David Block: Welcome to Parshat Noach; a parsha with so much action, it's easy to miss the plot. Immanuel Shalev: Don't worry we're here to help you out!

David Block: Really quickly, here is what happens in our parsha.

# Noah

and the

# Story of

the

# Flood

David Block: God tells Noah that He is going to destroy the world, and that he should take the animals and build an ark. Noah builds the ark, survives the flood, and God makes a rainbow. Noah plants a vineyard and something shady happens with one of his sons. Then they all have kids and some people decide to build a tower. God doesn't like the tower and scatters them.

Immanuel Shalev: And the question is, are these just stand-alone episodes mish-mashed together? Or is there a bigger picture here that connects all the stories in our parsha?

David Block: We think they are connected – better yet, we think that beneath the surface of the flood, the vineyard and the tower is a grand narrative that ties Parshat Bereishit to Noach and sets up the plot for the entire rest of the Torah.

David Block: I'm David Block… Immanuel Shalev: …and I'm Imu Shalev…

David Block: …and welcome to The Parsha Experiment. Instead of picking one or two episodes out of the parsha to focus on each week, we try to uncover the grand story that all those episodes tell together.

Immanuel Shalev: If this is your first look at this series and you want to learn a bit more about what we're trying to do here at The Parsha Experiment, go ahead and listen to our introduction in the beginning of last week's video.

David Block: And the whole video while you're at it… it was pretty good.

Immanuel Shalev: One of the most puzzling things in our parsha happens right after the flood.

# God's Water

Covenant

# with

Noah to

Not

# Destroy

the Earth with

When Noah comes out of the ark, God says something fascinating: V'hakimoti et briti itchem v'loh yikaret kol basar od mimei ha'mabul – I'm going to establish a covenant with you, and there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth.

David Block: And the question is, what is going on here? God obviously thought that it was perfectly appropriate to destroy the world the first time, so what changed? Is God just having second thoughts like, oh, shoot, wait, I did not think this through, I probably shouldn't have done that? I mean, if it was okay to destroy the world once, why not destroy it again if mankind becomes just as deserving?

Immanuel Shalev: Right. It was either the wrong thing to do, God realizes and promises never to do it again, or it was the right thing to do, but for some reason now it isn't. What was God's agenda here? Let's take a look at the text itself to see if it leaves any clues to this mystery.

David Block: We think that there is a clue in the verses of the flood's aftermath, in a fascinating theory proposed by Rabbi Fohrman. As we read, think about "where in the Torah have we heard these words before?" Here's a hint; this is the second parsha in the Torah, so the options are pretty slim… (pssst… last week!)

# Biblical

Connections to

the

# Story of

the

# Flood

Immanuel Shalev: Ok, so right after the flood, the verse says: Vaya'aver Elokim ruach al ha'aretz vayashoku ha'mayim – a wind of God passed over the land and the water subsided. So that's our first hint

– does that remind you of anything?

David Block: Then, vayisachru ma'ayanot tehom v'arubot hashomayim vayikaleh hageshem min hashomayim – the springs of the deep (meaning, the waters below), and the floodgates of heaven (the waters from above) were sealed, and the rain ceased. So, the waters of the flood really came from two directions – the waters below and above came together. And now they would separate.

Immanuel Shalev: Then, vayashuvu ha'mayim me'al ha'aretz haloch vashov … nir'u roshei heharim – the waters receded from the earth… which revealed mountains, the land underneath.

David Block: Okay, so what does all of this remind of you? Where else have we heard about a wind of God hovering on water, waters below and waters above separating, waters receding to reveal dry land?

Immanuel Shalev: It sounds eerily reminiscent of creation itself! The second verse in the Torah describes what the world was like before creation: Veha'aretz haytah tohu vavohu v'choshech al pnei tehom v'ruach Elokim merachephet al pnei ha'mayim – the earth was without form and empty, with darkness on the face of the depths, and the wind of God hovered on the water's surface.

And now look back at what happened after the flood: Vaya'aver Elokim ruach al ha'aretz vayashoku ha'mayim – a wind of God passed over the earth and the water subsided. In both cases, we have this wind of God hovering over the waters of the world.

David Block: Continuing in creation, on the second day: Vaya'as Elokim et ha'rakiyah vayavdel bein ha'mayim asher mitachat la'rakiyah u'bein ha'mayim asher me'al la'rakiyah – God made a sky by separating the waters underneath and on top. And that's exactly what we saw with the flood; the waters

came from below and from above, and when the flood was over, those two sources were held back and separated, once more allowing the sky to reappear

Immanuel Shalev: Pretty cool. And it continues on Day Three of creation; Vayomer Elokim yikavu ha'mayim mitachat hashomayim el makom echad v'tero'eh hayabashah – God said, gather the waters under the heavens to one place to reveal dry land. And look again at the flood; The waters receded to reveal the dry land underneath.

David Block: So the aftermath of the flood really does seem to be patterned after creation. But just in case you think that this may all be just a coincidence, let's see, do these patterns continue?

In addition to the water revealing dry land, something else happened on Day Three of creation too; vegetation and plant life were created. V'eitz oseh pri asher zaro bo – and fruit-bearing trees sprouted. And we actually have something like that in the post-flood story too; the dove brings back the olive branch signaling to Noah that plant life had re-emerged – there are now fruit bearing trees again.

Immanuel Shalev: On the fourth day of creation, God created the sun, moon and stars, the verse says: To establish night, day and the seasons of the year. And in our story, after Noah makes landfall and offers sacrifices to God, God promises He won't destroy the world again, but He also says something else.

David Block: Od kol yemei ha'aretz zerah v'katzir v'kor ve'chom v'kayitz v'choref v'yom v'lailah loh yishbotu. And what do you know? God tells Noah that: All the days of the earth, the seasons and day and night shall not cease. The day, night, and the seasons were the exact function of the sun, moon, and stars as described on the fourth day, and they make their appearance in our story right on cue.

Immanuel Shalev: These parallels actually keep on going and Rabbi Fohrman explores them all in some of the courses that we have linked below. But the question is why are these parallels here, and what in the world are they telling us?

David Block: So here's Rabbi Fohrman's theory. What is the simplest way to explain these patterns? God created the world once in [Genesis](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis), and now, with the flood, it sounds like God is creating it again. The flood is a story of destruction but also of re-creation. There are really two worlds; there's the pre-flood world, and now a brand new post-flood world.

Immanuel Shalev: By placing these parallels in the text, the author – God – is revealing the deeper significance of the flood story.

# Why Did

God

# Promise

Noah

# Not to

Flood

# Earth Again?

The flood isn't just the tool God uses to wipe out a few sinners, it's not the latest punishment since the ones handed out to Cain and to Adam, the flood is nothing short of the rebirth of the entire world.

David Block: This is a continuation of the story we started to tell last week. God created this ideal world

in which mankind could have this really close relationship with Him, but again and again, mankind sinned by ignoring God, and by making their own rules, their own decisions as to what's good and what's evil.

Immanuel Shalev: And when humanity spiraled out of control, God isn't angry, He's sad. Vayar Hashem ki rabah ra'at ha'odom ba'aretz … Vayinachem Hashem ki asah et ha'odom ba'aretz vayitatzev el libo – and God saw that the evil of man was great in the land, and God regretted making man and became sad in His heart. God seems to realize that His plan to build a world for humanity and to have a relationship with them – it's not working. And He decides to start over. Time for Plan B.

David Block: But the million-dollar question is how does God know that the problems from the pre- flood world aren't just going to resurface again? That mankind won't continue to sin and ignore God?

# How Do

We Know

God

# Will Keep His

Covenant

# with

Noah?

Immanuel Shalev: So, here's the key; God recreates the world a little bit differently than He did the first time. The reason why it won't be destroyed again is not because mankind won't ever sin, it's because it's a different world that operates with different rules.

God's Eternal Covenant With Noah

David Block: Here are a couple of ways that the world changes:

(1) God won't destroy the world. In the pre-flood world, evil was met with destruction. In the post-flood world, not so much. (

1. God won't curse the land. If you remember from last week, Adam and Cain's sins corrupted their relationship with the land – but now? The land will continue to produce like it always has. This new world is much less sensitive to the evil of mankind.

Immanuel Shalev: It seems that God designs this new world in response to humanity's shortcomings, and while mankind's evil might have seemed like a good reason for God to call it quits on humanity, He doesn't. God seems like He's still interested in holding onto that relationship. And, paradoxically, instead of holding on tighter, He lets go.

David Block: At the very least, it seems like people have more leeway now. Like, they can sin and God won't choose to destroy them like He once did. And that kind of sounds nice.

Immanuel Shalev: But from the other perspective, it's terribly sad. All relationships have expectations. If one partner betrays the other the consequences can devastate the relationship. But in some relationships, like that of a parent and child, sometimes unconditional love is what's needed. A child might rebel or do

hurtful things, and the parents bear the pain and continue to show love in the hopes that their child might one day return.

David Block: Before the flood, God and man were in a deeply committed relationship. The stakes were high enough that a betrayal was met with consequences.

Immanuel Shalev: In the post-flood world that God re-creates, fewer punishments are handed out, but humanity and God are also not as close as they used to be.

David Block: Sometimes, a parent needs to let go and give their children the time and space they need to make it back on their own. And that's what God seems to be doing here.

Immanuel Shalev: So does this new plan work? Does the re-created world bring humanity back to God?

# The Failure of Humanity

David Block: Unfortunately, things seem to get worse before they can get better. And that seems to be what the rest of the parsha is about. In the stories of Noah and the vineyard, and the Tower of Babel, mankind seems to sin in the new world in pretty similar ways to how they sinned before the flood.

Immanuel Shalev: Sadly, we don't have time to fully explore the vineyard story, but the good news is that we have another course on Aleph Beta devoted just to that – linked below.

…And then a few generations later we arrive at the final big episode of the Parsha: the Tower of Babel.

David Block: Here's the thing, many of us may have learned that the tower builders were these really evil people who wanted to build a tower that would reach all the way up to heaven so that they could wage war with God. But the text itself says NOTHING about that at all.

Immanuel Shalev: So what was the big deal with these guys?

# Is Babel Biblical Again?

Proof of

# God's

Promise

# Not to

Flood

# Earth

David Block: Here's what happened; humanity seemed to band together and they say two things. First: Hava nilbenah leveinim – let's make bricks. Then: Hava nivneh lanu ir u'migdal v'rosho bashomayim – let's make a city, with a tower up to the heavens. It actually seems pretty harmless.

Immanuel Shalev: The truth is, God himself seems to admit that they did nothing wrong – yet. Vayomer Hashem hein am echad v'safah achat l'kulam v'zeh hachilam la'asot, v'ata loh yibatzer meihem kol asher yazmu la'asot – these are one people, of one language, and this they have begun to do? Now, they will be able to do anything they want! So I'm going to prevent them from going any further. It seems that God

saw a potential danger in what they were doing. But what was that danger?

David Block: It's easy to miss if you don't look carefully. Their first plan wasn't even to build a tower. Let's take another look at the verse right before that; hava nilbenah leveinim venisrefa l'sreifa. Vatehi lahem haleveinah l'aven – let's make bricks, and we'll burn them, and the bricks were to them as stone.

Immanuel Shalev: Why do we care about their building materials? They all got together and decided to make bricks. Great. Do we have to hear about the building permits that they got, and who supplied the doorknobs too?

David Block: But look closely. The Torah is telling us about the newest technology of the day – the brick. And what was the brick? The verse says: Vatehi lahem haleveinah l'aven – the bricks that they had just made, they were like stones. Up until that point, if you wanted to build a house, you did it with stone, materials that the earth freely gave for the benefit of humanity.

Immanuel Shalev: But the people decided to play Creator and make their own versions of stones – the brick. That which the earth gave them, which God gave them, wasn't good enough for them anymore.

David Block: And when they invented the brick they decided to build a city with a tower to reach the heavens. But for what purpose?

Immanuel Shalev: The verse actually tell us: We want to build a tower – v'na'aseh lanu shem – in order to make a name for ourselves.

David Block: So here's a theory. There's nothing wrong with new technology. There's nothing wrong with wanting to create bricks. God made us in His image and gave us the ability to create – biologically and technologically! But as soon as they said, "in order to make a name for ourselves", God looked at that and said, 'Uh-oh, I see where this is going.' God was watching humanity revert to their pre-flood mistakes.

Immanuel Shalev: Yeah, and that's a bad direction to head in. But just like with Adam and Eve, the privileges of this world – like the ability to create – are meant to be enjoyed in the context of a relationship with God. That's why they could eat from all the trees save the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

David Block: So when God saw that humanity started to make bricks – essentially to improve upon God's bricks – God waited to see what they'd do with their new technology. Would they use the brick for good, within their relationship with God?

Immanuel Shalev: And God found the answer in their next line. They wanted to build a tower, not for God, but for their own legacy. V'na'aseh lanu shem – let's make a name for ourselves. God looked at that and said no, no, no, I've seen this episode already. I've seen mankind forget about Me, and think only about themselves. I've seen them act as the SOLE creator before, and make their own decisions about

what's good and what's evil.

David Block: So before it was too late, God intervenes. He made sure the new world wouldn't make the same mistakes as the pre-flood world.

Immanuel Shalev: This time, He didn't destroy the world, but He also didn't let humanity spiral out of control.

David Block: Right. And I don't know about you guys, but these last two Parshiyot are really difficult. It's kind of like watching a horror movie when you yell at the screen, "Don't go in there!" It is incredibly frustrating to see mankind fail again and again. Plan A? God's original world? That didn't work. Plan B? Letting go of humanity? That also seems to fail.

# Avoiding Humanity's Failure

Immanuel Shalev: It's time to unravel Plan C. If humanity is ever going to make its way back and have a relationship with God, they're going to need help. And soon.

David Block: Enter Abraham.

Immanuel Shalev: Of the 50 chapters of the [Book of Genesis](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis), 40 of them talk about Abraham and his family. The only parts that don't are the 10 chapters of Parshat Bereishit and Noach.

David Block: If the subject of this book is the family of Abraham, that means that we've just concluded the prologue to our story, and we're left with a failed humanity, a broken relationship, and a loving God who is left to pick up the pieces.

Immanuel Shalev: But Abraham is going to change everything. Somehow, he's going to be the antidote to the problem of humanity; he'll lead them back to the close and intimate relationship with God.

David Block: Join us next week and let's explore together the character of Abraham, and how he and his family are meant to save humanity.

Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman, and welcome to Parshat Noach!

I want to share with you a fascinating pattern that I think exists in this week’s Parsha, and I want to explore with you what it is that we might make of it.

# Themes

from

# Creation

So come with me for a minute back to the very beginnings of Creation:

פְנֵ ֥יעַל־ הַמ ֽי ִם׃

ח ֖פֶת

פְנֵ ֣יעַל־ תְה֑ום וְר֣ו ּח אֱלֹהִ֔ים מְר

וְהָאָ֗רץ הָי ְ ָת ֥ה תֹ֙הו֙ ּוָבֹ֔הו ּוְחֹ֖שׁך

And the world was formless and void; darkness was on the face of the deep, And the spirit [or wind] of God was hovering over the waters.

Try to draw a picture in your imagination of that scene. It’s a water world, isn’t it? Darkness over the deep. Deep waters, probably. And you’ve got this wind, or this spirit, of God that's hovering al pnei hamayim, over these waters. And of course, it is very chaotic, it's tohu v’vohu, so there’s like these waves crashing everywhere, right? I mean, doesn’t it remind you of something in this week’s parsha?

It looks like a great flood. It’s almost like we’re fast-forwarding to Parshat Noach! Might the very first story of the Torah, the story of creation, somehow be connected to the story of the flood?

Could be. Let’s see if we can explore this somehow a little bit further.

# Creation and the

Story of

# Noah

So, let’s go back to that primordial creation story. As I mentioned to you before, one of the things we hear back on Creation Day One is that:

פְנֵ ֥יעַל־ הַמ ֽי ִם

ח ֖פֶת

וְר֣ו ּח אֱלֹהִ֔ים מְר

it was a spirit of God, or literally, a wind of God, that was hovering over the waters.

So stop right there and ask yourself if there’s anything like this in the flood story in Parshat Noah? Curiously, turns out that there is. At the start of Chapter 8 in the [Book of Genesis](https://www.alephbeta.org/torah/genesis), we actually hear of the world's recovery from the flood. And lo and behold, that wind of God – it’s back.

We hear that God remembered Noach, and:

וַי ַ ּעֲבֵ֨ר אֱלֹה ֥ים ר֙ו ּח הָאָ֔רץעַל־ וַי ָ ּשֹׁ֖כּו ּהַמ ֽי ִם

God caused a wind to blow over the waters.

