

Chapter Six

Vs. 1: “When men began to multiply on the face of the ground and daughters were born to them.” The noun for “ground” is the familiar *‘adamah* from which Adam was taken and from which the blood of Abel cried out to God unceasingly. Such multiplication of the human race couldn’t have taken place in Eden nor was it desired because there God was fully present to the man and woman; he satisfied every need for any company they might desire. All humanity was contained within them, a pre-figuration of Christ as the Second Adam: “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” [1Cor 15.45]. As for the verb “multiply” (*ravav*), it suggests that there were few inhabitants until now, that even the City of Enoch (cf. 4.17) wasn’t populous. Furthermore, “city” implies abandonment of living in tents which had been the case until now. *Ravav*, applies to an increase in numbers compared with *ravah* as in 1.22 (‘Be fruitful and multiply’), the latter pertaining more to growth, not just increase in numbers. In all its simplicity and straight-forwardness this verse has a certain ominous tone, that things will turn out very differently from God’s original intent and do so in the near future. Vs. 2 continues as one sentence from vs. 1, making a distinction between the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” who were fair (*tov*: literally, good). Supposedly the former were divine beings and the latter were human beings, that is, those who lost their memory of the garden of Eden and hence their connection with it. Perhaps they were children of Abel prior to his murder...those who were nomads and not fixed to cultivation of the soil, including attachment to the inhabitants to the City of Enoch. And so we have an intermarriage between the descendants of Cain and those of Abel which gave rise to the same enmity as between those two brothers, an enmity which increased until God saw the need to destroy the earth.

Apparently while this *ravav* or physical multiplication of the human race was going on, God was not absent, for they enjoyed a certain divine relationship even after banishment from Eden. However, God said “My spirit shall not abide in man forever,” that is to say, God’s spirit had been with mankind to date but will depart shortly. Between Adam’s banishment and the birth of Noah we have no specific mention of God’s spirit (*ruach*) inhabiting any person. Perhaps what’s meant by *ruach* is the same divine being moving over the face of deep in 1.2 (In the verse under consideration the **RSV** has lower case ‘r’ compared with the upper case in 1.2). Regardless, *ruach* intimates that moving not so much over the face of the waters but moving over each person. The verb for this moving is *rachaph* which is more along the lines of a hovering and cherishing as in 1.2. However, this interior *rachaph* assumes the form of abiding, *dun* being the only use of this verb. Apparently *dun* has the connotation of striving or contending and thus intimates an opposition of God toward mankind. *Dun* reveals that God was getting tired of the human race, and he was about to do something drastic. The first step in this direction was a radical reduction in human life span, down to “a hundred and twenty years.” Even that didn’t stop people from disobeying God. Although we have no record of how people responded, we do know they became increasingly rebellious because “the thoughts of his (man’s) heart was only evil continually” [vs. 5]. And so the nurturing and charming image of a bird hovering over its young denoted by *rachaph* turns into one of contention.

Vs. 4 speaks of the Nephilim who “were on the earth in those days,” persons of large stature and endowed with super-human powers. When Moses sent out spies to reconnoiter the land, they encountered the Nephilim: “And there we saw the Nephilim...and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them” [Num 13.33]. These giants were the original inhabitants of the Promised Land with whom their distant ancestors had intermarried. Thus the encounter of Moses’ spies was not so much a reunion among long-lost relatives but a discovery of their genealogical roots, a relationship so distant that it was beyond reconciliation. The verse at hand has the simple words “in those days” which are countered by “and also afterward.” Perhaps “and also afterward” refers to an unspecified period of time after God uttered his words of rejection (‘my spirit shall not abide in man’). That may have opened the door for the Nephilim to take over and dominate the descendants of Enoch, the inhabitants of that city named after him. According to vs. 4, male Nephilim married the female members of the human race, not the other way around, nor was there a mixture of some with others and so forth. The verse concludes with “These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.” The words “of old” suggest that the Nephilim were distinct from the descendants of Adam, perhaps Cain’s wife (cf. 4.17) being from among them. Furthermore, they were renowned or literally “men of name (*shem*).” Being such could apply to their own race as well as that of Adam.

“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.” Such begins vs. 5 which takes the drama of human perversity a step closer to eventual resolution. Prior to this, did God see human wickedness (*rah*)? The answer is traceable to 2.9, the “tree of knowledge of good and *rah*” (2.9), as well as the serpent’s words to the woman, “you will be like God, knowing good and *rah*” (3.5). No small wonder that God’s *ruach* couldn’t abide in man, a life-and-death struggle not unlike that between Cain and Abel and later between Jacob and Esau. Note that *rah* is “in (*b-*) the earth,” fully present in it, permeating it as Abel’s blood which, by the way, we can presume with certainty was still crying aloud to God. As for God seeing, we have no place from which he did this. The traditional location is from above...heaven...but not necessarily. So if God’s *ruach* could not longer abide in man, his seeing must be elsewhere and certainly different from his presence within the garden when he walked in the cool of the evening. We don’t have a localized place from which God sees, just the fact that he does. The idea of heaven located above the earth had not yet sunken into religious consciousness of mankind. People were still close to the tradition that God is best perceived as walking with mankind.

The last encounter between God and humans was quite some time ago, just after Cain had murdered his brother Abel. There God speaks with Cain with no indication of from where it’s done, perhaps because this wasn’t terribly long after Adam was banished from Eden and recollection of a one-on-one interchange was still fresh, albeit in weakened form. Then we move up a number of generations with mankind sinking more and more into the bottomless pit of evil (*rah*). Because these generations extended a long time between Cain and the verse under consideration, let alone introduction of the Nephilim, no small wonder that God “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.” As for this seeing by God, it is perceived by an awareness of an ever increasing distance between him and the current generation, the one about to be destroyed in the worldwide flood.

The second half of vs. 5, while representing the last straw before the flood, needs some breaking down: “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” The word for “imagination” is *yetser* which fundamentally applies to a frame or formation. “For I know the purposes which they are already forming before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give” [Dt 31.21]. *Yetser* also can apply to an idol: “For the workman trusts in his own creation when he makes dumb idols” [Hab 2.18]. Thus in light of these two verses, *yetser* has a less than desirable connotation. In the text at hand, *yetser* is used with *machashavah* (purpose, plan, counsel) and so literally can read “thought of purpose.” “On that day thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme” [Ezk 38.10]. The verbal root for *machashavah* is *chashav*, to think, to be an artificer, and applies to planning and scheming, usually in the negative sense. “Thought of purpose” is situated within man’s heart (*lev*) which is the center of his being and comes from there. The additional phrase “only evil continually” heightens both the implied idolatry of *yester* and the evil scheming of *machashavah*. “All the day” is the way “continually” is expressed; coupled with “only,” we get a sense of genuine disgust from God as he does this seeing into the heart of men. The evil isn’t specified, being general in nature, but is a spin-off from Cain’s murder of Abel. Furthermore, *rah* (evil) is one of the two properties of that tree in the garden of Eden from which the first man and woman had eaten. Its taste remained not only in their mouths but in the mouths of all their descendants. What’s so amazing is the rapidity with which such *rah* had spread, forcing God’s hand to bring about the worldwide flood. To see the power of this tasting from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, consider it in the positive sense, Ps 34.8: “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Such taste precedes seeing and is the opposite of what happened to the man and women: “then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” [3.7].

