clear of guilt is that he could not bear to let his wife betray him.

IBN EZRA 27 **Breaking faith.** As I explained in my comment to Lev. 5:15, the Hebrew word implies something that was covered up.

28 **Able to retain seed.** Rather, she "shall conceive seed"—the Lord will give her offspring as a reward for the disgrace she was forced to undergo.

31 **The man shall be clear of guilt.** Once such a fit of jealousy has overtaken him that he thinks she has slept with another man, he is forbidden to sleep with another man.

וְהַשְׁקָה אֶת־הַיָּמִים וְהִי־תָה אֶם־נִטְמָאָה וְהַמַּעַל מֵעַל בְּאִשָּׁה וּבְאֵן כֹּה הַיָּמִים הַמְאָרְרִים לְמַרְיָם וְצַבְתָּהּ בְּטֵנָהּ וְנִפְלָה יֶרֶכֶהּ וְהִי־תָה הָאִשָּׁה לְאַלֶּה בְּקָרֵב עִמָּה׃ 28 וְאִם־לֹא נִטְמָאָה הָאִשָּׁה וְיִטְהַרָה הָיָא וְנִקְתָּהּ וְנִזְרָעָה יָרַע׃ 29 וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הַקְּנָאֹת אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁטָה אִשָּׁה תִּחַת אִישָׁה וְנִטְמָאָה׃ 30 אֵן אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּעֲבָר עָלָיו רִיחַ קִנְאָה וְקִנְאֵת אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְהִעֲמִיד אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְעָשָׂה לָּהּ הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־כֹּל־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת׃ 31 וְנִקְהָ הָאִישׁ מֵעַן וְהָאִשָּׁה הִלּוּא תִּשָּׂא אֶת־ עֶוְנָהּ׃ פ