So there you have it. In both the creation and the flood stories, there’s this wind of God, or from God – and in both cases, that wind is over the waters. It’s kind of intriguing.

Do these parallels continue? Let’s move on to consider Day Two in Creation.

# Watery Connections

Back in that primordial world, on Day Two, we’ve got another scene that’s also a little bit hard to visualize.

ק ֑יע

ב ֤ין הַמַּ֙י ִם֙ אֲשֶׁר֙ מִת ֣חַת לָרקִ֔יעַ ו ּ ֵב ֣ין הַמַּ֔י ִם אֲשׁ ֖ר מֵע ֣ל לָר

וַיַ ּ֣עַשׂ אֱלֹהִים֮ הָרקִיעַ֒אֶת־ וַי ַ ּבד֗ל

And God made the sky, and the sky divided between the water below the sky and the waters above the sky.

Now, I know that’s kind of hard to picture, because, you know, waters above the sky, what really are those? But hold that thought, and let's just kind of fast forward to Noah. As the world recovers from the flood in Chapter 8, we actually hear about something curiously similar to those two sources of water:

וַי ִ ּ ָס ֽכְרו֙ ּמַעְי ְנ֣ת תְּה֔ום ֽוַאֲרבֹּ֖ת הַשָׁמ ֑י ִם

The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up.

In other words, how did God create the flood in the first place? It seems that what He really did was, He brought two sources of water together. There was of course the rain, coming from the clouds, upper waters, but there were also lower waters, there was well-water, that came up from the earth. And when you brought those two sources of water together, it inundated the world.

So what did God do to stop the flood? Basically, God had to bring each source of water back where it came from: The rainwater, that’s got to go back to the clouds; the well-water, it’s got to go back beneath the earth.

So one more time, you’ve got water above and water below. And after the flood, as the world recovers, you’ve got just a blue ribbon of sky. Just like in creation, the sky is once again dividing between upper waters and lower waters.

OK, so what have we got here? We’ve got echoes of Creation Days One and Two, in the world after the flood. What about Creation Day Three?

# Dry Land, Vegetation, and Birds

What happens on Day 3? Water recedes and dry land appears. So, wouldn’t you know it, that’s actually exactly what happens next in the Noach story: Water recedes and dry land appears.

And after that in the Noach story? Well, Noah, you know, he’s in the ark and he’s got this dove. He sends it out, and it comes back with an olive branch, freshly plucked. What does that branch tell Noah that he didn’t know before? It tells him that vegetation, trees in particular, they are back in the world.

Well, go back to the Creation story: After the appearance of dry land, trees begin to come into the world.

OK? Let's fast forward to Noah again. What does Noah do after he gets that olive branch from the dove? He sends out the dove once more, and this time, the bird doesn’t return to him. Which means the world now has birds in it. Oh. Welcome to Creation Day Five, when birds came into the world.

OK, I hear you saying, not so fast. I see how the Noah story has stuff from Days One, Two, Three in Creation and now… Day Five, but you skipped something. What about Creation Day Four?

# Digging Deeper

into

# Noach's

Story

And of course on Creation Day Four, that’s when you get the sun, the moon, and the stars. The great heavenly luminaries. So is there any correspondence to that in the Noah story?

Well, that’s a good question. At face value, there isn’t anything like that in the Noach story. So that seems to be a little puzzle, a little hole in these parallels as it were. Let’s leave that aside for a second, and go back to our search.

Back to Noah: What happens in the Noach story after the birds? Well, God tells Noah to open up the ark and let out all the animals and humans. Does that remind you of anything back in Creation? Think about Day Six, the day in which animals and mankind were created and began to come and inhabit the earth.

It's really kind of remarkable, isn’t it? It really does seem like there’s a correspondence between the world after the flood and the world of Creation. It doesn’t seem coincidental. But what exactly do these parallels mean? What is their significance?

# God's

Second

# (Re)Creation?

Well, if you’re really interested in this question, I have good news for you: We have a whole course in Aleph Beta devoted to exploring exactly this mystery. I actually created it a few years back, it's called Genesis Unveiled – and you can find it by clicking below. I highly recommend checking it out. In the meantime, though, I want to leave you with at least the beginnings of a theory here.

So, here’s a way to make sense of all of this: The creation story is getting mirrored by the story of the world after the flood. Why, you ask? The answer might just be: The Torah wants us to understand that after the flood, it is as if the world is being created again.

To put it a little bit differently, the building process of creation, it's getting mirrored by the re-building

process of what we might call re-creation – the re-creation of the world after the flood.

And you know, this might, actually, help us understand why there is no analogy in Noah’s world to the creation of Day Four’s heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, and stars. They weren’t created again because they were never destroyed in the first place. Only the terrestrial world was destroyed; not the heavenly one.

I want to ponder one last thing with you: This idea we’ve been talking about – that God was re-creating the world after the flood – let’s stop and think why it matters so much.

It matters because it actually changes, in a subtle way, our whole understanding of why God brought the flood in the first place.

# Why

God

# Decided to

Flood

# the Earth

Stop your average person in the street and ask them: According to the Bible, why did God bring the great flood? Most people would likely say: You know, mankind turned evil. They were really bad, and so God decided to punish them. So that’s how the flood came to be.

But the Torah seems to be telling us something else. The point of the flood wasn’t really to destroy people; it was to destroy the world, our environment as a whole.

You know, had the point been just to destroy people, God wouldn’t need a whole recreation enterprise; all He’d have to do is repopulate the existing world. No, if there’s a recreation going on here, the Torah is telling you that it was the earth that had been destroyed. That was the flood’s principal target.

Humanity’s demise was almost, strange as it is to say it, incidental.

And I know that sounds crazy, but the truth is, you sort of see it if you look carefully at the Hebrew words that describe God’s decision to bring about the flood:

:וַתִּשָׁחֵת הָאָרץ לִפְנ ֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרץ חָמָס

וַי ַ ּ ְרא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָרץ וְהִנ ֵּה נ ִשְׁחָתָה כִּי הִשְׁחִית כָּל בָּשָׂר אֶת דרכּ ֹו עַל הָאָרץ

The earth, it was corrupt before God, the earth was filled with violence. And God looked at the earth and saw that it was ruined; because all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

Earth, earth, earth! It's over and over again. People, they filled the earth with violence, and somehow, that evil, it corrupts the earth itself. In other words: God had to get rid of the old world – it was ruined – and create a new one, and while He was renovating – you know, painting the apartment – well, there's no place for you humans to live.

It’s not so much that they were being punished as that they didn’t all deserve to be saved: I’ll put some of you guys in a boat and keep them alive until the renovation is complete, but until then, look, there's no

place to live. I’ve got to fix the world. Can’t have a ruined world!

One of the tantalizing questions we are left with is this: If after the flood, God is, in fact, re-creating the world, is He making the same world all over again, or is he designing a different world?

# Differences After the Flood

A friend of mine, Simcha Baer, once pointed out to me that, as it began to rain and the floodwaters began to rise, God closed the door to the ark: In the words of the text, .בַּעֲדו ְהוָה י ּסְגֹר ִ וַיBut when the flood was over, it was Noach who opened the doors of the ark.

God closed the doors on His own world, Simcha suggested, and when it was over, Noach opened the doors on a new world – on his own world.

You know, consider man’s role in the new world: Isn’t it interesting that, for the very first time, mankind is given permission to eat meat? To be sure, God had told Adam and Eve they’d rule over animals – but they were vegetarians; they had never been given the ultimate power to hunt and kill animals for food.

In the first world, man and animals were co-tenants in God’s world. On some level, in this new world, man is the landlord.

God promised never again to destroy this new world. Why? Maybe it’s because He had given over the keys to us. It was our world now. Chillingly, God promised that He would never ruin the world… but He never promised that we wouldn’t.

It’s our world now. Whether we keep it or ruin it is up to us.

Hi, it's Rabbi David Fohrman and welcome to Parshat Noach. You are watching Aleph Beta. So where did all the dinosaurs go?

# Where Did The Dinosaurs Go In The Bible?

Well, I guess they probably didn't have room on the big boat for them during the flood. That is one of the sort of folk legends which we have around about the disappearance of the dinosaurs. Certainly the dinosaurs are the most visible mysterious component of the vanished world. I know that when I take my kids to the Museum of Natural History, that's the draw, the Dinosaur Room. There's Raptosaurus Rex battling Megalosaurus and they’re huge and they’ve got fangs and your seven-year-old is wide-eyed and that's why you even bothered to go to the Museum of Natural History in the first place. What's the deal with these dinosaurs? And then the painful question, the question that the seven-year-old girl asks her father, stares up into his eyes: 'Daddy, how come these aren't in our book?' I mean, the Torah is supposed to contain the great history of it all, so... where are all the dinosaurs? That's what I want to talk to you about today.

# Where Do

Dinosaurs Fit

# Into

A Biblical

# Context?

Okay, so I would like to give you a general framework for thinking about this question… but not really just this question but really puzzling things about the Torah itself. I will elaborate some of that later, but let me jump in and give you the paradigm now.

A while back, I read a fantastic book and it is called 'How to Read a Book' by Mortimer Adler. He tries to give you a manual as to how to attack a book, how to go about understanding it. One of the very first things he says is: 'You have to decide early on what kind of genre the book is — and if you misinterpret the genre of the book, then you are lost from the very beginning and you really have no chance of really understanding it.'

Imagine that you were reading a Chemistry textbook and you did not understand that it was a Chemistry textbook, so you thought you were in fact reading poetry. You would ask the wrong questions about it. Or if you were reading poetry, and you thought you were supposed to be reading a Chemistry textbook, you’d also ask the wrong questions.

So imagine you are actually reading poetry, you are reading the Carl Sandburg poem 'The Fog Crept in on Little Cat Feet' and imagine you are teaching that poem and somebody in the back of the room raises their hand and says, 'Teacher, teacher, I don't understand... How could the fog creep? It doesn't have feet, it’s not a cat. This whole poem, it just doesn't make any sense.' You would say, ‘You just don't understand the genre. There is no answer to that question, it is the wrong question, it is a bad question!’

You could ask, if you want: “The imagery of the fog creeping, what's it meant to convey?” — but that is an entirely a different question. That's a question that makes sense for poetry. The bottom line is, you have to understand the genre. If you misinterpret the genre, you misinterpret everything.

And, so now, the great question is: What kind of book is the Torah? How could we begin trying to read this book without having any idea what kind of genre it is? And the problem is: it’s not so easy to figure out what kind of genre the Torah is. It’s got 613 laws — them’s a lot of laws, so maybe it is a law book, a legal treatise. But it is really not such a good legal treatise, because it sure has a lot of stories in it. What are all these stories doing in a legal treatise? It is just out of character. It's got lots of philosophy in it; could it be a philosophy book? But you know, it has too many laws and stories for it to be a philosophy book. So what kind of book is it?

Here is what I think it is. I would say it is a guide book. It is a book intended to guide individuals and a nation how to develop a relationship with those around them. A relationship with people around them, a relationship with their God. How to do that at the collective level — if you are the nation of Israel — and how to do that at the individual level — if you are one of the people of Israel.

What does this guide book consist of? What does it take to guide someone in this? One of the things it takes is laws. There are laws that you have to follow, certain laws that you have to know, the laws are very, very important... but it doesn't just take laws. It takes more than laws.

So if you say to yourself: ’All that it takes to be a good person is to follow the 613 commandments,’ that's actually, probably, not entirely true. The Ramban talks about being a menuval b'reshus haTorah.

Somebody who keeps, punctiliously, all the commands — and still is a morally obtuse person. How is that possible? It is possible because law alone is a too narrow a discipline to completely regulate human behavior — and the Torah itself accepts that. And that's why there are stories.

The stories are there to teach you values, stories that tell about what happened with our ancestors and the way God dealt with them and the way they dealt with God, and there are timeless lessons that apply to us today that are not about laws but are about larger truths that we are supposed to find a way to integrate into our lives. And there are certain philosophical notions that we need to understand — so the Torah talks about those ideas, too. It takes all of that to guide us.

So now, back to Mortimer Adler. If the Torah is a guide book, what does that then mean? It means that everything it tells you — its laws, its stories and its philosophy — is all going to be told from the perspective of a guide book. Everything is going to get slanted, to be told from that perspective.

# Torah

As A

# Guidebook,

Not A

# History

Book

And, by the way, Chazal says as much. There is a famous statement that our Sages make: ‘Nevuah she’chutz’recha l’dorot niktevah,’ ‘Any prophecy that was relevant for generations ended up getting written in the Torah.’ Prophecies that were just locally relevant for a particular generation didn't get written'. Why? It gives us lots of insight into what life looked like back then! Because it doesn't guide you, that's why. It is an interesting fact, but only that which guides you is written.

Let me show you another puzzling aspect of how the Torah writes history. Chazal tell us, ‘Ein mukdam u'meuchar batorah,' ‘There is no such thing as chronological order in the Torah' (Megillah 14a). Really,

there is no such thing as chronological order in the Torah?? Well, there is... but you can't trust the chronological order in the Torah, Chazal say, because every once in a while, the Torah will actually place something second that happened first.

Now, why would the Torah do that?? Why would the Torah deliberately mislead you about the chronological order of events? Because it is not a history book, it is a guide book — and if the Torah can guide you by juxtaposing two different episodes with the same theme, so that you should understand the theme that worked over overarching periods of Jewish history, the Torah is going to do that — and it is going to sacrifice the history in order to guide you.

# Answering Why Dinosaurs Aren't Mentioned In The Bible

And now, let's come back to dinosaurs. So I think you may understand where I am going here. The dinosaurs might have been around, but evidently the Torah didn't consider using Tyrannosaurus Rex as a guide to human behavior. So it left it out! And Stegosaurus, too. You want to learn about them? That's what the American Museum of Natural History is for. So you’ll go there. But the Torah is not going to tell you about them, because it doesn't fit into the guidebook. Were they important for what they contributed to the biological record? Very important! But they weren't important for you and how to guide your life from the Torah's perspective. So the Torah is not going to talk about it.

It may well be that the Torah tells one story and science tells another story, and ultimately it is the same story — it is a story called reality. But one is intended to tell you the nuts and bolts of that reality and the other is intended to guide you through it.

When you and I read this guide, let us make no mistake about what we are reading. We are not just reading any old book. We are reading something that is meant to shape us, meant to help us tackle a grand quest as to what is the best way to live our lives and relationships with others. Everything the Torah tells us is designed to help us achieve those goals. But we need to understand the genre in order to be able to understand the messages.



**NOACH: WHY DID GOD DESTROY THE WORLD?**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Noach!

## A Premonition of Comfort

In this week’s parsha, the Torah talks to us about Noah’s name and tells us how, exactly, he got it. It turns out that Noah’s father, a man named Lemech, made a declaration upon Noah’s birth – and in concert with that declaration, he named his child. But there’s something puzzling, almost chilling, about that declaration. Let’s take a look at this episode, as the Torah relates it to us.

### LOOK INSIDE: Noah’s Name



Read Lemech’s declaration below. What is this curse that he refers to? Have we come across this idea earlier in the Torah?

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will

ְי ַנ ֲח ֵמנ ּו זה

ַח, ֵלאמֹר: נ

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֶאת- ׁשמ ֹו

comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

ִמ ַּמ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו, ּו ֵמ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָי ֵדינ ּו, ִמן-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ֲא ׁ ֶשר ֵא ְר ָר ּה

יקוה.

Strangely, Lemech senses that this child is going to comfort him – and he names Noah for this idea. Indeed, the first two letter of Noah’s name – *nun* and *chet* – borrow from the first two letters of the Hebrew root for comfort: *Nun, chet, mem.* But according to Lemech, Noah’s “comfort” will play out on a grand scale: Noah is not just going to comfort Lemech; he will comfort *all* of mankind -- from some sort of ‘curse of the land.’

What is this curse of the land?

## The Curse Of The Land

The ‘curse of the land’ goes back to two of the earliest stories in the Torah, in both humankind’s encounter with the Tree of Knowledge and the subsequent story of Cain and Abel. Read the text carefully, and you’ll find that there were two main consequences to each of these sins.

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Noach: Why Did God Destroy the World?” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

Let’s explore the first consequence. Immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, what do Adam and Eve do?

**Genesis 3:8**

ה ָּגן

ֹו ְך ֵעץ ּבת

ה ָא ָדם ְו ִא ׁ ְש ּת ֹו ִמ ְּפ ֵני ְיקוה ֱאלֹקים

ו ִ ּיתְ ַח ֵּבא

And the man and his wife hid from before the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden

They *hide* from God. And fascinatingly, Cain does the same, in the aftermath of his own sin:

**Genesis 4:14**

ּו ִמ ָּפ ֶני ָך ֶא ָּסתֵר ה ֲא ָד ָמה

ֵמ ַעל ְּפ ֵני ה ּי ֹום

הן ֵּג ַר ׁ ְש ָּת אֹ ִתי

Behold You have driven me today off the face of the earth, and I shall be hidden from before You.