Vs. 6 serves as a counter-balance to the previous verse, as it were: “And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth” (first half of the verse). *Nacham* is the verb here which, like so many Hebrew verbs, has multiply meanings; it applies to grieving as well as to comfort plus taking vengeance. *Nacham* appears in 5.29 with a very different meaning as used in vs. 6: “this one (Noah) shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.” A double-edged sword, if you will. Noah did bring relief in that he saved the human race and the animal kingdom but on the other hand, was a witness to divine vengeance which wiped out both humans, animals and plant life. Compare the phrase “on the earth” (literally, ‘in the earth’), *érets* being the term, neither *‘adamah* nor the soil from which man had been fashioned. And so, “it grieved him to his heart.” A touching comment since this grief reached to God’s very heart (*lev*). That’s why this part of vs. 6 counters the heart of man of vs. 5, “only evil continually.” The verb for “grieved” is *hatsav*, to labor, afflict. “All day long they seek to injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil” [Ps 56.5]. And like the verbal root for *yetser* in vs. 5 (imagination), *hatsav* is the root for “idol:” “They served their idols which became a snare to them” [Ps 106.36].

Vs. 7 begins with “So the Lord said” but remains silent to whom he is speaking. Instead of this, he was speaking aloud, perhaps loud enough for people to hear and get wind of what he was about to say. This time the decision was made, no escape: “I will blot out man.” These words come immediately and without warning. *Machah* is the verb which alternately translates as to wipe off or away, a thorough annihilation which humanity in its infancy had not been experienced, so thorough that it was hard to believe. The verb appears again in 7.23: “He blotted out every living

thing that was upon the face of the ground.” The completeness of what was about to transpire is emphasized by “man whom I have created from the face of the ground.” Here *‘adamah* is used for “ground” which makes this *machah* all the more fearful, for *‘adamah* is that which had formed the first *‘adam* and subsequent descendants. The Lord continues by adding beasts, creeping things and birds...every living being except fish (in other words, they weren’t mentioned and would be in their native environment of water). He concludes these unfortunate words which echo vs. 6 uttered with a heavy heart, “I am sorry that I have made them.”

Even though vs. 7 has the Lord uttering his intent out loud, no one heard except Noah. And so this section of Chapter Six ends with a simple, straight-forward sentence, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” When God finished uttering his intention aloud, purposely aloud that people would hear him, tragically we get no response except that Noah was the object of divine *chen* or good-will, not the other way around. The verb *matsa’* (to find) shows that the Lord was casting his eyes all about in a desperate attempt to find some people he wouldn’t blot out, *machah*. Vs. 8 is upbeat, a single ray of light in an otherwise dark world. A hint that this would come took place in 5.29 when the essence of Noah’s name is spelled out: “This one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.”

Although vs. 9 opens with “These are the generations of Noah” (i.e., a full sentence), his line of descent is insignificant: three sons named Shem, Ham and Japheth. While coming first in vs. 9, they are inserted more or less in an obligatory sense, subordinate to the second sentence in this same verse which gets to the heart of the matter: “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.” That’s a rather stark appraisal of the human race, only one man singled out as righteous, *tsadyq*. Thus Noah is a precursor of Abram: “And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness” [15.6]. And: “Noah, a herald of righteousness” [2Pt 2.5]. As for the three sons just mentioned, presumably they shared Noah being *tsadyq* but to a lesser degree. Note the words “in his generation” meaning the present generation, not the earlier ones. That is of secondary importance given the fact that the drama of this chapter increasingly moves toward a resolution. Apparently being *tsadyq* is another way of “walking with God.” The only other person thus far recorded with this distinction was Enoch in 5.24, in other words, God “took him.” God could have destroyed the human race after Enoch was taken but didn’t, so he was a precursor for what would follow in the person of Noah. Even though Noah was destined to live 950 years (cf. 9.29), it is insignificant with Enoch’s blessed fate. As for Noah, it must have been difficult walking with God, for that means he was alone without t. His three sons weren’t on the same level as their father; they may have had an inkling of what was going on, nothing more. Putting it bluntly, their task was to propagate the human race, that’s all. Surely Noah realized that he was walking with God and looked forward to the flood though never could he have expressed this aloud. Because he was the only *tsadyq* of his generation, he was left undisturbed by his fellows and so enjoyed communion with God even in the thick of their unrighteous activities.

Vs. 11 takes up the now well known theme of corrupt humanity traceable all the way back to the murder of Abel: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.” Reference is to *‘erets* (twice) which is broader in meaning than *‘adamah*, the stuff from which the first man had been fashioned. *‘Erets* is the physical land itself and can apply to a given country, here the city Cain named after his son Enoch back in 4.17. At this juncture of history, *‘adamah* is

quasi-sacred not only because Adam came from there but because of Abel's blood crying out from it. And so we see a shift from these early generations, those immediately after Adam and onward, from treating *'adamah* as *'erets* which later developed into the idea of nationhood, quite different from the pre-historical garden of Eden. As for the verb "to corrupt," *shachath* alternately means to destroy, act wickedly. "They are corrupt, doing abominable deeds" [Ps 14.1]. As seen in "God's sight," *shachath* means that he cannot tolerate such action, that it is incompatible with his nature yet reveals divine long-suffering which quickly is coming to a close. Apparently only Noah was immune to *shachath* along with his predecessor, Enoch. Since Noah knew that Enoch "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him," was he aware that he was similar, that he too "walked with God?" Thus divine sight as trained upon humanity made Noah stand out as a beacon, one whom unfortunately no one seemed to have noticed. Such disregard intimates that no other person bothered to reflect upon his or her tendency to do evil, that it was taken for granted and was part of daily life.

Vs. 11 continues with the earth or *'erets* "filled with violence," *chamas* being a verb suggestive of maltreatment extended toward fellow human beings. It also involves oppression such as reducing free persons to slavery and imprisonment. "For I can see nothing but violence and strife in the city" [Ps 55.9], a verse quite applicable to the City of Enoch. And so *'erets* is full of both *shachath* and *chamas*, bursting at the seams and ready to explode. It is as though the earth which all along had been crying out to God, swallowed up so much blood beginning with Abel's, that its stomach couldn't take it any longer. This must have made Noah's walking with God a difficult and treacherous path to tread even in divine company. It was especially troublesome at night when things were quiet and the chorus of groans, led by Abel's blood, seeped up to the surface imploring God to send rain upon the earth and silence their cries.

Vs. 12 spells out the theme of corruption or *shachath* a bit more, really bringing home the fact of mankind's wickedness. First we have "And God saw the earth, and behold." Compare it with the previous verse where the earth "was corrupt in God's sight." That verse was passive using the preposition *liphney*, "before." That makes the earth a bit distant, necessarily so, from God or "before God, if you will. Next we have God actively seeing the earth with the exclamation, "behold" (the common *hineh*) which signifies a kind of astonishment, that God first saw followed immediately with the horrible situation into which mankind got itself. *Hineh* serves as a transition between God seeing and becoming aware of the earth's corruption. It was a second take on God's part insofar as he wished he hadn't beheld what was right in front of him, that it was an illusion or mistake. Then again, God may have wanted awareness of this corruption to sink into the consciousness of earth's inhabitants who were deaf to Abel's blood crying from the earth. Thus mankind was sandwiched in between the earth and God in heaven, no place to go, really.

Note that blame is placed squarely upon humanity in vs. 12: "for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." *Basar* as "flesh" primarily means people but can apply to other living beings who were affected by human behavior. Here the verb *shachath* is used once more in reference not so much to *basar* but to their "way," *derek*. That word applies to a road as well as a journey, the journey starting with Adam's expulsion from Eden to the land of Nod, east of the garden (cf. 4.16) all the way to the streets of the City of Enoch. *Derek*, of course, is upon the earth and just as

corrupt; perhaps this *derek* was intended to cover over the corruption and silence the cry of Abel's blood. The more earth covered, the quieter it becomes, far from providing a genuine solution. That's why *derek* is "upon (*hal*) the earth," on the earth as a blanket deliberately intended as a muffler. And so, *derek* became just as corrupt and full of violence as those treading upon it and those whose blood had seeped into the earth.

Finally...at long last...God speaks to Noah in vs. 13. Such speaking is in the context of Noah's walking with God, so it may have been while the two were out for a stroll. Walking has become associated with God in the "cool of the day" as in Eden (cf. 3.8); while out and about both almost certainly treaded lightly so as not to disturb the blood of Abel and those like him beneath. At least toward sunset both were alone, for all other inhabitants of the City of Enoch were at home engaged in indecent and violent behavior. Surely echos of it reached God and Noah as they were out in the field, an indirect though decisive way for God to teach Noah about humanity's true situation. Noah, unlike Abraham later on, did not intercede for his fellow citizens but went ahead with plans for the ark. The sooner he was out of there the better; this was understandable, even commendable, but not on the same level as Abraham's compassion manifested in his interceding with God for Sodom and Gomorrah. Chances are that Abraham did recall his ancestor's lack of intercession with God, that he had missed a great opportunity to save the entire human race. Thus Abraham was determined that the two cities of, Sodom and Gomorrah (for they were just as bad if not worse than the City of Enoch) would not suffer the same calamity.

God does share his inmost thoughts with Noah...not that he was obliged to but blurted them out in the hope that anyone listening would hear and repent. Even if a handful of people nearby caught God's intent, Noah would have put them on the ark he was about to construct. "I have determined to make an end of all flesh." *Boa' lephanay* is the way "determined" is rendered which reads literally as "has come to my face." That which has come to God's face is the "end" (*qets*) which usually applies to destruction. "The end has come upon the four corners of the land" [Ezk 7.2]. And so the words under consideration run as "the end has come to my face." Next God utters the obvious which had been recorded earlier in this chapter: "for all the earth is filled with violence through them." Interesting words in that God distinguishes between earth (*erets*) and the source of violence (*chamas*: cf. vs. 11) which is put as "through them" or through the inhabitants of the earth. Literally put, "through them" is "(violence) from their faces." Note the two instances of "face:" first the "end" which is literally "to" or *l-* prefaced to "face" and then the violence which emanates from the faces of people, from both their expressions and mouths which utter terrible things. Because of this two-fold use of face as a way to show the horror unfolding, God says "behold." That is to say, stop and listen. After he gets Noah's attention and anyone who happens to be about him—although they did hear God but paid no heed—God says "I will destroy them with the earth." *Shachath* is the verb at hand which implies laying waste a country, region or field and as in the case at hand, being spoiled, marred. "I took the waistcloth from the place where I had hidden it. And behold, the waistcloth was spoiled" [Jer 13.7]. The uncleanness implied with *shachath* suggests that God has to clean away that which had become marred or soiled, hence the need for the flood waters to do the job. He had to allow this cleansing not simply to wipe away living beings but to root out all the blood that had seeped into the earth starting with the blood of Abel. No other choice is possible.

The previous verse was the start of a fairly lengthy list of things to do when God confronted Noah and continues through vs. 22. Nothing is recorded about how Noah received this formidable challenge except that he did what he was commanded. It didn't preclude him from having thoughts which disturbed him considerably. Such was the price of walking with God (cf. vs. 9); Enoch paid a similar price though it goes unrecorded. The advantage Enoch had over Noah was that he witnessed no divine wrath. Now here in vs. 14 God gets specific, telling Noah to "make yourself an ark of gopher wood." Apart from the story at hand, *tevah* (ark) has two other biblical references, both of which pertain to Moses as a baby or when his mother placed him in "a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch" [Ex 2.3]. The anonymous mother of Moses made an "ark" just as elaborate as Noah's for her son whom Pharaoh sought to kill. The only difference was that it was much smaller. She must have recalled that incident in Hebrew history and was inspired to do the same. Her *tevah*, like Noah's, floated over the waters until it reached a safe haven. Although the Christ child had no connection with water, the manger in which he was placed was not unlike this *tevah* belonging to both Noah and Moses, a vessel destined to save the world. God is specific as to the word to be used for Noah's *tevah*, gopher (same transliteration in Hebrew) which is a resinous tree such as pine, fir and cypress favored for the building of ships. This is the only biblical reference though several from a derivative noun meaning "pitch" (*gaphryth*) exists, one of which is in 19.24: "Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." An interesting verse of how the Lord is presented in two ways, a fact to be examined later. In sum, the *tevah* Noah is about to construct is made of wood containing a lot of pitch and subject to catching on fire. That's why God decided to destroy the world with water instead of fire as with Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Make rooms in the ark and cover it inside and out with pitch." Now God gets more detailed about the *tevah* which must have made Noah wonder what all this was about. *Qen* is "room" which alternately means a nest or abode on a high rock, not unlike an eagle's nest. "The swallow has a nest for herself where she may lay her young at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God" [Ps 84.3]. One gets the idea that Noah's *tevah* can be described as a of "house with many rooms" [Jn 14.2]. Moses' *tevah* didn't have these rooms but it was just as painstakingly fabricated. After all, it was bearing the author of the Pentateuch, a most precious cargo with an endless list of rooms. God commanded Noah to cover the *tevah* with pitch (*kopher*). This noun is derived from the verbal root *kaphar* (to cover) which is used here in vs. 14. The literally reading is "in *kopher*" suggesting that this resinous material permeated the gopher wood through and through whose odor must have been overpowering, especially from the animals in the confined *qen* or rooms. For that reason ventilation was vital, hence the need for windows. In its final phase, the ark was black...if not totally then pretty close to it, and presented an ominous sight sitting out there on the dry ground.