Indeed, Cain senses that he will spend his entire life *continually* hiding from God. This impulse to hide seems to express a kind of distance or awkwardness that has been introduced into the relationship between God, on the one hand, and Adam, Eve and Cain, on the other.

So both Adam and Eve, and Cain, hide from God after they sin. Let’s call this **first consequence** “alienation from God” - the distance between man and God, as a result of man’s sins.

## Title

But there was also a **second consequence** that devolved from these sins. There was a different kind of alienation that came about – an alienation between humans and land. Let’s see it play out in the verses, starting with the curses the God doles out after Adam and Eve’s sin:

**Genesis 3:17-19**

**17** And to man He said, “Because you listened to your wife, and you ate from the tree from which I

commanded you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed be the ground for your sake; in sadness shall you eat of it all the days of your life. **18** And it will cause thorns and thistles to grow for you, and you shall eat the herbs of the field. **19** With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for you were taken therefrom, for dust you are, and to dust you will return.”

**בראשית ג:יז–יט**

**יז** ו ְל ָא ָדם ָא ַמר, ּכי- ׁש ַמ ְע ָּת לקול ִא ׁ ְש ֶּת ָך, ַו ּתֹא ַכל

מן-ה ֵעץ, ֲא ׁ ֶשר ִצ ִ ּוי ִתי ָך ֵלאמֹר לֹא תֹא ַכל

מ ֶּמ ּנ ּו--אר ּו ָרה ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ּב ֲעב ּו ֶר ָך, ּב ִע ָ ּצב ֹון ּתֹא ְכ ֶל ָּנה,

ֹכל ְי ֵמי ח ֶ ּיי ָך. **יח** וקוץ ְו ַד ְר ַ ּדר, ַּת ְצ ִמי ַח ָל ְך; ְו ָא ַכ ְל ָּת, את-ע ֶ ׂשב ה ָּ ׂש ֶדה. **יט** ּב ֵז ַעת ַא ֶּפי ָך, ּתֹא ַכל ֶל ֶחם, ַעד

ְב ָך ֶאל-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ּכי ִמ ֶּמ ָּנה ֻל ָּק ְח ָּת: ּכי-ע ָפר ַא ָּתה, ׁש ּו

ו ֶאל-ע ָפר ָּת ׁש ּוב.

Adam is told, for example, that he shall work the land in sadness, by the sweat of his brow. No longer shall the land simply provide, almost effortlessly, for Adam and Eve.

And that curse seems to intensify in the age of Cain. Let’s listen in on what God tells him after he slays his brother, after Cain causes the land to take back the blood of Abel:

**Genesis 4:12**

בד ֶאת-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, לֹא-תֹ ֵסף ֵּתת- ּכ ָח ּה ָל ְך

ֲע ת

ּכי

When you till the soil, it will not continue to give its strength to you

When it came to Adam and Eve – well, the land might no longer provide effortlessly for them anymore, but at least if they worked it, they could expect to yield its rich bounty. Somehow, that promise becomes compromised with Cain. Even if Cain exhausts himself working the land, still, he will sense something missing in land’s response to his efforts: it will no longer continue to give him its best. Cain will look upon the bounty of the land and find it wanting. And this second alienation - alienation from land - *this* is the “curse of the land” that Lemech was referring to.

## Lemech Senses Change is Afoot

And now, generations later, Lemech senses that things could be different; that somehow, we as humans could and would get beyond this curse. And he expresses that thought in terms of an idea he calls “comfort.”

### LOOK INSIDE: Understanding Comfort



Reflect again upon this declaration of Lemech: *“This one will comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”* How do you understand the word “comfort” here? How do you envision that Noah’s birth might bring comfort?

What, exactly, does Lemech mean by “comfort”? He seems to mean that his generation will be relieved, somehow, from the effects of Adam’s curse, of Cain’s curse. But comfort is a word that you and I don’t usually associate with getting past divine curses. Comfort is something we associate primarily with death and mourning. Someone loses a loved one, so they seek comfort. What, exactly, does comfort have to do with Noach and humankind’s response to “the curse of the land”? How do we understand Lemech’s cryptic premonition?

It turns out that the Torah gives us a series of clues that enable us to decode Lemech’s premonition. Indeed, there is a remarkable textual pattern that seems to be lurking just below the surface of the verses that we’ve been examining, a pattern which points to another account in the Torah. The implications of the pattern are as far-reaching as they are chilling.

## Uncovering The Pattern

### PONDER THIS



Let’s start first with this notion of “comfort.” It turns out that the Hebrew root for “comfort” - נחם - shares a root with another word: “regret.” Can you think of any other biblical stories that talk about “regret”?

**Hint 1:** In this story, God is the one doing the regretting…

**Hint 2:** It comes just before a massive disaster…

Think about God regretting having created man, just before He decides to bring the flood. Fast-forward just a few verses from Lemech’s declaration, and you’ll find the following:

**Genesis 6:6**

**בראשית ו:ו**

**6** And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon

ּב ָא ֶרץ; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַע ֵ ּצב,

ּכי-ע ָ ׂשה ֶאת-ה ָא ָדם

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנחֶם ְיקוה,

the earth, and He became grieved in His heart.

אֶל- ִל ּב ֹו.

Well, that’s an interesting coincidence, you might say. But here’s the remarkable thing: it is not just this word נחם in God’s declaration that echoes Lemech. Other parts of the Almighty’s declaration do, too.

### LOOK INSIDE: Looking for Parallels



Take a closer look at God’s pre-flood declaration, and compare it to Lemech’s language when Noah is born. How many parallels can you find between the two accounts? (The parallels are much more evident in the Hebrew, so if you’re looking at the English, just do the best you can!)

**LEMECH’S DECLARATION GOD’S DECLARATION (before the Flood)**

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**Genesis 6:6-7**

**בראשית ו:ו–ז**

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֶאת- ׁשמ ֹו נ ַח, ֵלאמֹר: זה ְי ַנ ֲח ֵמנ ּו

ּכי-ע ָ ׂשה ֶאת-ה ָא ָדם ּב ָא ֶרץ;

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנ ֶחם ְיקוה,

מ ַּמ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו, ּו ֵמ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָי ֵדינ ּו, ִמן-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ֲא ׁ ֶשר

א ְר ָר ּה ְיקוה.

ו ִ ּי ְת ַע ֵ ּצב, ֶאל- ִל ּב ֹו. **ז** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ְיקוה, ֶא ְמ ֶחה את-ה ָא ָדם ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָב ָראתי ֵמ ַעל ְּפ ֵני ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ֵמ ָא ָדם

ּכי

ה ׁ ָּש ָמ ִים:

ְו ַעד-ע ֹוף ש

עד- ְב ֵה ָמה, ַעד-ר ֶמ

נ ַח ְמ ִּתי, ּכי ֲע ִ ׂשי ִתם.

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

* 1. And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon the earth, and He became saddened in His heart.
  2. And the Lord said, “I will wipe out man, whom I created, from upon the face of the land, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them.”

**Don’t turn to the next page until you’ve given it your best shot...**

Let’s compare notes:

**LEMECH’S DECLARATION GOD’S DECLARATION (before the Flood)**

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**Genesis 6:6-7**

**בראשית ו:ו–ז**

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֶאת- ׁשמ ֹו נ ַח, ֵלאמֹר: זה ְי ַנ ֲחמֵנ ּו

ּכי-עָ ָ ׂשה ֶאת-ה ָא ָדם ּב ָא ֶרץ;

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנחֶם ְיקוה,

מִ ַמּ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו, ּומֵ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָידֵינ ּו, מִן- ָה ֲא ָדמָה, אֲ ׁ ֶשר

א ְר ָר ּה ְיקוה.

ו ִ ּיתְ ַע ֵ ּצב, ֶאל- ִל ּב ֹו. **ז** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ְיקוה, ֶא ְמ ֶחה את-ה ָא ָדם ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָב ָראתי ֵמ ַעל ְּפ ֵני ה ֲא ָדמָה, ֵמ ָא ָדם

ּכי

ה ׁ ָּש ָמ ִים:

ְו ַעד-ע ֹוף ש

עד- ְב ֵה ָמה, ַעד-ר ֶמ

נ ַח ְמ ִּתי, ּכי ֲע ִ ׂשי ִתם.

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

1. And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon the earth, and He became saddened in His heart.
2. And the Lord said, “I will wipe out man, whom I created, from upon the face of the land, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them.”

When you see the parallels all lined up, it’s astounding: **four** of the words from Lemech’s declaration are repeated in God’s declaration, just before bringing the flood:

1. Comfort/regret (נחם) - (red)
2. Deeds/made (עשה) - (blue)
3. Sadness (עצבון) - (green)

4. Land (האדמה) - (pink)

And not only are they repeated; they are repeated in the *exact same order* in which Lemech used them. It really does seem that God is consciously echoing Lemech’s words.

## What’s Going On?

The correspondences between the verses don’t seem to be mere happenstance. On the contrary: it seems like, for some strange reason, the declaration to destroy the world has as its *prototype* the naming speech that Lemech gave for Noah. But why would that be? Lemech’s declaration was made in joy -- it was the product of a father exulting in the birth of a new child. God’s declaration has a much darker provenance: it foretells the end of the world. One declaration heralds a single new life; the other declaration signals the death of all. Why would God build the decision to destroy His creation out of Lemech’s innocent hopes for his newborn child?

We’d like to suggest that the answer to this question centers around this notion of comfort, the first of the textual parallels. Ask yourself: how is it that Noah is supposed to bring comfort to his generation? Lemech doesn’t say, but Rashi (quoting the Sages of the Midrash) offer a fascinating explanation:

**Rashi on Genesis 5:29**

עד שלא בא נח לא היה להם כלי מחרישה והוא הכין להם

Before Noah, men did not have plowshares. Noah prepared [such tools] for them.

this? How might the invention of the plow be a source of comfort?



**PONDER THIS**

How do you understand

According to this Midrash, Lemech saw prophetically that Noah would be the creator of the plow. The plow would be a form of comfort for humans; it would be a salve for the “curse of the land.” After all, the curse of the land meant that it would be extremely hard to make anything grow. It would require toil and back-breaking labor -- and even then, all of

man’s hard work might yield a bounty mixed with thorns and thistles, or no bounty at all. But the plow could help to solve that problem. It would make it easier for man to cultivate the soil. Suddenly, labor would be halved and yield would be tripled. The worst of the curse of the land -- well, mankind could move beyond it. At the very least, the curse would no longer be as pronounced.

### PONDER THIS



And now we’re ready to return to our outstanding question: why is there this connection between Lemech’s declaration and God’s decision to bring the flood? Lemech is predicting that his son is going to decrease pain and suffering - which sounds like a good thing! So why should it augur the destruction of the world?

What’s so bad about the plow? What is wrong with this notion that it will bring comfort?

## What Does Comfort Really Mean?

We think the answer has everything to do with how we understand the idea of “comfort.” What is comfort, anyway? And what does it mean for us to achieve it?

Comfort is the antidote for loss - or if it is not the antidote, it is the balm we humans use for loss that allows us to actually be able to bind our wounds and move on. When we are wracked by a terrible loss, we seek “comfort” for it; we seek to get over it. But getting over it isn’t easy. Someone in mourning asks a question: *Why did this happen?* - but there is no answer to such a question. So, in the absence of an answer, the only thing a mourner can do is somehow *reconcile* himself to the simple fact that, inexplicably, it *has* happened.1

Comfort involves a shift in perspective. I stop trying to *change* an uncomfortable fact, and instead just *accommodate* myself to it. When we’re talking about mourning the loss of a loved one, that is difficult - but ultimately healthy and necessary. But here’s the challenge: **Not all uncomfortable facts should be accepted.** There is a certain kind of pain that perhaps we should *not* seek comfort for. That kind of pain is not meant to be *accommodated*, but perpetually *challenged.* It is a kind of pain that is ultimately meant to be overcome. It’s a pain which is meant to spur us to change something about ourselves. If we allow ourselves to get used to it, to live with it, then we never make the necessary change. And it is that pain, we want to argue, that was expressed by the curse of the land.

## Sadness and Toil

Ask yourself: What were the purposes of the curses of the land? Why did they even exist?

A clue comes from the language God uses in imposing the curse. The Almighty suggests that in the wake of the first humans’ sin, they would experience “sadness”2 in working the land.

### PONDER THIS



What is so sad about working the land? Given what we know about the curse of the land, we might have expected the verse to say, “In *difficulty* shall you eat of it…” - but that’s not what it says. What is sad about hard work which doesn’t yield anything?

**Here’s our answer:** Hard work isn’t sad, by *definition.* But when hard work is hard because it *could* have been easier -- well, then there’s something sad about that. There’s a kind of futility involved. And our sadness, our disappointment, is a recognition of that - a recognition that things could have been different.

The curses in the wake of the Tree of Knowledge, and in the wake of Cain’s murder of Abel – they were curses that, as we suggested above, imposed a kind of distance between us and land, and between us and God. Hiding from God is one way we felt the distance – and the other way was in this sadness: the sadness that would prevail when we worked the land. We would not be as close to land as we might like to be; the interaction between us and land would be more difficult, more fraught, than we would like it to be. There was *supposed* to be an inherent closeness that man would experience with God and with land, a natural warmth and intimacy. After all, in a sense, both God and land are our creators, our source. That’s what life was like for man in the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. But because of our sins, a kind of distance would creep into the relationship. And *that* was the curse.

1 That, indeed, might be why the Hebrew word for “mourner” is אבל - which also spells “but” or “nevertheless.” Being a mourner means embracing “nevertheless-ness”: *Why did this happen? I don’t know. But nevertheless, it happened.*

2 Most conventional translations render the word ֹון ּצב ָ עִ (*“itzavon*”) as “toil”, but literally, it means “sadness.”

### PONDER THIS



But why would God react to man’s sins this way? Why would God want us to feel sad? Why would God want us to feel alienated from Him, from the land?

The answer, perhaps, is that this feeling of alienation – it is a kind of homing beacon. We were once one with God and with land, and there is a part of us that craves that oneness, that closeness, always. We always want to come back, to come home. And so, the more one becomes alienated from one’s creator, from one’s source, the more one wants to return; the stronger the homing beacon becomes.

And *that*, perhaps, is the point of the curses. They bid us to understand the consequence of our sins, to see how alienated we have become – and, by extension, to imbue us with a longing to return. But in order to feel that longing, we need to experience the futility of toil; we need to feel that sadness. You see, there was supposed to be something *productive* about that sadness - but instead, we wanted to escape it, to anesthetize ourselves to it. That’s what the plow was meant to do - and that’s what made it deeply problematic.

## The Breaking Point

So there’s something “problematic” about the plow -- it was a sort of Tylenol for a pain, the sadness, that we were supposed to be experiencing, head-on. But to return to our outstanding question: why should it bring about the destruction of the world? Doesn’t that seem a little harsh?

### PONDER THIS



Ask yourself: if man’s evil gradually increased over time, when would a benevolent Creator decide

to give up on the project called creation and start over? As man’s evil deeds accumulated, each was only incrementally worse than the last. When, then, does a Creator decide enough is enough?

That comes, perhaps, when man chooses to find comfort in all the wrong places. It comes when man finds comfort in the plow. **The plow is a technological solution to a spiritual problem.** *“Take heart, men, a solution to our sadness*

*is at hand! We can work the land with the plow now. We don’t have to deal with the alienation anymore; we can inure ourselves to it….”* It is at that moment that God gives up. God gives up because we have given up, because we’ve reconciled ourselves to perpetual alienation, perpetual distance. Because we show no signs of ever wanting to come back into the relationship.

At this point, God decides to bring one family into an ark, and to start over. In doing so, the Almighty uses the exact same language that we used to comfort themselves. God mimics Lemech’s decision to name his child “comfort” – with a decision of His own, to bring *this* world to a watery end. With the purpose of the curses exhausted, this world will go now, will pass into the night – to be replaced with a new one, as God and the children of men start anew, seeking to forge a brand new relationship on better terms.



Noach: Why Did God Destroy the World?

Source Sheet

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will comfort

זה ְי ַנ ֲח ֵמנ ּו לאמֹר:

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא את- ׁשמ ֹו נ ַח,

us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

ְר ָר ּה א

מן-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, א ׁ ֶשר

ו ֵמ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָי ֵדינ ּו,

ִמ ַּמ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו,

יקוה.

**Genesis 3:8**

**בראשית ג:ח**

**8** And they heard the voice of the Lord God going in the garden to the direction of the sun, and the man and his

ְּפ ֵני מ

ְיקוה אלֹקים, מ ְת ַה ֵּל ְך את-קול

ה ּי ֹום; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַח ֵּבא ה ָא ָדם ְו ִא ׁ ְש ּת ֹו,

**ח** ו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ְמע ּו

ּב ָּגן-- ְלר ּו ַח

wife hid from before the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden.

ָּגן. ה

ֹו ְך, עץ ּבת

יקוה אלֹקים,

**Genesis 4:14**

**בראשית ד:יד**

**14** Behold You have driven me today off the face of the

ָמה, ו ִמ ָּפ ֶני ָך, ה ֲא ָד

ֹום, מ ַעל ְפ ֵני ה ּי

**יד** הן ֵּג ַר ׁ ְש ָּת אֹ ִתי

earth, and I shall be hidden from before You, and I will be a wanderer and an exile in the land, and it will be that whoever finds me will kill me.”

**Genesis 4:12**

ְצ ִאי, כל-מֹ

ֶרץ, ְו ָה ָיה ּב ָא

ֵתר; ְו ָה ִיי ִתי ָנע ָו ָנד, ֶא ָּס

י ַה ְרגֵנִי.

**בראשית ד:יב**

**12** When you till the soil, it will not continue to give its strength to you; you shall be a wanderer and an exile in the land.”

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

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ְך; ל

ּכ ָח ּה ֵתת-

ֲעבד את-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, לֹא-תֹ ֵסף ת

ִת ְה ֶיה ב ָא ֶרץ.

**יב** ּכי

נע ָו ָנד,

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Noach: Why Did God Destroy the World?

Source Sheet

**Genesis 3:17-19**

**בראשית ג:יז–יט**

**17** And to man He said, “Because you listened to your

ּכי- ׁש ַמ ְע ָּת לקול א ׁ ְש ֶּת ָך, ַו ּתֹא ַכל

**יז** ו ְל ָא ָדם א ַמר,

wife, and you ate from the tree from which I commanded

א ׁ ֶשר צ ִ ּוי ִתי ָך לאמֹר לֹא תֹא ַכל

מן-ה ֵעץ,

you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed be the ground

ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ּב ֲעב ּו ֶר ָך, ּב ִע ָ ּצב ֹון תֹא ְכ ֶל ָּנה,

מ ֶּמ ּנ ּו--אר ּו ָרה

for your sake; in sadness shall you eat of it all the days of

ַח ל ְך; ְו ָא ַכ ְל ָּת, ַת ְצ ִמי

ֹכל ְי ֵמי ח ֶ ּיי ָך. **יח** וקוץ ְו ַד ְר ַ ּדר,

your life. **18** And it will cause thorns and thistles to grow

ה ָּ ׂש ֶדה. **יט** ּב ֵז ַעת א ֶּפי ָך, תֹא ַכל ל ֶחם, עד

את-ע ֶ ׂשב

for you, and you shall eat the herbs of the field. **19** With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to

ֻל ָּק ְח ָּת: ּכי-ע ָפר א ָּתה, מ ֶּמ ָּנה

ּכי

ש ּו ְב ָך אל-ה ֲא ָד ָמה,

the ground, for you were taken therefrom, for dust you are, and to dust you will return.”

ׁש ּוב. ָת

ו ֶאל-ע ָפר

**Genesis 6:6-7**

**בראשית ו:ו–ז**

**6** And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon the

את-ה ָא ָדם ּב ָא ֶרץ; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַע ֵ ּצב,

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנ ֶחם ְיקוה, ּכי-ע ָ ׂשה

earth, and He became grieved in His heart. **7** And the Lord said, “I will wipe out man, whom I created, from upon the

א ְמ ֶחה את-ה ָא ָדם

ָד ָמה, מ ָא ָדם עד- ְב ֵה ָמה, ה ֲא

אֶל- ִל ּב ֹו. **ז** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ְיקוה, א ׁ ֶשר- ָב ָראתי מ ַעל ְפ ֵני

face of the land, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to

the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them.”

ּכי ִנ ַח ְמ ִּתי, ּכי ע ִ ׂשי ִתם.

עד-ר ֶמש ְו ַעד-ע ֹוף ה ׁ ָּש ָמ ִים:

**Rashi on Genesis 5:29**

**This one will give us comfort:** He will give us rest from the toil of our hands. Before Noah came, they did not have plowshares, and he prepared [these tools] for them. And the land was producing thorns and thistles when they sowed wheat, because of the curse of the first man (Adam), but in Noah’s time, it [the curse] subsided.

**רש”י על בראשית ה:כט**

**זה ינחמנו:** ינח ממנו את עצבון ידינו, עד שלא בא נח לא היהלהם כלי מחרישה והוא הכין להם, והיתה הארץ מוציאה קוצים ודרדרים כשזורעים חטים, מקללתו של אדם הראשון, ובימי נח

נחה, וזהו ינחמנו, ינח ממנו.

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Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman, and welcome to Parshat Noach. Today I want to talk to you about Noach's name.

The Torah actually talks to us about Noach's name and tells us how it is exactly that he got it. It turns out that Noach's father, Lemech, made a declaration upon the birth of Noach — and there's something very, very puzzling, very chilling, about that declaration. Let me read it to you.

# The Meaning of

Noah's

# Name

' saying, Noach, child his of name the called he andוַי ִ ּקרא אֶת שְׁמו נֹחַ לֵאמֹר' '

deeds our from us comfort shall one Thisז ֶה י ְנ ַחֲמֵנו ּמִמַּעֲשֵׂנו ּו ּמֵעצבון י ָ ֵדינו ּמִן הָאֲדמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵררהּ י ְקוָה'.

and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that God cursed.

Somehow Lemech senses that this child is going to comfort him. Not just comfort him, but comfort all of us, comfort mankind, from the curse of the land.

What's the curse of the land? The curse of the land goes back to the earliest stories in the Torah, the stories of the Tree of Knowledge, the stories of Cain and Abel, where the land became cursed.

There were consequences to eating from the Tree of Knowledge, there were consequences to Cain's killing of Abel — and those consequences express themselves in two main ways. One of them was an alienation from God. Adam and Eve hide from God immediately after eating from the tree. Cain senses that he will spend his life continually hiding from God.

And similarly, not just an alienation from God but an alienation from land. Adam is told ’

just won't It days. the all land the on work you will toil and sadness inבְּעִצבון תֹּאכְלֶנ ָּה כֹּל י ְמֵי חַי ֶ ּיךָ', will you brow your of sweat the byבְּז ֵעַת אַפֶיךָ תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם', ' it. on work to have you'll you; for provide land. the work

And that curse also intensifies itself in the times of Cain, when Cain is told that even if he works the land, it's not going to help: ' ',לָך כֹּחָהּ תֵּת תֹסֵף לֹאit won't continue to give you its bounty.

And now, generations later, Lemech comes and senses that things could be different now. '

land the from hands, our of sadness the from us comfort will one Thisז ֶה י ְנ ַחֲמֵנו ּמִמַּעֲשֵׂנו ּו ּמֵעצבון י ָ ֵדינו ּ.' cursed. has God that

So it all sounds very nice, sounds very hopeful — but here's the chilling part. If you fast-forward not six verses ahead, you get to the verses that describe God's decision to bring the flood, God's decision to destroy the world, because Lemech lives in the generation which is right before the flood.

# Noah's

Name and

# God's

Decision

Now listen to God's decision to destroy the world as described by the Torah. Chapter six, verse six: ’

' land, the in man created had He thatכִּי עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדם בָּאָרץ', ’ regretted, God andוַי ִ ּנ ָּחֶם י ְקוָה', ' said: God then And heart. His to saddened was He andוַי ִ ּתְעצב אֶל לִבּו',

פְנ ֵי הָאֲדמָה', earth. the

of face the from created have I that man out wipe will Iאֶמְחֶה אֶת הָאָדם אֲשֶׁר בָּראתִי מֵעַל

Now if you pay careful attention to the words here, you will find a very fascinating but very chilling thing, which is that God's declaration in creating the world exactly echoes Lemech's declaration upon the birth of Noach.

These are the words to look for. Go back to Lemech's declaration: ' ',ּ ַחֲמֵנו ְנ י ֶה זword number one. 'Yenachem,' comfort or regret — it has both meanings. ' ',ּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוthis one will comfort us 'mi- ma'asenu,' from our deeds. Word number two, deeds. ' ',ּמֵעצבון וword number three, sadness [ִitzavon]. Word number four, ' 'הָאֲדמָה מִן[min-ha-adamah].

sadness the from us comfort will one thisז ֶה י ְנ ַחֲמֵנו ּמִמַּעֲשֵׂנו ּו ּמֵעצבון י ָ ֵדינו ּמִן הָאֲדמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵררהּ י ְקוָה' '

of our hands, from the earth that God has created.

But if you take those four words – y'nachem, ma'asenu, me-itzvon, adamah – you will find them repeated in this exact same order in God's decision to destroy the world.

' ',ְקוָה י ָּחֶם ּנ ִ וַיthere's word number one, and God regretted — but it's the same word for comfort, going back to the declaration of Lemech. ' ',עָשָׂה כִּיthere's word number two, that He had made man in the land. ' ',לִבּו אֶל ּתְעצב ִ וַיand He became saddened - there's itzavon, sadness, word number three. And

then, as if on cue, God says: I will wipe out man ' ',הָאֲדמָה ֵי פְנ was word number four.

מֵעַלfrom the face of the adamah — there

It's impossible to resist the conclusion that for some strange reason, God is mimicking Lemech when He decides to destroy the world. The declaration for destroying the world has, as its prototype, the naming speech that Lemech gave for Noach. Now why would that be?

# The Real Meaning of Lemech's Words

So I want to propose a theory to you. It comes from Rashi. Rashi makes a very innocent little comment in describing Lemech's declaration. Lemech said that this one, Noach, will comfort us. That's why he is named Noach — from the word 'yenachem,' to comfort. This one will comfort us. Comfort for the curses of the land. How would Noach comfort mankind from the curse that God had placed upon the land?

The sages of the Midrash said that Lemech saw prophetically that Noach would be the creator of the plow. The plow would be a form of comfort. We wouldn't have to deal with the curse of the land anymore.

I want to suggest that that was the straw that broke the camel's back. That comfort, the declaration of the

plow, in the world before the flood, for reasons of comfort – and not just the creation of the plow but the significance that mankind attached to the plow, that the plow would comfort us – is the reason to destroy the world.

Why? The answer is: Because the plow can never comfort you.

But what is comfort all about? When do we achieve comfort? How do we achieve comfort? When we are wracked by a terrible loss, how do we get comfort from a loss?

Comfort involves a kind of change in perspective. There is a kind of mourning which you can't get comfort for, which is called 'aninut': terrible pain, searing grief, before burial. But after burial, there's a new kind of mourning, and it's called 'avelut,' alef-bet-lamed. It's the same word as 'aval,' 'but.'

An 'avel,' a mourner, asks himself a question — but the question has no answer, and the question is: How could this have happened? Why did this happen? And the only thing that the 'avel' can do, ultimately, is to say '...but it happened.' It happened anyway — and 'avelut' is the stage of but-ness, of nevertheless-ness

– 'It happened and I must deal with it.'

It's a change in perspective, it's a willingness to accommodate the uncomfortable reality.

' ',ּ ּמִמַּעֲשֵׂנו ַחֲמֵנו ְנ י ֶה זLemech said. 'This one will comfort us, he is going to create the plow that will allow us to live, to accommodate ourselves to an uncomfortable reality.'

# The

Consequences of

# God's

Regret

What were the purposes of the curses? The curse of the land, the sadness of the land? Why was it so sad to toil on the land, such that the language for the curse should be ''ּיךָ ֶ חַי ְמֵי י כֹּל ָּה תֹּאכְלֶנ בְּעִצבון? That you will work the land by the sweat of your brow and you will eat it in sadness?

What's so sad about work? The answer is: When work is just work, it's not sad — but when work is toil, when work could have gone easier, but it goes harder, then it's sad. There's a futility involved — and then the sadness is a reminder that things could be different.

The curses in the wake of the Tree of Knowledge, in the wake of the murder of Hevel (Abel), were curses that alienated us from land and they alienated us from God. We hid from God, and when we worked the land, it would no longer give its power to us. It would be sad and we would toil.

Land and God. There's a fascinating comment that the Ramban makes. The Ramban says that when God

was God because was 'us' the – 1:26) (Genesis man' make us 'let –נ ַעֲשֶׂה אָדם בְּצַלְמֵנו ּכִּדמו ּתֵנו ּ' ' said,

speaking to the land. God said to the land: 'You contribute the body and I will contribute the soul. We together shall make man.'

So land and God stand as man's Creators — but we become alienated from our Creators, land and God,

in the wake of the Tree of Knowledge... and that alienation grows after Cain and Abel and it grows and it grows... and when will it stop? And what's the point of that alienation?

Why make curses that alienate man from God? God doesn't want us to be alienated. The answer is: There is a homing beacon. A homing beacon we all have to come back to our Creator. We were once one with our Creator. We always want to come back, we never want to be separate — and the more you become alienated, the stronger the homing beacon becomes, the stronger you want to come back.

And that's the point of the curses. The curses are: Understand the consequence of the sins, understand how alienated we have become, and desire to come back! Feel the sadness, the toil, and return!

# The

Reason

for

# God's

Decision

When would God say that the time has come to give up, to just destroy the world? It comes when you find comfort in all the wrong places. It comes when you find comfort in the plow. The plow is a technological solution to a spiritual problem. It is a way of taking Tylenol so that you don't feel sadness anymore.

We can work the land with the plow! We can accommodate ourselves to this uncomfortable reality! We don't have to deal with the alienation anymore! We can inure ourselves to it! And it's at that moment that God says: 'You say that you will comfort yourselves with the creation of the plow? You are giving up on the relationship; there's no way that you will ever come back. I have no choice but to start all over again.'

And God uses the exact same language that mankind used to comfort themselves with the plow, to start all over again with a watery end to the previous world and the hope for a better one, in a recreated world with a new slate, and a new relationship with this being.

Hi, I’m Beth Lesch. Welcome to [Parshat Acharei Mot](https://www.alephbeta.org/weekly-torah-portion/parshat-acharei-mot). You are watching [Aleph Beta](https://www.alephbeta.org/).

If you were riding a crowded elevator in New York City and these two shifty-looking guys were huddled in the back, and one of them said: “We gotta cover up his blood” – what would you think?

You’d probably think a few things, like: “Ummm, can someone get me out of this elevator, please?” and “I knew I shouldn’t have come to New York” and “Beth, I think you’ve been watching a little too much Law & Order.” And that may be true. But the point is, it sounds like these guys are murderers, right?

When someone talks about covering up blood, they just did something horrible and they’re trying to avoid being caught.

So why is it that when we read this verse in Acharei Mot that talks about covering up blood, those murderous connotations don’t come to mind?

# Bible Verses

About

# Eating Animals and Meat

וְאִישׁ אִישׁ מִבְּנ ֵי י ִשׂ ָראֵל ו ּמִן הַג ֵּר הַג ָּר בְּתוכָם

them with lives who stranger any or Israel of children the from person Any אֲשֶׁר י ָצו ּד צֵיד חַי ָ ּה או עוף אֲשֶׁר י ֵאָכֵל

and who hunts a wild animal or bird that is to be eaten —

דּמו וְכִסָּהו ּבֶּעָפָר.

וְשָׁפַךְ אֶת

he shall spill its blood and he shall cover it up with earth. (Leviticus 17:13-14)

This verse describes the mitzvah of kisui hadam – when a shochet, a ritual slaughterer, kills a wild animal or a bird and covers up its blood. We don’t think that it has anything to do with murder! It’s just part of the process of preparing kosher meat. Nothing to see here, folks!

But I can’t help but wonder if there’s something more going on here. Is it possible that the Torah is telling us that there’s something murderous about this mitzvah?

# Is The Bible Saying

Not to

# Eat Meat?

I know, I know, it seems like a stretch, and you’re thinking: “Beth, just because ‘covering up blood’ means ‘concealing a crime’ in Law & Order, you can’t just apply that back to the Torah. The Torah has its own way of speaking. You have to read the Torah on its own terms.”

And that’s a fair point. So fine, let’s do that. We’ll run a quick search in our Torah database for the phrase “kisui hadam,” covering blood. And what do you know? Whenever this phrase shows up, it’s talking about something criminal. Look at the first hit: it’s from the sale of Joseph, when Judah talks his brothers

down from committing murder:

מַה בֶּצַע כִּי נ ַהֲרֹג אֶת אָחִינו ּ

What do we gain by killing our brother

וְכִסִּינו ּאֶת דּמו

and covering up his blood? (Genesis 37:26)

“To cover up blood” means “to hide a murder.” That’s how Rashi defines the phrase, Ramban too. And you’ll find that every other time this phrase appears — Isaiah 26, Ezekiel 24, Job 16 — it’s the very same specific connotation. Take a look for yourself. It’s not just Law & Order. In the language of the Torah, to “cover up blood” means to conceal a crime.