Vs. 15 begins with "This is how you are to make it" and gives the ark's dimensions after which further details are set forth in the next verse. They are 450 x 75 x 45 feet, no small task for Noah whose sizable construction project must have gotten considerable attention from his neighbors. Then again, Noah could have disguised the ark making it appear as a large house or farm so he could continue in peace and not be subject to ridicule. As for the gopher wood Noah was covering

with pitch, it would have added to the disguise. Noah had resigned himself as to warning people, so why bother now? He realized full well what Jesus Christ would say later on, “They ate, drank, married, were given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark” [Lk 17.27]. Vs. 16 includes a vital element to this ark, a *tsohar* or window which would have ventilated the pitch-smell from the bottom to top decks in addition to providing light. Actually, *tsohar* implies a window but more specifically means light, the light of midday or noon when the sun is directly overhead. That makes perfect sense for the *tsohar* which must have extended close to the 450 feet of the ark’s length. “You make your flock to rest at noon” [Sg 1.7].

The Lord bids Noah to make a door on the side of ark; just one is required without mention of any others, not unlike what we’d call portholes. The *tsohar* running the entire length of the ark would compensate for this easily. Finally, Noah is to make a “lower, second and third deck.” As for the lower deck, that means it is directly under the *tsohar* for those animals requiring the most amount of light. Most likely Noah and his family resided in a separate section on this deck. The lowest or third deck is for nocturnal creatures. And so, the ark with its *tsohar* is completely flat not unlike an aircraft carrier minus its island.

Vs. 17 is the first time God confides in Noah the manner by which he will destroy the earth although he made known his intent prior to the ark’s construction (cf. vs. 13): “For behold, I will bring a flood (*mabul*) of waters upon the earth.” Here “behold” (*hineh*) serves as a way of getting Noah’s attention, that God is going to communicate an important message. As for this *mabul*, it can refer to the waters above the heavens, the logical place from which rain to fall: “The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits as king forever” [Ps 29.10]. This is the only reference to *mabul* apart from those occurrences pertaining to the Noah story. Thus *mabul* is different from yet derivative from primal waters at the beginning of Genesis. Until now they had been held at bay successfully yet remained a constant threat. The purpose of *mabul*? “To destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven.” Here we have yet another use of *shachath* as “to destroy” only it’s specified by water. The words “breath of life” add to the poignancy of the impending worldwide disaster; at the same time, fish are exception since they don’t breathe air. “Under the heaven” means that *mabul* will come from above, neither from springs nor oceans below, so it will be an unceasing torrential downpour. The result is that “everything that is on the earth shall die,” *gawah* meaning to breathe out one’s life. “When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust” [Ps 104.29]. Such words lifted from the Psalter reflects the memory of that distant yet still vivid tragedy.

Vs. 18 strikes a positive note with regard to Noah, not the earth and its inhabitants about to be destroyed: “But I will establish my covenant with you.” This is the first mention of a covenant and for Noah, a novelty; next mention of a *beryth* is in 9.9, in the form of a rainbow, which is the one God had in mind. When we think of a covenant, it’s in terms of a sacrifice or a pledge. Nothing of the sort is involved due to Noah’s unfamiliarity with this concept, so God puts it off for an indefinite period of time. *Beryth* derives from a verbal root meaning to cut and even to destroy. That means a *beryth* is cut into a tablet, a bodily member (circumcision) or the sacrifice (i.e., cutting) of animals. Since Noah had close acquaintance with God by their walking together, God informed him beforehand of this *beryth*, that it was the first ever to be established followed by

many others, extending into New Testament times. The notion that something had to be cut (*karath* being the verbal root) must have frightened Noah. With the implications of dissecting a victim for sacrifice, his fear increased all the more. However, that would have to wait for later because more pressing issues were at hand. In the meanwhile their presence upon the flood waters would be a pre-covenant or a preparation for the one of a rainbow, all alone upon that trackless expanse for an extended and as yet unknown period of time. Noah would use that time floating upon the water—aimlessly as far as he was concerned, for God said nothing of its duration, let alone a destination—to reflect upon himself, his family and animals as to what they would find once (and if...at this stage) the waters recede. Those persons and animals within the ark upon the flood waters represent being cut off...*karath*...from the earth and its perverse inhabitants along with the promise of a new beginning. Not only would Noah be afraid of drifting aimlessly, his family would have shared in this terrible prospect. They saw Noah putting together this huge vessel which lacked any means of propulsion, that is, no rudder, sails nor oars. Anyone boarding such a thing on dry, desert land would have grave thoughts as to its purpose.

Now the Lord proceeds to detail his plans for Noah, his sons, wife and sons' wives, a total of eight persons entering the ark. Presumably no children are involved, that is, from Noah's three sons. Noah alone was commanded to construct the large ark, not unlike asking someone to build single-handedly an ocean-going freighter. His sons and wives had nothing to do with the project, perhaps thinking Noah crazy. That was okay, for Noah didn't require help since he built the ark at God's command which made the task easy. Next vs. 19 begins with "every living thing of all flesh" which applies to all animals and birds; nothing is said of fish which would do well in the flood waters nor of insects, many of which could survive in a watery environment. "You shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female." This pairing of the two sexes for each type of living thing assures propagation after the flood, a fact clear to Noah yet must have scared his family. Just seeing all these pairs of animals gave them a strong hint as to what was about to happen. They went along with Noah berthing the animals in suitable rooms on the three decks of vs. 16, that is, each in accord with the amount of light required which entered through the *tsohar* or window (cf. vs. 16). Not only was the ark crammed, but various types of food was required which means Noah and his family had to be acquainted with the animals' feeding habits (see vs. 21). As for the carnivores, no problem: the ark became a type of Eden where all living beings were at peace for the first time since Adam was expelled. It had to be this way or chaos would result. This sight of a new Eden floating upon the waters all by itself must have been an outstanding sight. Surely Isaiah got inspiration from it when he prophesied of the messianic king "The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" [Is 11.7, etc.].

Vs. 20 has the Lord specifying two types of animals Noah is to take on board: birds and "every creeping thing of the ground." They seem to be different from "every living thing of all flesh" of the previous verse, an inclusion of those animals more difficult to capture as well as being less desirable. Birds would next to impossible to ensnare unless God helped out; then there's the undesirable task of capturing "creeping things," this phrase, even in English, is scary enough. Jumping ahead to vs. 22, we have the words, "Noah did all this." Surely one of the greatest understatements of all times. Try to imagine Noah and his family capturing two pairs of all these

animals...not just that it was difficult but in some instances extremely dangerous. That's where Noah's walking with God became a valuable asset (vs. 9), for it was akin to the familiarity the first man enjoyed with God in the garden of Eden. This familiarity mitigated the daunting practice of capturing all those beasts, many of which were elusive. Noah uses his charm over these animals to subdue them sufficiently that they may enter the ark. "Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" [1.28]. Not only that but the Lord imparted this calming ability to his three sons and their wives for the purpose of helping out. Getting the animals into the ark is one half of the story; the other half is keeping them fed and quiet for an unknown duration of time.

Once this gigantic task of gathering animals, birds and creeping things is done, Noah and his family had to get "every sort of food that is eaten and then store it up." Surely this thought must have crossed their minds even before God had uttered the command. Since each pair of animals had their own type of food, that required considerable knowledge of their habits. Then they had to store it, an especially difficult problem with flesh-eating animals as lions and tigers. Yet in actuality this problem was surmountable because all animals, from the most docile to the most ravenous, were came under that submission readily available with the garden of Eden. The second half of vs. 22 which concludes this drama reads "he did all that God commanded him." Everything was now in place for the flood.

Chapter Seven

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

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

Vs. 2 has God telling Noah to take “seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate,” the same being applied to unclean animals. The word *behemah* is used, first noted in 6.20 (‘of the animals of their kinds’), which generally applies to domestic animals. This is different from the “wild animals” of 3.14 (*chayah* or living things) which is more inclusive. Because Noah had to bring on board *behemah*—and that includes animals considered wild and dangerous—automatically all became domestic and subservient to him just like with the first man in the garden. Not only that, the *behemah* would be on their best behavior within the ark which would form a second garden of Eden, albeit a floating one, because they would be confined for an indefinite period of time. As for the number animals, it is seven or *shivhah*, usually considered a sacred number and from the verbal root *shavah*, to swear an oath. As for “these pairs,” this is rendered literally as “the man and his woman,” the latter being rendered as “mate.”

The first group of animals are clean or *tahor*, whose verbal root means to shine, be bright. “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever” [Ps 19.9]. Noah must have been confused at this distinction between clean and unclean animals, the first such distinction made. However, a basis exists for Noah to make the distinction; he was alone among a corrupt generation and was qualified to differentiate between clean and unclean human beings. And so we have an important element in place which would apply to future sacrifices, the first one occurring when Noah, his family and all the animals disembarked from the ark (cf. 8.20). Once the initial confusion of loading all the animals was over, Noah went ahead with taking seven animals from both types, clean and unclean. As for the latter, they lacked that brightness or *tahor* and thus didn’t stand out

but remained hidden in the shadows. While the task was easy, Noah had to hasten because the flood waters were ready to be let loose at God's command. The division between two classes of animals applied as well to the "birds of the air"... "to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth" [vs. 3]. Again, the birds weren't difficult to catch because they had the same docility as the *behemah* attributable to the first man and were placed without difficulty in that second Eden, the ark. With regard to the birds, the Lord distinguishes them from *behemah* by "upon the face of the earth." After all, both a raven and dove were destined to have important roles on the ark as to discerning whether or not land had appeared.

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

"Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth." In 5.32 we have Noah at the age of five hundred when he became the father of his three sons. That statement comes at the end of Chapter Five which means one hundred years had passed between the time when men became corrupt and the day when Noah entered the ark. At first glance the span of one hundred years offered sufficient time for people to turn to God. However, it did not turn out to be so because Noah was alone and couldn't accomplish such a large conversion task. Noah may have realized this early on, so he turned his energy into building the ark...not at his instigation but at

God's command. He must have suffered tinges of regret and considered every bang of the hammer as one more into the collective coffin of his fellow men and women who would be wiped out in a flood.

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

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

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

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

the animals on board, for it reads literally, "And (they) came to Noah to the ark." That is to say, first the animals came to Noah; he didn't have to go out tracking them down. Immediately afterwards the animals came to the ark. Thus their coming was two-fold, Noah and the ark being indistinguishable.

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

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

“The waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered.” The verb for “prevailed” is *gavar*, to be strong, and from which is derived *gever* or man (opposed to woman). For an alternate meaning of the same verb, see Ps 117.2: For great is his steadfast love toward us.” *Gavar* is used with the verb *ravah*, to increase, along with the adverb *me’od* indicating strength almost to an excessive manner as in 1.31. Thus the verse at hand can read literally “the waters prevailed and increased excessively.” Afterwards “the ark went on the face of the waters.” A verb suggesting to float or to rise isn’t used, just the common *halak* (to go). This must have brought some satisfaction to the Lord who had just tucked away Noah, his family and the animals, for the ark now was on its own. Where it would float is anyone’s guess, but that wasn’t an issue. Noah had been commissioned to build an ark or *tevah* which is more like a gigantic basket lacking any means of propulsion. The idea was to rescue both the human race and animals from the earth which had become corrupt and the blood of Abel crying out from beneath. Where the *tevah* would land makes no difference.

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

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

“And the waters prevailed (*gavar*) upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.” This period of time differs from the forty days after which the flood waters stopped. Nevertheless, the waters kept their grip...*gavar*...for approximately four months. One gets the impression that after this time the

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

Chapter Eight

“But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.” So begins a new chapter where the English “but” is the Hebrew “and” (*w-*) used throughout as a connective between most sentences which makes the action string together as a single unbroken unit. Here we have the very first mention of “remember” in the Bible; up to now there wasn’t any need for God to have people recollect anything. Obviously remembrance was useless in Eden due to God’s immediate presence and later was close to impossible due to the corruption that soon ran rampant over the earth after Cain’s murder of Abel. The only two people who had the capacity to keep God’s presence in mind were Enoch and Noah. For God to take the initiative and actually remember someone (Noah) was unheard of until now. The verb is *zakar* from which is derived the noun (same spelling) “male,” the implication being that a male is a type of memory...monument...to one’s family and heritage. A male thus embodies the past of his particular family within his generation and ensures its projection into the future. In the case at hand, not just one person is involved but the entire human race in a nutshell. Thus we could say that Chapter Eight spells out this divine remembering as well as its lack. Note that God remembers two types of animals in addition to Noah, beasts (*chayah*) and cattle (*behemah*). No mention is made of his wife (whose name eludes us) nor his three sons. This intimates that they were passive instruments as bearers of the human race, pretty much nothing else, an important role yet one any person could perform simply by being human in the physical sense. As for the difference, *chayah* is first found in 1.20 which applies to those living in the water and later in vs. 24 as those living upon the earth. Thus *chayah* (an adjective) is a generic term. On the other hand, *behemah* applies to cattle or domestic four-footed beasts used for both food, clothing and transport. Obviously there were plenty of other animals in the ark, but the Lord singles out these two as being “with him” (Noah) and thus worthy of *zakar*, of being remembered.

One day while Noah, his family and the animals were drifting aimlessly upon the waters, God decided enough. All living beings had perished in the worldwide flood and at last the blood of Abel had been silenced. A new problem presented itself. How to get rid of so much water? “God made a wind blow over the earth.” God effected this by imparting a self-sustaining power to the wind (*ruach*) so it could blow by itself. The verb for this action is *havar*, to pass over, to pass through. Compare this *havar* with the Spirit of God which “was moving over the face of the waters” right at the beginning of Genesis. There the Spirit was *rachaph*—hovering as a bird over its young in the

nest—not touching the waters directly but just over “the face of the waters.” Both waters, however, were the primal ones present before the appearance of the dry land. *Rachaph* was done once and for all, not to be repeated, and suggests stationary hovering over a particular spot whereas *havar* is a continuous back and forth motion intended to sweep back the waters. In this way the land may now appear, a land which had no need of being created a second time. Note that vs. 1 has this *havar* passing “over the earth,” not the water. Of course, there was no earth to be seen except for the garden of Eden sticking out as an island, yet that was clearly out of sight. The *ruach* at work here did *havar* the water itself with the earth laying beneath. It was the special intent of God to make sure Abel’s blood did not continue to cry out in the second creation, so mention of earth is God’s way of including the added power of the divine *ruach* to make certain no cries were heard.