Ok, maybe I’m making too big a deal out of this one phrase, kisui hadam, but... when you look back at the verse in Acharei Mot, you realize it’s not just that one phrase that smacks of something criminal.

What about the phrase, shofech et damo, he spills the animal’s blood? Does that conjure anything in your mind? That’s an idiom for murder, pure and simple.

On the surface, this verse reads like a benign kashering procedure, but when you look a little closer, you start to see that the words that the Torah uses — they aren’t mere physical descriptions. Kisui hadam, shofech et ha dam – each one is a loaded phrase, a metaphor with insidious connotations, pointing to a single idea: that there’s something criminal about slaughtering an animal for food.

# Is Eating Meat

Wrong

# According to

the Bible?

At this point, you might be getting a bit nervous, even annoyed. What is this, Aleph Beta is accepting money from the animal right’s lobby or something? The Torah permits us to kill animals and eat them. It’s even a mitzvah —

[to eat a korban](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/korbanot-meaning-today)

, to enjoy meat at your yom tov table. So how could it be that there’s something problematic about killing animals? I must be somehow misconstruing the verse, right?

If the Torah doesn’t want us to eat meat, then why does the verse tell you how to kill animals to eat them? I mean, kisui hadam is a mitzvah! We even say a bracha, al kisui hadam! Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who commands us to… cover up our murder? But on the other hand, the intertextual parallels are hard to deny. If the Torah really thinks that eating meat is 100% totally thoroughly OK, then why does it choose these loaded metaphors — kisui hadam, shofech et hadam — to describe the act? The Torah is sending us mixed messages: giving us a law out of one side of its mouth, and out the other side, saying: “But maybe you should think twice about it…”

So it’s true, by the time we get to Parshat Acharei Mot, eating animals is permissible, but it wasn’t always that way.

# When Humans Started Eating Meat in the Bible

When God first created the world, we weren’t allowed to eat animals. We were vegans. Listen to how God describes our diet:

ֵע ֣שׂבכָּל־אֶת־ herb… Every

וְאֶת כָּל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בּו פְרי עֵץ זֹרעַ ז ָ ַרע

inside seed a with fruit a has that tree every And לָכֶם י ִהְי ֶה לְאָכְלָה

to you it shall be for food (Genesis 1:29)

Did you hear anything about hamburgers? Neither did I. It’s an articulation of the value of animal life. And lest you think I’m just reading this with my 21st century lens, no less than the sages of the Midrash comment on this verse:

לא ברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בריותיו על מנת שימותו

God didn’t create his creatures in order that they would die (Midrash Aggadah to Genesis 1:29) But in the aftermath of the flood, things changed. God altered the decree:

כָּל רמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הו ּא חַי לָכֶם י ִהְי ֶה לְאָכְלָה

All animals, every living thing, I am now giving to you as food

כְּי ֶ ֶרק עֵשֶׂב נ ָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כֹּל.

Just like I gave you plants, now I’m giving you everything. (Genesis 9:3)

Most commentators say God was rewarding Noach for having saved the animals on the ark. But isn’t that interesting? You see, it’s not just the verse in Acharei Mot which is sending mixed messages about whether or not it’s proper to kill animals for food. The Torah seems to send mixed messages right from the start. Reverence for animal life is definitely a value, but so is the ability of human beings to enjoy the world. It’s almost as if we’re seeing God struggle to work out which value is on top. And we can see that tension reflected in the very next verse:

דמו

אַךְ בָּשָׂר בְּנ ַפְשׁ ֹו

But flesh, with its soul, its blood,

לֹא תֹאכֵלו ּ.

you shall not eat. (Genesis 9:4)

# What the Bible Says

About

# Not

Eating Meat with

# Blood

You see, God decides to let us eat animals, but there’s a limitation. We can’t eat the animal’s blood (or as the halachic tradition interprets it: ever min ha’chai), because its “

[soul is in its blood](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/where-is-the-soul)

.” What message is God trying to send? We may be higher than the animals on the food chain, but we still have to remember that they contain a nefesh, a God-given soul. They are alive, and that “aliveness” requires some measure of respect. The animal isn’t just your lunch. It had life coursing through its veins.

Now, in the next two verses, God speaks to us about killing people:

דּמְכֶם לְנ ַפְשׁתֵיכֶם אֶדרֹשׁ

…וְאַךְ אֶת

But your blood, of your souls, I will demand [an account]...

דּם הָאָדם

שֹׁפֵךְ

Whoever sheds the blood of man

שׁפֵךְ

דּמו י ִ

בָּאָדם

through man shall his blood be shed

כִּי בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדם.

for in the image of God He made man. (Genesis 9:5-6)

Why is God suddenly talking about killing people? You’d be forgiven for thinking that God changed topics altogether — but I think that what He is doing is adding texture, adding nuance, to our understanding of killing animals. He is commenting on it.

# What the Bible Is Saying

About

# Eating Animals

In order to understand what God is telling us here, we have to understand the sequence of these verses: You can eat animals.

But don’t eat their blood, [because their soul is in their blood.](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/where-is-the-soul)

But don’t kill people, because they are made in My image.

I know how Verse 1 leads to Verse 2. But where is Verse 3 coming from? What’s the logical flow?

It strikes me that there are two ways to read this sequence. The first is to say: You can eat animals, but don’t eat their blood, because their nefesh is in their blood, and I want you to take their nefesh very seriously. Speaking of nefesh, do you know who else has a nefesh? Human beings have a nefesh. I want you to take their nefesh very seriously, too! Animals and humans — they’re both alive, they both possess a God-given soul. The bottom line: Animals and humans share something very fundamental.

But there’s another way to read the verse. You can kill animals. (By the way, don’t eat their blood.) Almost like it’s in parentheses. But listen, just because you can kill animals, don’t you start thinking that it’s ok to kill people. Killing people is an extremely serious crime. Heaven forbid that you would equate animals and people! The bottom line: Animals and humans are two totally different levels.

So which reading is the correct one? Is the bottom line that animals and humans are fundamentally similar? Or fundamentally different? I struggled for a long time over which one of these readings was the “correct” one, until a friend pointed out to me — “They’re probably both true.” People and animals do share something very fundamental. But we’re also fundamentally different. We both sleep, eat, play. We experience pain, fear. We make choices, we have agency. But people are capable of high-level reasoning, and we are faced with moral choices. In the language of the Torah, we would say that [both people and](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/where-is-the-soul) [animals contain a nefesh, a soul](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/where-is-the-soul) — but only people are [created b’tzelem Elokim, in the image of God](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/created-in-gods-image-meaning).

There is some way in which we resemble, in which we can approach godliness — a way that an animal never could.

And then on the other side of the spectrum, you have plants. Plants don’t have a nefesh. We consider plants to be alive, but in the Torah’s account, a dandelion doesn’t have a soul. That’s why we’ve been able to eat plants from the start. The Torah is plotting out for us these three tiers of creation:

Plants — no nefesh Animals – nefesh, and

People – nefesh and b’tzelem Elokim

Animals and people both have a nefesh, a God-given soul. And a nefesh, any nefesh, demands respect.

# Understanding the Bible Verses Blood

Mot: Acharei to back it bring and idea that take Now וְאִישׁ אִישׁ מִבְּנ ֵי י ִשׂ ָראֵל ו ּמִן הַג ֵּר הַג ָּר בְּתוכָם

# about

Eating Animals and

them with lives who stranger any or Israel of children the from person Any אֲשֶׁר י ָצו ּד צֵיד חַי ָ ּה או עוף אֲשֶׁר י ֵאָכֵל

and who hunts a wild animal or bird that is to be eaten —

דּמו וְכִסָּהו ּבֶּעָפָר.

וְשָׁפַךְ אֶת

he shall spill its blood and he shall cover it up with earth. (Leviticus 17:13–14) But this time, let’s look at the very next verse:

כִּי נ ֶפֶשׁ כָּל בָּשָׂר דּמו בְנ ַפְשׁ ֹו הו ּא

For the soul of all flesh — its blood is in its soul (Leviticus 17:14) Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

God gives us permission to kill animals and eat them for food. But then God asks us to undergo this strange ritual, to cover up the blood. To me, that is God’s way of saying to us: “Look, you’ve just ended the life of another being. That is serious business. I want you to feel the gravity of what you did. You’ve killed one of my creations, and there’s no escaping that — but I’m giving you a pardon. Pour some dirt on the blood. A covered up crime goes unpunished.”

# Eating Meat:

Not

# A Biblical Sin, but

Not

# the Ideal?

All of us meat eaters are well within the letter of the law here, we’re enjoying a privilege given to us directly by God… but chas v’shalom that we should treat that as lightly as the harvesting of lettuce for a salad. It seems to me that the Torah nudging us towards an ideal: a world in which we don’t kill animals for food. The notion that X is permissible but Y is ideal… we find that all of the time in Jewish law. It’s called a chumrah, a stringency. If you’ve mastered the 613 commandments and you are overflowing with a want to serve God, then a chumrah is a lovely thing to take on. When we hear the word chumrah, we tend to imagine people eating huge amounts of matzah at the seder, but could vegetarianism be a chumrah? After seeing these parallels, a big part of me thinks that it is.

And yet I’m troubled by the fact that we don’t find much of a push for vegetarianism in our traditional sources. Why is that? The Torah clearly articulates reverence for animal life as a value. How did the pious men and women before me grapple with this? Maybe the bottom line is that vegetarianism, as an ideal, is not meant to be achieved in this world. Maybe this world is a world of meat eating — and in the messianic age, we’ll realize the ideal.

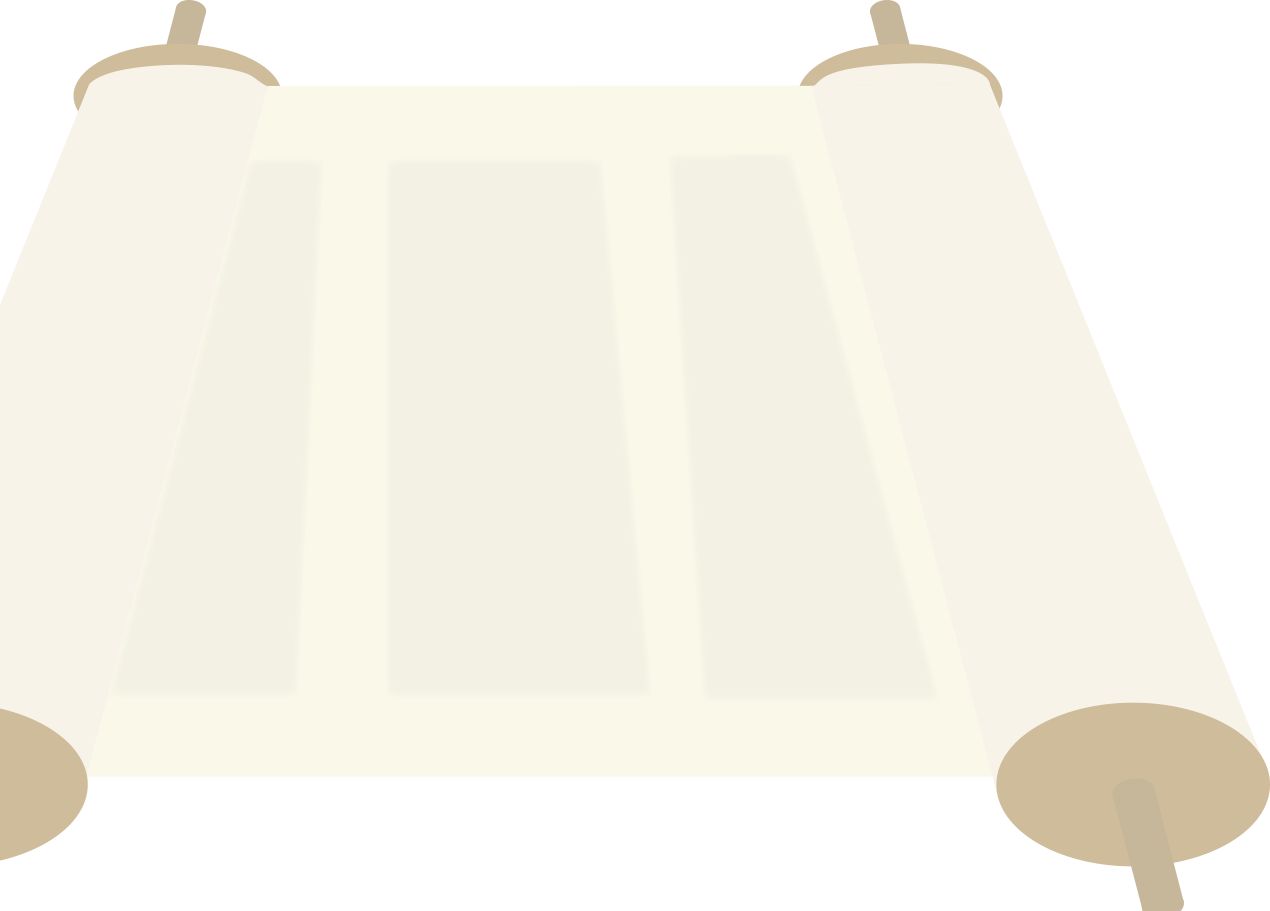
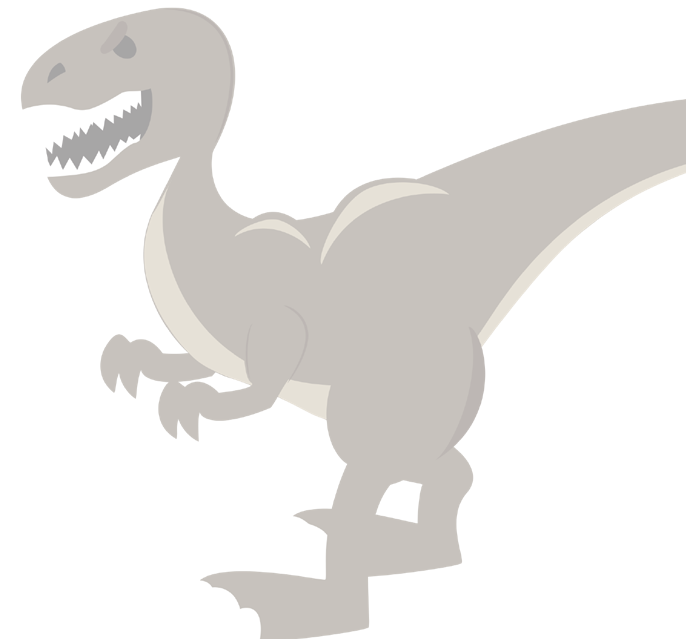
But no matter where you come down, it’s obvious to me, from this seeming contradiction in Acharei Mot, that God is demanding that we have an honest conversation with ourselves about eating animals. That we look in the mirror, so to speak, sharpened knife in hand, and ask: Do we fully appreciate what

we’re doing? We are taking a God-given soul and extinguishing it. And if we’re not the ones who do the actual slaughtering, as is so often the case, but rather we go to the store and pick up our meat in a neat little package, do we fully appreciate what the shochet, the ritual slaughterer, did for us?

I’m not talking about the evils of factory farming. I’m not talking about methane emissions. You raise a chicken in your own backyard. You treat it like a member of the family. You buy credits to offset your carbon footprint. Should you end its life, so that you can enjoy your schnitzel? Yeah, you can do it, but… what’s the spiritually ideal thing to do?

I once went to a chicken farm to witness a shechita, a ritual slaughter. I stood two feet away as the shochet ended the chicken’s life. He covered the blood with earth. I took the bird, still warm, and walked it over to the defeathering machine. Then I helped to soak it, heap salt onto its flesh, to kasher it, and I brought it home that night for dinner. It was an intense experience. I felt connected but also repulsed. I remember thinking to myself: “I can’t imagine eating an animal ever again unless I go through this process, so I can stay in touch with what goes into it.” And then… life got busy and my resolve wore off. That was nine years ago. Honestly, in that time, I haven’t found any other way to seriously grapple with these issues. I’m not ready to take on this chumrah yet. But I’m pretty sure that this verse, if nothing else, demands that I find a new way.

Do you want to learn more about how the Torah relates to animal life? Check out [this course](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/jewish-oral-law-vs-written-law) from Rabbi Fohrman on not mixing milk and meat. It’s one of my favorites. Link in the description.