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

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

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

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

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

rachaph in 1.2. *Harav* is the verbal root meaning to pledge as well as to set (as the sun). And so the *horev* acted as a pledge in its constant flying back and forth which in actuality caused the waters to recede.

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

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

The time for Noah to reassess his situation—for by now he and his family were getting restless—was seven days, the same time the flood came upon the earth (cf. 7.10). That time must have passed slowly and was tense for everyone on board, including the animals who were getting weary of being penned up. However, Noah had in mind the seven days of creation, Day Seven being the one on which God had rested and the day in which he put his trust. *Yachal* is the verb for “waited” which also means to expect and to hope as in 1Sam 10.8: “Seven days you shall wait until I come to you.” Note that vs. 11 has the dove returning in the evening of the seventh day or literally “at the time of evening” or *herev* which is from the same verbal root as “raven” meaning to pledge. So in a sense the *horev* (raven) does return to the ark transformed into a different type of bird bringing the *herev* or pledge, if you will, of “a freshly plucked olive leaf (*zayth*).” This *zayth* didn’t come from any grove before the flood but from the garden of Eden which, as noted earlier, escaped the flood. It was a sign from Eve—who never had been banished from the garden—that all would turn out well for the ark’s passengers. Though she suffered the consequences of aging, she lived much longer than anyone from her son Cain’s descendants. Eve was aware of the flood waters gradually

surrounding the garden yet was confident they wouldn't swallow it up. As a sign of that confidence, she put the *zayth* in the dove's mouth as the best possible testimony for Noah. After another seven days (totally fourteen) Noah let the dove go again. That means the raven, who continuously had been flying back and forth to dry up the flood, caught the dove, for "she did not return to him anymore." Unfortunate as this had been, the good news is that almost all the waters had disappeared or more accurately, returned to their normal places such as the ocean.

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

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

The words which God uttered once the waters had receded are "Go forth from the ark" [vs. 16]. Even though the earth was in plain sight, it took a direct divine intervention to coax Noah and his family outside, followed by all the animals. As for these animals, God spoke works akin to 1.20-25 when they first came into existence...after all, this was a new or second creation. In many ways to create anew is more difficult than at first. The excitement and adventure of the first endeavor is

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

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

So what happened to the ark after everyone and all the animals disembarked? Noah was to be congratulated for having built such a sturdy vessel that withstood the punishing flood waters from below and the incessant rain from above. With the experience of being surrounded by so much water behind them, Noah is to be thanked profusely for having listened to God's instructions to "cover it inside and out with pitch" [6.14], i.e., giving the ark a thorough job of waterproofing. This penetration of the gopher wood with pitch was key to the ark's survival and therefore all on board. Despite the torrential rain and flood, the ark didn't have to be made seaworthy in the conventional sense; all it had to do was float on the water, hence the greater importance on waterproofing. Everyone and the animals were relieved to leave the ark behind despite the barren earth before them. After Noah had used up the food stored on board for both his family and the animals, they used the ark for a dwelling; they knew full well that any dissembled timbers would be ideal for protection against rain which for them would seem insignificant after all they had gone through. With time the ark's remains were forgotten and allowed to decay, so any attempt to locate it is irrelevant. Another reason for the futility of such a search is that this ark or *tevah* pales in significance with the one which contained the baby Moses. That *tevah* his mother made of

bulrushes “and daubed it with bitumen and pitch” [Ex 2.3] pretty much along the lines of Noah’s *tevah*. And so this *tevah* contained something far more precious than the human and animal survivors from before the flood: it bore the author of the Torah whose contents excel in every way that which is found in creation, either before or after the flood. So instead of wasting time and energy looking for the *tevah* of Noah, that of Moses should be sought for diligently; better yet, if you find the Torah, you have found everything there’s worth looking for.

“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord” [vs. 20]. *Mizbeach* is the word used for the very first time implying that the world before the flood had no need to offer sacrifice. The offerings of Cain and Abel (‘an offering of the fruit of the ground’ and ‘firstlings of his flock’ of 4.3-4) are recorded without any specifics as to how they were done, supposedly some kind of immolation being involved. An altar wasn’t necessary so early after their father’s banishment from the garden of Eden because familiarity with God, although significantly decreased, was still fresh in mind. This memory was transmitted to Cain’s descendants who, despite their folly and corruption, maintained some semblance of fidelity to this tradition. If they didn’t, God would have brought the flood crashing down upon the earth much earlier. As for *mizbeach*, its verbal root is *zavach*, to offer sacrifice in the sense of slaughtering animals, hence its purpose is clear. So where did Noah get this novel idea? Obviously from the tradition handed on from Cain who founded the city of Nod (cf. 4.16) and thus his descendants. However, Noah felt that something had gone awry over the years, that the idea of offering (*minchah*: alternately as gift, tribute, a sacrifice without blood) became so distorted, a new approach was required. Noah had time to ponder this while on the ark; he didn’t discuss it with his wife, three sons, let alone their wives. They wouldn’t have a clue about it because they were slightly less polluted than their recently destroyed generation. Thus Noah built upon the idea of *minchah*. While on the ark tending to all the animals, it came to mind that they might contribute in a manner satisfactory to God and not incite his wrath which might bring about another flood. This idea grew stronger as Noah fed the penned up animals below decks, wondering which ones might be a suitable gift for the Lord. Apart from Enoch, Noah had been the only person identified to have walked with God. And while God wasn’t walking with him on the decks of the ark, Noah recalled him with the hope that soon both would be walking upon the face of the new earth.

As for the animals Noah chose, he “took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” And so continues vs. 20. Because the animals had just paraded off the ark in families or *mispachah* and were looking for food, they hung around the ark making it easier for Noah to pick out clean animals. *Tahor* is the adjective for “clean” which connotes brightness as noted in 7.2. Thus they stood out from the unclean animals by reason of their brightness and were recognized easily. It was easy for Noah to know which animals were *tahor*, perfect candidates for sacrifice upon the altar, because they represented a divine spark carried over from the earth prior to the flood and worthy of being returned to God who had created it. As for the burnt offerings, the word is *holah* or that which is laid upon the altar. It is derived from the verbal root *halah*, to go up, as the offering (and scent) ascending to God in heaven. The verb “offered” is this verb. Such a gesture acknowledges that God is no longer walking with Noah upon the earth as he did with him and Enoch, that he is removed from this second creation or better, the re-colonization of the former earth. Despite the disobedience of the first man and first woman

along with having need to destroy every living being with a flood, God couldn't retain the same relationship with man as before; it was irreparably broken and couldn't be restored until many generations later with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As for these burnt offerings, Noah could take animals which were *tahor*—and that involved a huge number of them—and sacrifice them. Seven pairs (cf. 7.2) were taken onboard the ark, so Noah had to exercise care in choosing the right amount so as not to depopulate these animals. In order to build a fire for the sacrifice, Noah used the ark's wood. Being covered in pitch made it easy to burn. Chances are that given the large amount of animals to be sacrificed, Noah disassembled the ark in its entirety to provide fuel.