**NOACH: WHY AREN’T DINOSAURS IN THE TORAH?**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Noach!

## An Inevitable Question

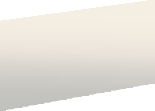
When you take your kids to the Museum of Natural History, what’s the big draw? Everyone knows it’s the Dinosaur room. There’s Raptosaurus Rex battling Megalosaurus and it’s right there in front of you, all laid out in gigantic glory. Your 7-year-old is wide- eyed. And then, wait for it, the inevitable, innocent question comes: ‘*Daddy, how come these aren’t in our book?*’ Little seven year old Benji or Shloimie or Debbie or Elisheva – they are looking at you pensively, and they just want to know.

The Torah is God’s book, and it is supposed to tell the truth to us. But flip through the Book of Genesis, and it seems – at face value, at least – that the Torah omits mention of dinosaurs entirely. If they lived – and the fossil you can reach out and touch1 seems to suggest that they very much did – how does one tell the story of Creation without telling the story of the dinosaurs? These creatures seem to have been a fairly prominent feature of the story of creation. Isn’t it a terrible sin of omission to leave them out?

As a religiously inclined person – or even as someone who takes the Torah seriously, at all – how does one grapple with that question? Why *doesn’t* the Torah talk about those dinosaurs?

## ‘How To Read A Book’

We’d like to suggest to you a general framework for thinking about this question. And really, not just this one question, or even science-and-Torah questions in general – but a framework that is even larger; a framework that seeks to understand Torah study itself. We want to explore with you: what are we really doing when we study Torah? And: is there a proper way to go about this study? Are there any rules or guidelines we ought to keep in mind as we embark upon the adventure of reading this Book of Books?



Here’s a principle that we have found helpful. It came to us courtesy of a handy little book entitled, appropriately enough: *How To Read A Book*, written by Mortimer Adler, a modern-day philosopher and historian. Adler argues, somewhat facetiously, that despite the thousands of books published every year, few books are actually worth reading. But, there are a hundred or so books that he does consider worth reading – works that, he argues, somehow don’t show their age; works that remain perennially fresh, despite the passage of time. These are books to which we can return and reread at different stages of our lives and find ourselves

enlightened by them anew; they will always seem to yield fresh insights to us. Such books, he writes, are *above* us; we have to stretch ourselves to understand them. Such books don’t yield their secrets easily; they are to be *studied*, not merely read.

1 Please do not actually touch the fossils.

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Noach: Why Aren’t Dinosaurs In The Torah?” (available for viewing at [www.](http://www.alephbeta.org/) [alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org/)). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

Unsurprisingly, Adler counts the Bible among these books.

So how does one go about reading such a book? Adler gives his readers a list of suggestions, and here is one of the very first pieces of advice he offers: In order to *understand* a book, a reader needs to decide early on what *genre* the book belongs to. If you misinterpret the genre of the book you are reading, then you are truly lost before you even begin. You will have very little chance of understanding as you read.

Imagine, for example, that you were reading a chemistry textbook - *but you didn’t understand that it was a chemistry textbook.* You thought you were reading poetry, instead. Or the reverse: You were reading poetry and you thought that you were reading a chemistry textbook.

In either situation, things wouldn’t go well.

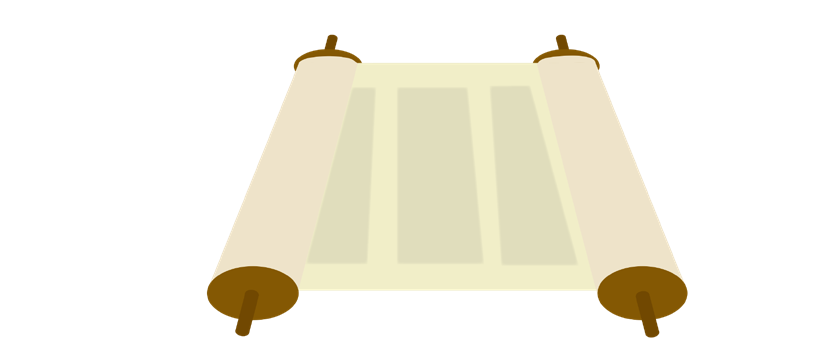
There you are, reading Carl Sandburg’s poem ‘Fog,’ with your class. The first line is: “The fog comes on little cat feet,” and somebody in the back of the room raises her hand and says, ‘Teacher, teacher, I don’t understand, fog doesn’t have feet, and it’s not a cat. This whole poem, it just doesn’t make any sense.’

How would you answer a question like that?

The truth is, there is no answer to a question like that. The question itself is based on a fundamental misunderstanding: *You are reading poetry here, not meteorology.* Had the student instead asked: ‘The imagery of the fog coming on cat feet, what is it meant to convey?’ – well, that’s a real question, a question that makes sense for poetry – and you could go about trying to answer it. But there is no ‘answer’ to a question that comes from misunderstanding a book’s genre. If you misinterpret genre, you misinterpret everything.

## What Kind of Book is the Torah?

So let us pose a grand question to you: *What kind of book is the Torah?* What is its genre?

The importance of the question should, by now, be clear: How could we begin trying to read this book without having any idea what kind of book it is? But the answer to the question of genre, when it comes to the Torah, turns out not to be so easy to answer. What kind of book is it, really?

One’s first impulse might be to say that it is a book of laws, a legal treatise. After all, the Torah has 613 laws in it – that sure is a lot of laws. But here’s the thing: The Torah doesn’t really seem to be a legal treatise, because it has many other things in it, too. For example, the Torah is loaded with stories.

What are all these stories doing in a legal treatise? It seems strange for a law book to be riddled with anecdotes.

So let’s go back to the drawing board, here: the Torah really *does* have a great many stories in it. Maybe then, it is a history book. But that doesn’t seem to quite work, because… it really seems to have too many laws in it to be a history book. So what kind of book is it?

Well, maybe the Torah is a philosophy book, or a book of theology. But here, too, we meet a dead end: the Torah has too many laws and stories in it to be a philosophy book. Moreover, the Bible would seem to completely fail as a book of theology: theology is the study of the Divine – but the Bible doesn’t tell us very much at all about what it is like to be

God, or what He does up there in Heaven all day. It is much more focused on what it is like to be human, and what we are supposed to be doing all day, right here on earth.

So what kind of book is the Torah?

## The Torah As A Guide Book

The truth is: Its name provides a clue. The word ‘Torah’ comes from the verb להורות (*lehorot*), ‘to guide’, or ‘to show the way.’ The Torah’s name suggests that it is a guide book.

And, if you think about it, it really is. The Torah is intended to *guide* us in our life’s journey; it guides us as to how to develop and maintain a relationship with God, and with the people around us. At the collective level, the Torah offers such guidance to a nation – the People of Israel – and at the individual level, it offers this kind of guidance to each person in that nation.

So… now ask: what does it *take* to guide someone in this?

One of the things it takes is **laws**. There are laws you have to follow, guidelines for behavior that you have to observe. These laws are very important – but they are not, in themselves, enough. They don’t comprise the totality of the ‘guidance’ offered by the Torah.

That is, if you say to yourself, all it takes to be a good person is to follow the commandments, that’s actually, probably, not true. The *Ramban* talks about being a התורה ברשות נבל: somebody who keeps, punctiliously, all the commands, and yet still manages to live life as a morally obtuse person.2 And that might seem impossible; how could you keep all the laws and still be deeply morally flawed? The answer is: It is possible because law alone is too narrow a discipline to completely regulate human behavior. Law is just *part* of the answer. And so the Torah contains more than just laws; it contains **stories**, too... stories that tell you about what our ancestors did and the way God dealt with them, and the way they dealt with God. There are timeless truths in those stories that matter to us today. The stories teach us *values*, and values and laws are not one and the same thing.

Beyond stories and laws, there are certain philosophical notions that we need to understand, as well, in order to properly develop relationships with God and with those around us – and so the Torah talks about those ideas too. It takes *all* of this to guide us.

## Seeing The Angle

So let’s stop for a moment and explore the implications of this: If the Torah really is a guide book, if that is its ‘genre’, as it were – what does that mean? Well, a book’s genre defines the perspective it takes on everything it talks about. So if the Torah is a guide book, that means that everything the Torah tells you – its laws, its stories and its philosophy – is all going to be told from the *perspective* of a guide book.

And, by the way, *Chazal*, our Sages, say as much. Our Sages make the following statement in the Talmud:

**Babylonian Talmud Megillah 14a**

נבואה שהוצרכה לדורות נכתבה ושלא הוצרכה לא נכתבה

Any prophecy that was relevant for generations was written [in the Torah] and any prophecy that wasn’t relevant was not written

In other words, prophecies which were just locally relevant for particular generations weren’t written down. Why? Wouldn’t they give us lots of insight into what life looked like back then? Maybe so, but a prophecy like that doesn’t *guide* you. It might be an *interesting* fact, but only that which *guides* you is written.

## Chronology

Here’s another puzzling thing that our Sages say, that becomes explicable once you understand that the Torah is a guide book. Our Sages tell us:

**Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 6b**

אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה

There is no “earlier” and “later” in the Torah (i.e. there is no chronological order in the Torah)

2 See the Ramban (Nachmanides) on Leviticus 19:2, which we’ve brought for you in your Source Sheet.

Now, what does that really mean? The Sages can’t be saying that nothing in the Torah is written in chronological order, because surely that’s not true. The Torah starts with Creation, the very beginning, and it ends with events that happened much later, with Moses and the people poised to enter the Land of Israel – and it tells us about a lot of things that happened in between. So yes, there is a basic flow of chronology in the Torah. So what are the Sages really trying to say?

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

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Thanks for understanding - we love you guys, too.

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**X**

The point of the Sages is that you can’t always trust the chronological order in the Torah. Because every once in a while, the Torah will actually switch around the order of events, putting something that happened later, earlier in the Torah.3 But now ask yourself, why would the Torah actually

*do* that? Why switch around the order of two events, and ‘deliberately mislead’ you about the chronological order of those events?

The answer: because the Torah is not a history book, it is a guide book. And if the Torah can guide you by juxtaposing two episodes that were separated in time but display an important, underlying theme – the Torah will sometimes do that, so the reader will discern that underlying theme. The Torah will sacrifice strict historical accuracy in order to guide you.

## Back To Dinosaurs

So now, let’s finally come back to dinosaurs — and perhaps you can anticipate where we are going here. Where are the dinosaurs in the Torah? Why not talk about them? Well, evidently the Torah saw little in the advent of Tyrannosaurus Rex and its battles against Stegosaurus that needed to serve as a guide to human behavior. And the same goes for Pterodactyls, and every other type of dinosaur. So these creatures didn’t get included in the book. The advent of these creatures may have been important for what they contributed to the biological record, but the Torah didn’t deign their appearance to be important to *you,* and for how you seek to shape your life in relation to those around you. You want to learn about them? Well, that’s what the American Museum of Natural History is for.

At some level, the story the Torah tells and the story science tells is one and the same story - a story called reality. But each tells that story from a different perspective. One tells you the nuts and bolts of reality, and the other is intended to guide you through it. And so, when we read this guide, let us make no mistake about what we are reading: we are not just reading just any old book. We are reading something that is meant to shape us, something that is meant to help us tackle a grand quest: how should we set about this journey called life? What is the best way to live it, in relationship with God and those around us? Everything the Torah tells us is designed to help us achieve those goals — but we need to understand the genre in order to be able to understand its message.

3 See, for example, Rashi on Exodus 24:1, cited in the sources below.



Noach: Why Aren’t Dinosaurs In The Torah?

Source Sheet Page 1

**Ramban (Nachmanides) on Vayikra 19:2**

And the matter is [that] the Torah prohibited sexual transgressions and forbidden foods, and permitted sexual relations between husband and wife and the eating of meat and [the drinking of] wine. If so, a desirous person will find a place to be lecherous with his wife or his

many wives, or to be among the guzzlers of wine and the gluttons of meat. He will speak as he pleases about all the vulgarities, the prohibition of which is not mentioned in the Torah. And behold, **he would be a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah.** Therefore, Scripture came, after it specified the prohibitions that it completely forbade, and commanded a more general [rule] - that we should

be separated from [indulgence of] those things that are permissible: He should minimize sexual relations, like the matter that they stated (Berakhot 22a), “That Torah

scholars should not be found with their wives [constantly] like chickens.” And he should only have relations according to the need for his execution of the commandment. And he should sanctify himself from wine by minimizing it - just as Scripture calls the Nazarite holy; and mentions the evil that comes from it in the Torah with Noach and with Lot.

And so [too], he should separate himself from impurity - even though we are not prohibited from it in the Torah - as they mentioned (Chagigah 18b), “The clothing of ignorant people are [considered] midras (a type of impurity) for perushim.” And just as the Nazarite is also called holy for his guarding [himself] from the impurity of the dead…

**Babylonian Talmud Megillah 14a**

Many prophets arose for the Jewish people, numbering double the number of Israelites who left Egypt. However, only a portion of the prophecies were recorded, because only prophecy that was needed for future generations was written down in the Bible for posterity, but that which was not needed, as it was not pertinent to later generations, was not written.

**רמב׳׳ן על ויקרא יט:ב**

והענין כי התורה הזהירה בעריות ובמאכלים האסורים והתירה הביאה איש באשתו ואכילת הבשר והיין א”כ ימצא בעל התאוה מקום להיות שטוף בזמת אשתו או נשיו הרבות ולהיות בסובאי יין בזוללי בשר למו וידבר כרצונו בכל הנבלות שלא הוזכר איסור זה בתורה והנה **יהיה נבל ברשות התורה** לפיכך בא הכתוב אחרי שפרט האיסורים שאסר אותם לגמרי וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה

פרושים מן המותרות ימעט במשגל כענין שאמרו (ברכות כב) “שלא יהיו תלמידי חכמים מצויין אצל נשותיהן כתרנגולין” ולא ישמש אלא כפי הצריך בקיום המצוה ממנו ויקדש עצמו מן היין במיעוטו כמו שקרא הכתוב הנזיר קדוש ויזכור הרעות הנזכרות ממנו בתורה בנח ובלוט וכן יפריש עצמו מן הטומאה אע”פ שלא הוזהרנו ממנה בתורה כמו שהזכירו (חגיגה יח) “בגדי עם הארץ מדרס לפרושים” וכמו שנקרא הנזיר קדוש בשמרו מטומאת

המת…

**.בבלי מגילה יד**

הרבה נביאים עמדו להם לישראל כפלים כיוצאי מצרים אלא

נבואה שהוצרכה לדורות נכתבה ושלא הוצרכה לא נכתבה.



Noach: Why Aren’t Dinosaurs In The Torah?

Source Sheet Page 2

**Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 6b**

Rav Menashiya bar Tachlifa said in the name of Rav: That is to say that there is no earlier and later, i.e., there is no absolute chronological order, in the Torah, as events that occurred later in time can appear earlier in the Torah.

**Rashi on Exodus 24:1**

**And to Moses He said, “Come up…:**” This section was [actually] said before the Ten Commandments [were given] (Mechilta 19:10). On the fourth of Sivan, “Come up” was said to him [Moses]. [Midrash Lekach Tov, based on Mechilta and Mechilta d’Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai on

Exod. 19:10, Shab. 88a] See also Midrash Hagadol on this.

**:בבלי פסחים ו**

אמר רב מנשיא בר תחליפא משמיה דרב זאת אומרת אין מוקדם

ומאוחר בתורה.

**רש׳׳י על שמות כד:א**

**ואל משה אמר עלה:** פרשה זו נאמרה קודם עשרת הדברות,

ובארבעה בסיון נאמר לו עלה.



**NOACH: WHY DID GOD DESTROY THE WORLD?**

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Noach!

## A Premonition of Comfort

In this week’s parsha, the Torah talks to us about Noah’s name and tells us how, exactly, he got it. It turns out that Noah’s father, a man named Lemech, made a declaration upon Noah’s birth – and in concert with that declaration, he named his child. But there’s something puzzling, almost chilling, about that declaration. Let’s take a look at this episode, as the Torah relates it to us.

### LOOK INSIDE: Noah’s Name



Read Lemech’s declaration below. What is this curse that he refers to? Have we come across this idea earlier in the Torah?

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will

ְי ַנ ֲח ֵמנ ּו זה

ַח, ֵלאמֹר: נ

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֶאת- ׁשמ ֹו

comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

ִמ ַּמ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו, ּו ֵמ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָי ֵדינ ּו, ִמן-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ֲא ׁ ֶשר ֵא ְר ָר ּה

יקוה.

Strangely, Lemech senses that this child is going to comfort him – and he names Noah for this idea. Indeed, the first two letter of Noah’s name – *nun* and *chet* – borrow from the first two letters of the Hebrew root for comfort: *Nun, chet, mem.* But according to Lemech, Noah’s “comfort” will play out on a grand scale: Noah is not just going to comfort Lemech; he will comfort *all* of mankind -- from some sort of ‘curse of the land.’