The point of reconciliation between the Lord, mankind, the earth and all living beings is expressed in vs. 21: "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man.'" Note the interplay between "smelled" and "odor," *reyach* and *reyach* (the former has a short 'e' and the latter, a long 'e'). The alternate spelling of *reyach* is *ruach* from which comes "spirit," "wind." This "wind" wafted to the Lord above which gladdened him. As for the distance between the altar and God, it was difficult to access it in physical terms because Noah had just embarked from the ark upon a newly cleansed earth. Being afloat upon the waters for so long confused him as far as the ability to tell distance, yet was familiar with smoke from cooking their meals on board. In this way Noah ingeniously figured that the *reyach* would reach God. And so, Noah completed the rigorous (and bloody) task of making burnt offerings. While watching the smoke waft up above—it traversed the earlier height where the ark has been located on the flood waters—Noah, his wife, three sons and their wives wondered how far it would have to go before reaching the Lord. Despite some anxiety, all were confident contact would be made because these burnt offers were pleasing to the Lord, *neychoach*. "It (ram) is a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the Lord" [Ex 29.18]. The odor itself (which must have been considerable smoke) was *neychoach* because it came from a mixture of all the clean animals and hence itself was clean or as in the paragraph above, *tahor* suggesting brightness.

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

"For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Indeed, the Lord had plenty experience of that from the beginning yet decides to forego catastrophic punishment in this re-colonization of the first creation. *Yetser* is the word for "imagination" as found in 6.5: "that every imagination of his heart was only evil continually;" the verbal root is *yatsar* as in 2.7: "then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground." So we have the same divine observation before and after the flood...unfortunately no difference which must have made God wonder if it was worth having wiped out all living things. Even if he did it a third time, same result. Note the two uses of *lev* (heart): first as "the Lord said in his heart" and second, "the imagination of man's heart is evil

from his youth.” The words which follow are “neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.” An utterance pretty much of resignation, for the evil that would take root now would in every way surpass that of before the flood.

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

Chapter Nine

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

In the same breath as these words of blessing with respect to re-colonizing the earth God continues: “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth.” While they may encourage Noah and his family, they are tinged with sadness; the domestic relationship enjoyed with the animals on the ark is broken even though one could argue that it started with Noah’s sacrifice in 8.20. Even in English these words are unsettling: instead of something like “they will have dread of you and fear you,” the Hebrew has the more forceful “the fear of you and the dread of you” as though this fear and dread were part and parcel of the human constitution. The noun for “fear” is the more common *more’* (similar to *yire’ah*) and the noun “dread” is *chat*, derived from *chatah* which fundamentally means to take hold of, to seize. *Chat* has only three other references, 1Sam 2.4, Job 41.33 and Jer 46.5, the last being cited here: “They are dismayed and have turned backward.” God makes sure each and every species has this fear and dread drilled into them: beasts of the earth, birds of the air, things that creep on the ground and fish in the sea. All those animals which had been companions with Noah in the ark passed on this fear and dread

not unlike the descendants of Cain who transmitted the memory of Abel's murder. Thus one act of murder was sufficient to taint everything, even the re-colonization of earth, and had to wait until the coming of Jesus Christ to right the situation. While God's words were re-assuring for Noah and his family, instinctively they realized that never would they be at peace with the animals and eventually would have to hunt them for food. "Into your hand they are delivered." Such unsettling words conclude vs. 2.

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

"Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." This verse hearkens back to pre-flood days and even further, to the murder of Abel by Cain. Above all else God wants to avoid the shedding of blood which brought back memories of Abel's blood "crying to me from the ground" [4.10]. Not only did that blood require a worldwide flood to silence it, God would be forced to bring forth a second catastrophe. In other words, at some time the threat of punishment had to stop, and now was the best opportunity. As for the "life" in vs. 4, *nephesh* is the word which commonly applies to soul. Thus the close connection between *nephesh* as animating principle, blood and the human body is spelled out so Noah's descendants may avoid the sin of Cain. "For your life-blood I will surely require a reckoning." That is to say, for the *nephesh* associated with blood—and the blood God has in mind is Abel's which had soaked the ground—he will seek or *darash* a reckoning, the same verbal root being used. In short, it reads that God will "seek a seeking." God narrows down this seeking in words reminiscent of Abel: "of every man's brother I will require the life (*nephesh*) of man." When a stringent reminder is laid on someone, it sets the stage for a fall or repetition of the original offense. That wasn't to be the case during the re-colonization of the earth, and God knew it full well which is why in vs. 11 he promises never to destroy the earth by a flood.

For the first time since 1.26, vs. 6 speaks of God having "made man in his own image" or *tselem* which as noted, means a shadow, a shadow being a counterpart or imitation with respect to the object upon which the sun shines. When God first made man thus, he had no need to be commanded because his home was the garden within Eden. By mentioning *tselem*, God reminds Noah and his family the true nature of man. However, he omits the word "likeness" which would

be too much at this juncture; too much because given all humanity had experienced, including escaping the flood, human nature had lost the capacity to imitate God. It was simply too weak. The single person of Noah is stark testimony to that. So in vs. 7 God turns attention to “you” (second person plural) in order to “be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.” We have the verbs *parah* and *sharats*, the former first noted in 1.22 (‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’) and the latter as in 1.20 (‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures’). While both verbs apply to water creatures, in 1.28 *parah* applies to the first man and woman. In addition to *parah* and *sharats*, the verb *ravah* occurs twice and applies to growth, not just increase in numbers.

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

At last in vs. 9 we have God speaking in the present tense introduced by the dramatic *hineh*: “Behold, “I establish.” No question this got the attention of Noah and his family because the tension begun in 6.18 with the promise of a covenant would be resolved shortly. However, details about this covenant remained hidden which only increased the tension. Surely they must have thought the *beryth* would be similar to Noah’s recent sacrifice. This second time around God added a bit more drama by mentioning not just those present but “your descendants after you.” That means the *beryth* would last in perpetuity compared with the occasional offering of a sacrifice and in the minds of Noah’s family, their private hope that never again would they experience a flood. Not just Noah and his family were involved but thrown in for good measure (vs. 10) are the birds, cattle, every beast of the earth...“as many as came out of the ark.” NB: the Hebrew of the last part of vs. 10 repeats “every beast of the earth” compared with the RSV “as many as came out of the ark.”

Vs. 11 repeats God’s intention soon to be implemented as to the *qum* (to rise) or establishment of the covenant. Here that verb assumes significance insofar as the *beryth* will continue to “arise” throughout future generations and therefore act like leaven. It’s a consolation for Noah and his family, that God wouldn’t destroy the earth by flood, words to that effect being uttered in the

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

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

Although vs. 11 reads “I establish my covenant with you,” vs. 13 has “it (the bow) shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” That is to say, the former is between God and man and the latter, between God and the earth (*’erets*). Both are crucial though mention of *’erets* is important here, the same *’erets* that had been covered totally by flood waters but now is revealed and ready for re-colonization. Never would Noah trust God fully unless the covenant be with the earth.