What is this curse of the land?

## The Curse Of The Land

The ‘curse of the land’ goes back to two of the earliest stories in the Torah, in both humankind’s encounter with the Tree of Knowledge and the subsequent story of Cain and Abel. Read the text carefully, and you’ll find that there were two main consequences to each of these sins.

### INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life’s biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That’s why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we’ll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you’re planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the “Source Sheet” for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, “Parshat Noach: Why Did God Destroy the World?” (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

Let’s explore the first consequence. Immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, what do Adam and Eve do?

**Genesis 3:8**

ה ָּגן

ֹו ְך ֵעץ ּבת

ה ָא ָדם ְו ִא ׁ ְש ּת ֹו ִמ ְּפ ֵני ְיקוה ֱאלֹקים

ו ִ ּיתְ ַח ֵּבא

And the man and his wife hid from before the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden

They *hide* from God. And fascinatingly, Cain does the same, in the aftermath of his own sin:

**Genesis 4:14**

ּו ִמ ָּפ ֶני ָך ֶא ָּסתֵר ה ֲא ָד ָמה

ֵמ ַעל ְּפ ֵני ה ּי ֹום

הן ֵּג ַר ׁ ְש ָּת אֹ ִתי

Behold You have driven me today off the face of the earth, and I shall be hidden from before You.

Indeed, Cain senses that he will spend his entire life *continually* hiding from God. This impulse to hide seems to express a kind of distance or awkwardness that has been introduced into the relationship between God, on the one hand, and Adam, Eve and Cain, on the other.

So both Adam and Eve, and Cain, hide from God after they sin. Let’s call this **first consequence** “alienation from God” - the distance between man and God, as a result of man’s sins.

## Title

But there was also a **second consequence** that devolved from these sins. There was a different kind of alienation that came about – an alienation between humans and land. Let’s see it play out in the verses, starting with the curses the God doles out after Adam and Eve’s sin:

**Genesis 3:17-19**

**17** And to man He said, “Because you listened to your wife, and you ate from the tree from which I

commanded you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed be the ground for your sake; in sadness shall you eat of it all the days of your life. **18** And it will cause thorns and thistles to grow for you, and you shall eat the herbs of the field. **19** With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for you were taken therefrom, for dust you are, and to dust you will return.”

**בראשית ג:יז–יט**

**יז** ו ְל ָא ָדם ָא ַמר, ּכי- ׁש ַמ ְע ָּת לקול ִא ׁ ְש ֶּת ָך, ַו ּתֹא ַכל

מן-ה ֵעץ, ֲא ׁ ֶשר ִצ ִ ּוי ִתי ָך ֵלאמֹר לֹא תֹא ַכל

מ ֶּמ ּנ ּו--אר ּו ָרה ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ּב ֲעב ּו ֶר ָך, ּב ִע ָ ּצב ֹון ּתֹא ְכ ֶל ָּנה,

ֹכל ְי ֵמי ח ֶ ּיי ָך. **יח** וקוץ ְו ַד ְר ַ ּדר, ַּת ְצ ִמי ַח ָל ְך; ְו ָא ַכ ְל ָּת, את-ע ֶ ׂשב ה ָּ ׂש ֶדה. **יט** ּב ֵז ַעת ַא ֶּפי ָך, ּתֹא ַכל ֶל ֶחם, ַעד

ְב ָך ֶאל-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ּכי ִמ ֶּמ ָּנה ֻל ָּק ְח ָּת: ּכי-ע ָפר ַא ָּתה, ׁש ּו

ו ֶאל-ע ָפר ָּת ׁש ּוב.

Adam is told, for example, that he shall work the land in sadness, by the sweat of his brow. No longer shall the land simply provide, almost effortlessly, for Adam and Eve.

And that curse seems to intensify in the age of Cain. Let’s listen in on what God tells him after he slays his brother, after Cain causes the land to take back the blood of Abel:

**Genesis 4:12**

בד ֶאת-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, לֹא-תֹ ֵסף ֵּתת- ּכ ָח ּה ָל ְך

ֲע ת

ּכי

When you till the soil, it will not continue to give its strength to you

When it came to Adam and Eve – well, the land might no longer provide effortlessly for them anymore, but at least if they worked it, they could expect to yield its rich bounty. Somehow, that promise becomes compromised with Cain. Even if Cain exhausts himself working the land, still, he will sense something missing in land’s response to his efforts: it will no longer continue to give him its best. Cain will look upon the bounty of the land and find it wanting. And this second alienation - alienation from land - *this* is the “curse of the land” that Lemech was referring to.

## Lemech Senses Change is Afoot

And now, generations later, Lemech senses that things could be different; that somehow, we as humans could and would get beyond this curse. And he expresses that thought in terms of an idea he calls “comfort.”

### LOOK INSIDE: Understanding Comfort



Reflect again upon this declaration of Lemech: *“This one will comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”* How do you understand the word “comfort” here? How do you envision that Noah’s birth might bring comfort?

What, exactly, does Lemech mean by “comfort”? He seems to mean that his generation will be relieved, somehow, from the effects of Adam’s curse, of Cain’s curse. But comfort is a word that you and I don’t usually associate with getting past divine curses. Comfort is something we associate primarily with death and mourning. Someone loses a loved one, so they seek comfort. What, exactly, does comfort have to do with Noach and humankind’s response to “the curse of the land”? How do we understand Lemech’s cryptic premonition?

It turns out that the Torah gives us a series of clues that enable us to decode Lemech’s premonition. Indeed, there is a remarkable textual pattern that seems to be lurking just below the surface of the verses that we’ve been examining, a pattern which points to another account in the Torah. The implications of the pattern are as far-reaching as they are chilling.

## Uncovering The Pattern

### PONDER THIS



Let’s start first with this notion of “comfort.” It turns out that the Hebrew root for “comfort” - נחם - shares a root with another word: “regret.” Can you think of any other biblical stories that talk about “regret”?

**Hint 1:** In this story, God is the one doing the regretting…

**Hint 2:** It comes just before a massive disaster…

Think about God regretting having created man, just before He decides to bring the flood. Fast-forward just a few verses from Lemech’s declaration, and you’ll find the following:

**Genesis 6:6**

**בראשית ו:ו**

**6** And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon

ּב ָא ֶרץ; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַע ֵ ּצב,

ּכי-ע ָ ׂשה ֶאת-ה ָא ָדם

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנחֶם ְיקוה,

the earth, and He became grieved in His heart.

אֶל- ִל ּב ֹו.

Well, that’s an interesting coincidence, you might say. But here’s the remarkable thing: it is not just this word נחם in God’s declaration that echoes Lemech. Other parts of the Almighty’s declaration do, too.

### LOOK INSIDE: Looking for Parallels



Take a closer look at God’s pre-flood declaration, and compare it to Lemech’s language when Noah is born. How many parallels can you find between the two accounts? (The parallels are much more evident in the Hebrew, so if you’re looking at the English, just do the best you can!)

**LEMECH’S DECLARATION GOD’S DECLARATION (before the Flood)**

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**Genesis 6:6-7**

**בראשית ו:ו–ז**

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֶאת- ׁשמ ֹו נ ַח, ֵלאמֹר: זה ְי ַנ ֲח ֵמנ ּו

ּכי-ע ָ ׂשה ֶאת-ה ָא ָדם ּב ָא ֶרץ;

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנ ֶחם ְיקוה,

מ ַּמ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו, ּו ֵמ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָי ֵדינ ּו, ִמן-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ֲא ׁ ֶשר

א ְר ָר ּה ְיקוה.

ו ִ ּי ְת ַע ֵ ּצב, ֶאל- ִל ּב ֹו. **ז** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ְיקוה, ֶא ְמ ֶחה את-ה ָא ָדם ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָב ָראתי ֵמ ַעל ְּפ ֵני ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ֵמ ָא ָדם

ּכי

ה ׁ ָּש ָמ ִים:

ְו ַעד-ע ֹוף ש

עד- ְב ֵה ָמה, ַעד-ר ֶמ

נ ַח ְמ ִּתי, ּכי ֲע ִ ׂשי ִתם.

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

1. And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon the earth, and He became saddened in His heart.
2. And the Lord said, “I will wipe out man, whom I created, from upon the face of the land, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them.”

**Don’t turn to the next page until you’ve given it your best shot...**

Let’s compare notes:

**LEMECH’S DECLARATION GOD’S DECLARATION (before the Flood)**

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**Genesis 6:6-7**

**בראשית ו:ו–ז**

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא ֶאת- ׁשמ ֹו נ ַח, ֵלאמֹר: זה ְי ַנ ֲחמֵנ ּו

ּכי-עָ ָ ׂשה ֶאת-ה ָא ָדם ּב ָא ֶרץ;

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנחֶם ְיקוה,

מִ ַמּ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו, ּומֵ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָידֵינ ּו, מִן- ָה ֲא ָדמָה, אֲ ׁ ֶשר

א ְר ָר ּה ְיקוה.

ו ִ ּיתְ ַע ֵ ּצב, ֶאל- ִל ּב ֹו. **ז** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ְיקוה, ֶא ְמ ֶחה את-ה ָא ָדם ֲא ׁ ֶשר- ָב ָראתי ֵמ ַעל ְּפ ֵני ה ֲא ָדמָה, ֵמ ָא ָדם

ּכי

ה ׁ ָּש ָמ ִים:

ְו ַעד-ע ֹוף ש

עד- ְב ֵה ָמה, ַעד-ר ֶמ

נ ַח ְמ ִּתי, ּכי ֲע ִ ׂשי ִתם.

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

1. And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon the earth, and He became saddened in His heart.
2. And the Lord said, “I will wipe out man, whom I created, from upon the face of the land, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them.”

When you see the parallels all lined up, it’s astounding: **four** of the words from Lemech’s declaration are repeated in God’s declaration, just before bringing the flood:

1. Comfort/regret (נחם) - (red)
2. Deeds/made (עשה) - (blue)
3. Sadness (עצבון) - (green)

4. Land (האדמה) - (pink)

And not only are they repeated; they are repeated in the *exact same order* in which Lemech used them. It really does seem that God is consciously echoing Lemech’s words.

## What’s Going On?

The correspondences between the verses don’t seem to be mere happenstance. On the contrary: it seems like, for some strange reason, the declaration to destroy the world has as its *prototype* the naming speech that Lemech gave for Noah. But why would that be? Lemech’s declaration was made in joy -- it was the product of a father exulting in the birth of a new child. God’s declaration has a much darker provenance: it foretells the end of the world. One declaration heralds a single new life; the other declaration signals the death of all. Why would God build the decision to destroy His creation out of Lemech’s innocent hopes for his newborn child?

We’d like to suggest that the answer to this question centers around this notion of comfort, the first of the textual parallels. Ask yourself: how is it that Noah is supposed to bring comfort to his generation? Lemech doesn’t say, but Rashi (quoting the Sages of the Midrash) offer a fascinating explanation:

**Rashi on Genesis 5:29**

עד שלא בא נח לא היה להם כלי מחרישה והוא הכין להם

Before Noah, men did not have plowshares. Noah prepared [such tools] for them.

this? How might the invention of the plow be a source of comfort?



**PONDER THIS**

How do you understand

According to this Midrash, Lemech saw prophetically that Noah would be the creator of the plow. The plow would be a form of comfort for humans; it would be a salve for the “curse of the land.” After all, the curse of the land meant that it would be extremely hard to make anything grow. It would require toil and back-breaking labor -- and even then, all of

man’s hard work might yield a bounty mixed with thorns and thistles, or no bounty at all. But the plow could help to solve that problem. It would make it easier for man to cultivate the soil. Suddenly, labor would be halved and yield would be tripled. The worst of the curse of the land -- well, mankind could move beyond it. At the very least, the curse would no longer be as pronounced.

### PONDER THIS



And now we’re ready to return to our outstanding question: why is there this connection between Lemech’s declaration and God’s decision to bring the flood? Lemech is predicting that his son is going to decrease pain and suffering - which sounds like a good thing! So why should it augur the destruction of the world?

What’s so bad about the plow? What is wrong with this notion that it will bring comfort?

## What Does Comfort Really Mean?

We think the answer has everything to do with how we understand the idea of “comfort.” What is comfort, anyway? And what does it mean for us to achieve it?

Comfort is the antidote for loss - or if it is not the antidote, it is the balm we humans use for loss that allows us to actually be able to bind our wounds and move on. When we are wracked by a terrible loss, we seek “comfort” for it; we seek to get over it. But getting over it isn’t easy. Someone in mourning asks a question: *Why did this happen?* - but there is no answer to such a question. So, in the absence of an answer, the only thing a mourner can do is somehow *reconcile* himself to the simple fact that, inexplicably, it *has* happened.1

Comfort involves a shift in perspective. I stop trying to *change* an uncomfortable fact, and instead just *accommodate* myself to it. When we’re talking about mourning the loss of a loved one, that is difficult - but ultimately healthy and necessary. But here’s the challenge: **Not all uncomfortable facts should be accepted.** There is a certain kind of pain that perhaps we should *not* seek comfort for. That kind of pain is not meant to be *accommodated*, but perpetually *challenged.* It is a kind of pain that is ultimately meant to be overcome. It’s a pain which is meant to spur us to change something about ourselves. If we allow ourselves to get used to it, to live with it, then we never make the necessary change. And it is that pain, we want to argue, that was expressed by the curse of the land.

## Sadness and Toil

Ask yourself: What were the purposes of the curses of the land? Why did they even exist?

A clue comes from the language God uses in imposing the curse. The Almighty suggests that in the wake of the first humans’ sin, they would experience “sadness”2 in working the land.

### PONDER THIS



What is so sad about working the land? Given what we know about the curse of the land, we might have expected the verse to say, “In *difficulty* shall you eat of it…” - but that’s not what it says. What is sad about hard work which doesn’t yield anything?

**Here’s our answer:** Hard work isn’t sad, by *definition.* But when hard work is hard because it *could* have been easier -- well, then there’s something sad about that. There’s a kind of futility involved. And our sadness, our disappointment, is a recognition of that - a recognition that things could have been different.

The curses in the wake of the Tree of Knowledge, and in the wake of Cain’s murder of Abel – they were curses that, as we suggested above, imposed a kind of distance between us and land, and between us and God. Hiding from God is one way we felt the distance – and the other way was in this sadness: the sadness that would prevail when we worked the land. We would not be as close to land as we might like to be; the interaction between us and land would be more difficult, more fraught, than we would like it to be. There was *supposed* to be an inherent closeness that man would experience with God and with land, a natural warmth and intimacy. After all, in a sense, both God and land are our creators, our source. That’s what life was like for man in the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. But because of our sins, a kind of distance would creep into the relationship. And *that* was the curse.

1 That, indeed, might be why the Hebrew word for “mourner” is אבל - which also spells “but” or “nevertheless.” Being a mourner means embracing “nevertheless-ness”: *Why did this happen? I don’t know. But nevertheless, it happened.*

2 Most conventional translations render the word ֹון ּצב ָ עִ (*“itzavon*”) as “toil”, but literally, it means “sadness.”

### PONDER THIS



But why would God react to man’s sins this way? Why would God want us to feel sad? Why would God want us to feel alienated from Him, from the land?

The answer, perhaps, is that this feeling of alienation – it is a kind of homing beacon. We were once one with God and with land, and there is a part of us that craves that oneness, that closeness, always. We always want to come back, to come home. And so, the more one becomes alienated from one’s creator, from one’s source, the more one wants to return; the stronger the homing beacon becomes.

And *that*, perhaps, is the point of the curses. They bid us to understand the consequence of our sins, to see how alienated we have become – and, by extension, to imbue us with a longing to return. But in order to feel that longing, we need to experience the futility of toil; we need to feel that sadness. You see, there was supposed to be something *productive* about that sadness - but instead, we wanted to escape it, to anesthetize ourselves to it. That’s what the plow was meant to do - and that’s what made it deeply problematic.

## The Breaking Point

So there’s something “problematic” about the plow -- it was a sort of Tylenol for a pain, the sadness, that we were supposed to be experiencing, head-on. But to return to our outstanding question: why should it bring about the destruction of the world? Doesn’t that seem a little harsh?

### PONDER THIS



Ask yourself: if man’s evil gradually increased over time, when would a benevolent Creator decide

to give up on the project called creation and start over? As man’s evil deeds accumulated, each was only incrementally worse than the last. When, then, does a Creator decide enough is enough?

That comes, perhaps, when man chooses to find comfort in all the wrong places. It comes when man finds comfort in the plow. **The plow is a technological solution to a spiritual problem.** *“Take heart, men, a solution to our sadness*

*is at hand! We can work the land with the plow now. We don’t have to deal with the alienation anymore; we can inure ourselves to it….”* It is at that moment that God gives up. God gives up because we have given up, because we’ve reconciled ourselves to perpetual alienation, perpetual distance. Because we show no signs of ever wanting to come back into the relationship.

At this point, God decides to bring one family into an ark, and to start over. In doing so, the Almighty uses the exact same language that we used to comfort themselves. God mimics Lemech’s decision to name his child “comfort” – with a decision of His own, to bring *this* world to a watery end. With the purpose of the curses exhausted, this world will go now, will pass into the night – to be replaced with a new one, as God and the children of men start anew, seeking to forge a brand new relationship on better terms.



Noach: Why Did God Destroy the World?

Source Sheet

**Genesis 5:29**

**בראשית ה:כט**

**29** And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will comfort

זה ְי ַנ ֲח ֵמנ ּו לאמֹר:

**כט** ו ִ ּי ְק ָרא את- ׁשמ ֹו נ ַח,

us from our deeds and from the sadness of our hands, from the land that the Lord has cursed.”

ְר ָר ּה א

מן-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, א ׁ ֶשר

ו ֵמ ִע ְ ּצב ֹון ָי ֵדינ ּו,

ִמ ַּמ ֲע ֵ ׂשנ ּו,

יקוה.

**Genesis 3:8**

**בראשית ג:ח**

**8** And they heard the voice of the Lord God going in the garden to the direction of the sun, and the man and his

ְּפ ֵני מ

ְיקוה אלֹקים, מ ְת ַה ֵּל ְך את-קול

ה ּי ֹום; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַח ֵּבא ה ָא ָדם ְו ִא ׁ ְש ּת ֹו,

**ח** ו ִ ּי ׁ ְש ְמע ּו

ּב ָּגן-- ְלר ּו ַח

wife hid from before the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden.

ָּגן. ה

ֹו ְך, עץ ּבת

יקוה אלֹקים,

**Genesis 4:14**

**בראשית ד:יד**

**14** Behold You have driven me today off the face of the

ָמה, ו ִמ ָּפ ֶני ָך, ה ֲא ָד

ֹום, מ ַעל ְפ ֵני ה ּי

**יד** הן ֵּג ַר ׁ ְש ָּת אֹ ִתי

earth, and I shall be hidden from before You, and I will be a wanderer and an exile in the land, and it will be that whoever finds me will kill me.”

**Genesis 4:12**

ְצ ִאי, כל-מֹ

ֶרץ, ְו ָה ָיה ּב ָא

ֵתר; ְו ָה ִיי ִתי ָנע ָו ָנד, ֶא ָּס

י ַה ְרגֵנִי.

**בראשית ד:יב**

**12** When you till the soil, it will not continue to give its strength to you; you shall be a wanderer and an exile in the land.”

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

And when you do, please remember to support Aleph Beta. Nothing makes us happier than bringing eye-opening, soul-heartening, life-changing Torah directly to you — but it all costs money. Like the cost of the writing, editing, design and circulation of the guide that you’re reading. So until we win the lottery, we need your support. Encourage your friends to subscribe to Aleph Beta, so they can get the guides sent directly to them! Or if you shared it with a friend and it was an awesome experience for both of you, consider making a small donation to show your love.

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ְך; ל

ּכ ָח ּה ֵתת-

ֲעבד את-ה ֲא ָד ָמה, לֹא-תֹ ֵסף ת

ִת ְה ֶיה ב ָא ֶרץ.

**יב** ּכי

נע ָו ָנד,

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Noach: Why Did God Destroy the World?

Source Sheet

**Genesis 3:17-19**

**בראשית ג:יז–יט**

**17** And to man He said, “Because you listened to your

ּכי- ׁש ַמ ְע ָּת לקול א ׁ ְש ֶּת ָך, ַו ּתֹא ַכל

**יז** ו ְל ָא ָדם א ַמר,

wife, and you ate from the tree from which I commanded

א ׁ ֶשר צ ִ ּוי ִתי ָך לאמֹר לֹא תֹא ַכל

מן-ה ֵעץ,

you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed be the ground

ה ֲא ָד ָמה, ּב ֲעב ּו ֶר ָך, ּב ִע ָ ּצב ֹון תֹא ְכ ֶל ָּנה,

מ ֶּמ ּנ ּו--אר ּו ָרה

for your sake; in sadness shall you eat of it all the days of

ַח ל ְך; ְו ָא ַכ ְל ָּת, ַת ְצ ִמי

ֹכל ְי ֵמי ח ֶ ּיי ָך. **יח** וקוץ ְו ַד ְר ַ ּדר,

your life. **18** And it will cause thorns and thistles to grow

ה ָּ ׂש ֶדה. **יט** ּב ֵז ַעת א ֶּפי ָך, תֹא ַכל ל ֶחם, עד

את-ע ֶ ׂשב

for you, and you shall eat the herbs of the field. **19** With the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to

ֻל ָּק ְח ָּת: ּכי-ע ָפר א ָּתה, מ ֶּמ ָּנה

ּכי

ש ּו ְב ָך אל-ה ֲא ָד ָמה,

the ground, for you were taken therefrom, for dust you are, and to dust you will return.”

ׁש ּוב. ָת

ו ֶאל-ע ָפר

**Genesis 6:6-7**

**בראשית ו:ו–ז**

**6** And the Lord regretted that He had made man upon the

את-ה ָא ָדם ּב ָא ֶרץ; ַו ִ ּי ְת ַע ֵ ּצב,

**ו** ו ִ ּי ָּנ ֶחם ְיקוה, ּכי-ע ָ ׂשה

earth, and He became grieved in His heart. **7** And the Lord said, “I will wipe out man, whom I created, from upon the

א ְמ ֶחה את-ה ָא ָדם

ָד ָמה, מ ָא ָדם עד- ְב ֵה ָמה, ה ֲא

אֶל- ִל ּב ֹו. **ז** ו ּיֹא ֶמר ְיקוה, א ׁ ֶשר- ָב ָראתי מ ַעל ְפ ֵני

face of the land, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to

the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them.”

ּכי ִנ ַח ְמ ִּתי, ּכי ע ִ ׂשי ִתם.

עד-ר ֶמש ְו ַעד-ע ֹוף ה ׁ ָּש ָמ ִים:

**Rashi on Genesis 5:29**

**This one will give us comfort:** He will give us rest from the toil of our hands. Before Noah came, they did not have plowshares, and he prepared [these tools] for them. And the land was producing thorns and thistles when they sowed wheat, because of the curse of the first man (Adam), but in Noah’s time, it [the curse] subsided.

**רש”י על בראשית ה:כט**

**זה ינחמנו:** ינח ממנו את עצבון ידינו, עד שלא בא נח לא היהלהם כלי מחרישה והוא הכין להם, והיתה הארץ מוציאה קוצים ודרדרים כשזורעים חטים, מקללתו של אדם הראשון, ובימי נח

נחה, וזהו ינחמנו, ינח ממנו.

[www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org/) ALEPH BETA STUDY GUIDE ON PARSHAT NOACH - PAGE 11

Hi everybody, this is Rabbi David Fohrman. Welcome to [Parshat Terumah](https://www.alephbeta.org/weekly-torah-portion/parshat-terumah). You are watching Aleph Beta.

This week’s parsha details the building instructions for the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. And in those blueprints, I think I found something remarkable. I want to share it with you. It’s the telltale signs of a fascinating, hidden pattern. A pattern that centers around the most sacred feature of the Mishkan, the Aron, the Holy Ark. I want to show you the pattern, piece by piece, and – over this week and the next one – ponder with you what it might mean.

# What

Does

# the Ark

of the

# Covenant

Represent?

So here’s the thing that first clued me into this pattern. When the Torah describes how the Holy Ark was supposed to be built, a few things stand out about the description. One thing, in particular, the text tells us, is that the ark needed to be built out of wood – and it was supposed to be overlaid, inside and outside, with pure gold. In the words of the text,

פ ֑נ ּו ּ

ה ֣ב טָה֔ור מִב ֥י ִת ו ּמִח֖ו ּץ תְּצַ

וצִפִית ֤אֹתו֙ ז ָ

You shall overlay it will pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it.

So, does that remind you of anything? Because it turns out that, in the Torah, there is actually another structure that is also supposed to be built the same way. Which is to say there’s another structure, that God commands to be built out of wood – and that other structure also is supposed to have an overlay, inside and outside, with some other substance. And wouldn’t you know it: In all of the Torah, the phrase ‘mibayit umichutz’, inside and outside – it appears only in connection with these two structures: God’s ark in the Mishkan, and this other, mystery structure, elsewhere in the Torah. Anyone care to guess where?

Well, here’s a hint: It is another ark. It is... Noah’s ark.

Yes, coincidentally enough, although in Hebrew, Noah’s boat was a teivah and the box that housed the Ten Commandments was an aaron, it just so happens that in English – we use the same word to denote both structures. They’re both arks. God’s ark and Noah’s ark.

# God's

Ark and

# Noah's

Ark

Now, that might be a coincidence – but it does seem that the structures have something in common – I mean, at least in their appearance, they do seem to be mirror images of one another. Think about it: God’s ark is made of wood, and it is overlaid, inside and outside, with gold. It presents itself as this really shiny box, glistening with shiny, precious material. And then you have… Noah’s ark, made of wood,

covered, inside and outside with a very different kind of material: Pitch – a substance that is … really the very opposite of gold.

Gold is bright and shiny; it reflects light. Pitch is dark; it absorbs light. Gold is smooth; pitch is sticky. Gold is odorless; pitch is pungent. Gold is precious; pitch is almost worthless. I mean you get the picture here.

There is mirror image relationship between these two structures, but it could just be coincidence I suppose... It does seem kind of crazy to think that the Torah intends us to see these two structures as related, in any fundamental way, to one another, right? But, you know, as they say – just because you’re paranoid, doesn’t mean they’re not out get you. Maybe the structures are connected somehow…

But how would we know? How would we know whether the notion that these two arks mirror each other in some fundamental way – whether this incipient theory really holds any water, you’ll pardon the pun?

Well, you’d have to see more connections between these two structures, wouldn’t you? So let’s go back and see whether such connections exist.

# Kofer

Ask this: Might there be anything else about God’s ark that reminds us of Noah’s?

Well, let’s take a look at that verse I showed you above; the one that describes the pitch that covers Noah’s ark. It says:

וְכ ֽפרת ֥ אֹת ֛הּ מִב ֥י ִת ו ּמִח֖ו ּץ בַּכֹּֽפֶר

(6:14) And you shall cover it, inside and outside, with pitch.

So, that word for ‘cover it’ – vechafarta – how do you spell it? You spell it: kuf, pei, reish, tav. So... here’s the thing: That exact sequence of letters, kuf pei reish tav, appears in only one other context in the entire Torah. Where? You guessed it: In connection with God’s ark. Kuf, pei, reish, tav, it just happens to spell kaporet, the word the Torah coins for the solid gold covering that you’d lay on top of the Aron in the Tabernacle to cover it.

# What Is the Meaning of These Ark Parallels?

Two wooden boxes. Mibayit umichutz. Overlays that are exact opposites of one another. Kaporet, Vechaparta. The connections really do seem to be there. Except: If the connections are real, what could possibly explain them? Why would the ark of Noah be connected, in some essential way, with the ark of God, of all things? Sure, in English, they are both arks. But they are so different: One ark saves humanity from destruction during a flood. The other houses

[the Ten Commandments](https://www.alephbeta.org/the-ten-commandments)

in God’s holy sanctuary. The two roles seems as far apart from one another as you could possibly

imagine. Why would they be related to each other?

So I’d like to suggest a theory for your consideration. Remember before, how I suggested that, in some ways, the two arks seem to be mirror images of one another? We saw that with respect to their overlays, pitch and gold being quite the opposite of one another. What if that explains the conceptual connection between these arks, too? In other words: Maybe these two arks really are mirrors of one another, in terms of their function, not just their appearance. Maybe they do the same, essential, thing as one another – but in a reverse kind of way.

What could that mean? Well, think about God and think about mankind. Could it be that… each ark helps one of these beings, live in the other’s world?

What would that mean?

Well, let’s start with God. Our world isn’t really His place. I sometimes give the analogy of a Monopoly game to explain this. You know, imagine a conversation between little hat and little shoe going around the Monopoly board. One day, little hat says to little shoe: ‘Hey, Do you believe in Parker?’ Little shoe responds, “what do you mean by that?” And little hat continues: “Well, you see right over there, on the side of the board, it says, ‘made by Parker Brothers’. Well, what do you say? ‘Do you believe in Parker?” And before he gets a reply, little hat he says: ‘Look, I don't know about you, but I'm a Parker atheist. And let me tell you why. I've been here for a long time. Every week I go around this board. I've seen it all, I've seen Tennessee Avenue, Park Place, Boardwalk. Every week I pass go and collect two hundred. I've even seen free parking and I've even seen jail. But I've never seen Parker. If Parker really exists, how come I don't see more of him!

So, what would you say to little hat? You’d say: My friend, you’ve been looking for Parker in all the wrong places. Parker doesn't live on the board; he made the board! So of course, he exists outside the board!

The creator of a system obviously lives outside the system. So if God is our Creator, that means: God lives in His own realm, beyond space and time. Yes, He understands what is going on in this world; sees it; can influence it; even make signs and miracles happen here – but still, this world is not His place.

There is, however, an exception to this: The Tabernacle – and the ark within the Tabernacle.

# The Spiritual Meaning Behind the Ark

of the

# Covenant

You see, the Torah speaks of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, as a home for God in this world: V’asu li mikdash, veshachanti betocham; make for me a holy place, and I will dwell among them, the verse says. And the ark with in the Mishkan seems to have a special role with respect to this. The Torah tells us that the ark is where the Presence of God would reside, It would hover in a cloud over the kaporet, over the covering for the ark. So… maybe the ark… strange as it sounds… is a vessel designed to facilitate God’s existence in an environment that is otherwise not be God’s own environment: It’s our world, the world of humans.

And now… think of the reverse… think about us… in God’s World. We don’t live in God’s world. But what, if suddenly, we had to? Let me ask you a question: Did it ever strike you as odd that the Torah’s description of the world before creation sounds a great deal like a flood? Go back to the second verse of Genesis; it is a verse that seems to describe this ‘pre-Creation’ world: V’ha’aretz hayta tohu vavohu. The world was utterly chaotic. Choshech al pnei tahom. It is dark. Ruach elokim merachefet al penei hamayim. There is a spirit, or a wind from God that’s hovering over this water, this water that’s all over the place. Put all those elements together, what does it look like? It is a vast water world, dark and wind, there’d be waves crashing all over the place. It would be like a flood.

Now, why the Torah describe God’s world that way, a flood like world? That is something I don’t have time to talk about now (I explored this in another series of talks on Aleph Beta– you can [find them](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/why-did-god-flood-the-earth) [below](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/why-did-god-flood-the-earth)). But if we just accept this as a given for a moment – God’s World, beyond space and time, is spoken of by the Torah as it were a dark, water world – it seems to me that we can infer something really interesting about the nature of the flood in Noah’s time. When the floodwaters inundated the earth… it wasn’t just that the world was being destroyed. It was being undone. It was as if the world was returning to its original, tohu vavohu, pre-created state. What is that ‘pre-Created state’? That would be God’s world.

Noah’s moment on the world stage was a moment when humans, to survive, suddenly needed to somehow make it in God’s World. And the ark that God instructed Noah to build? It was the vehicle through which this could happen.

So think about these two arks, now. They really do mirror each other. Noah’s ark allowed humans to exist, safely in an environment approximating God’s own world. And the ark of the Tabernacle allowed God to reside, ‘safely’ as it were, in mankind’s world – without our world being utterly overturned in the process.

# Biblical

Connections to

# the Ark of

the

# Covenant

So that’s the basics of a theory I want to sketch out to you. I want to continue to talk about it with you next week. And right now, it's really just a theory. Seems kind of intriguing, kind of speculative; could be right, could be wrong. And what I want to do next week, is two things. First of all, I want to take this theory out of the realm of the speculative, and into the realm of the ‘very hard to deny’. I want to try to prove it to you. And I also want to explore the further implications of this theory. I want to explore, in the larger sense, what these correspondences might mean for our understanding of the Tabernacle.

How are we going to do that?

Well, I want to show you that these connections between the two Arks, Noah's Ark and God's Ark, aren't just isolated moments in which the biblical text in one context, seems to echo the biblical text in another. No. Each of these points are part of a vast web. Each is part of a much larger, breathtaking, pattern – a pattern that both proves the correspondence between the arks, as well as further explains the meaning of that correspondence.

Meet me here next week, and I’ll show you what I mean.