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

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

“Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard” [vs. 20]. This verse consisting of two short sentences as rendered by the **RSV** stands in stark contrast to the *naphats* or almost explosive getaway of Shem, Ham and Japheth in the previous verse. It sounds familiar, even makes us a bit uneasy, because it reminds us of Cain, “a tiller of the soil” (cf. 4.2). The latter has for “tiller” *hoved*, from the verbal root *havad*, to do or to make, to be engaged within a task. On the other hand, Noah is someone who (as it reads literally) “began (*chala*) the earth and planted a vineyard.” If Noah had imitated Cain by simply planting a vineyard, he would be in the same position as his murderous forebear. So while Noah “began” his work with respect to the earth

(*'adamah*), he was mindful of the first man (*'adam*) who similarly cultivated the garden (cf. 2.15). An interesting contrast here: Noah stays put whereas his three sons scatter...run wild...upon the newly uncovered earth. He's more interested in the *'adamah*, that soil from which Adam had been fashioned, and wished to appease it so no more blood might be spilled upon it as had been the case with Abel. Thus Noah "began" (*chala*) his cultivation of *'adamah* right away with a disappointment tinged with regret as his sons scattered in three directions away from him.

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

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

"Noah awoke from his wine." These words are an embarrassment to Noah insofar as they identify him, the man noted as having walked with God, as the first person who had become drunk, drunk from the wine of the first vineyard ever planted. Instinctively Noah knew it was Ham who

discovered his nakedness, but instead of calling him by that pre-flood name, he uses the one of Canaan. Although that was the name of the place the ark had landed after the flood, it became a curse for Ham. So despite the re-colonization of the earth, it had not recovered fully, as had been expected, from the banishment of the man from Eden whose descendants through Noah's family transmitted the corruption of the pre-flood earth. God successfully withdrew the flood waters from the earth but was unable to undo the corruption of mankind which had been affected by the blood of Abel as it cried out from the earth over so many generations. That's a tough curse to eradicate, really, yet nothing is said about the first murder in this, the newly colonized earth.

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

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

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

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

Chapter Ten

This chapter begins immediately with the “generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japeth; sons were born to them after the flood.” *Toldoth* (generations) refers to the history of families or genealogical records around which are draped external events. They are important insofar as they seek to trace Noah’s lineage from that all-embracing event, the flood. The *toldoth* at hand continue throughout the entirety of the chapter followed by the story of the tower of Babel. Both stories work together to form an introduction, if you will, to the real theme at hand, the call of Abraham. As for Babel, we get a hint of that story’s theme in vs. 5: “each with his own language by their families, in their nations.” The same applies to Ham in vs. 20 and Shem in vs. 31. That is to say, with regard to the sons of all three of those born to Noah, a division of languages exists in accord with families and nations. They are natural ways for a language to develop and shouldn’t be construed with the confusion of languages depicted later (cf. 11.17).

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

So despite the rapid dispersal of Noah’s three sons which set in motion the re-colonization of the earth, each of these three main branches of the new humanity remained united as far as language goes. The only hint of future disturbance of this unity lay, as intimated in the last paragraph, with Nimrod who founded Babel and whose ancestry was not fully in line with that of Noah’s offspring. Even though all living beings had been destroyed by the flood, there carried over to the re-colonization traces of the Nephilim, however small. Despite this apparent insignificance, it was enough to spread like a virus and cause the nations of the earth not to understand each other’s

language. The last verse of Chapter Ten is basically the same as the first, a statement as to the dispersal of Noah's sons. Note that "from these (three) the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood." The verb for "spread" is *parad*, to separate by breaking. "In their death they were not divided" [2Sam 1.23]. *Parad* is a word indicative of things to come, the fracture of humanity starting with the tower of Babel lasting all the way to the the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is quite different from the original divine injunction of 9.1, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." With greater distance between the flood and each succeeding generation, fear of the Lord diminished...fear that he would bring a second flood and wipe out humanity. So the shift from fear of God to a land where gradually his memory becomes absent is a kind of flood, a flooding of humanity's collective mind with amnesia for things divine. Although this took place gradually, still the verb *parad* is a good way to describe the process since it embodies swiftness as well as thoroughness as far as filling up that upon which it spreads.

Chapter Eleven

"Now the whole earth had one language and few words," a verse which applies to approximately three generations stemming from the three sons of Noah. What could have been that first language? As for the garden of Eden, there was no need for a language since the first man and woman required no words to communicate with each other due to the immediate presence of the Lord. What we have as far as anything recorded derive from Moses, the author of Genesis, who put words into their mouths. We have to look for a first language originating outside the garden of Eden with the banishment of the man and his need to communicate with his two sons, Cain and Abel. Adam was in between two worlds: the one of no language and the one of language. That is to say, he had to speak with Cain and Abel yet not with his wife who, as noted in 3.23, did not suffer banishment from the garden. From time to time Adam met her at the gate of Eden, that is, close to the fiery revolving sword, not so much to utter words with her but to enjoy to some degree that communion which had been lost and hopefully could be transmitted to his two sons. Certainly that was a fervent wish on the woman's part. As for Adam's two sons Cain and Abel born outside the garden of Eden, they lacked this non-verbal ability to communicate and were reduced to just the basics of a rudimentary language. So that primitive tongue was marked by nostalgia for the days of uninterrupted communion the first man and woman enjoyed with God within Eden. Despite its tragic loss, a trace of it remained, the reason why the first verse of Chapter Eleven says that one language existed with few words. It was, of course, handed down to the inhabitants of the City of Enoch (cf. 4.17) and later survived the flood through the medium of eight speakers, those who were on the ark. This single language which sprang into existence after the man's expulsion from the garden in Eden and later survived the flood became the true unifying element among a disparate population. If it could survive those two calamities, people of the day felt reasonably confident they could continue communicating among each other with ease. However, that was soon not to be the case. The word for "language" is *saphah* which seems to apply more to the lips and speech. "Their libations of blood I will not pour out nor take their names upon my lips" [Ps 16.4]. As for "few words," the adjective *'achad* (one) is used, the same as "one" in this same verse. Use of *'achad* in both instances stresses unity of speech as opposed to primitive language carried over from pre-flood days. All the history from the pre-flood days to the present state of affairs was

easy to pass on to future generations, a task that soon was to become significantly more complicated.

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

The place to which the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japeth came turned out to be “a plain in the land of Shinar.” Vs. 2 says that they “found” (*matsa*) this place, intimating that they stumbled upon it with the intent of not remaining but of going elsewhere...and that elsewhere is not mentioned. The word for “plain” is *biqhah* which also translates as “valley:” “The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land...of fountains and springs, flowing both in valley and hills.” *Biqhah* suggests that which is cleaved, and anything cut in half like this can be either a plain or a valley...or both together with one half being one and the other half, another. Regardless whether Shinar was a valley or plain, it is a geographical location and had been mentioned in 10.10: “the beginning of his (Nimrod) kingdom was Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.” Thus Shinar is associated with the descendants of Ham and then Nimrod, “a mighty hunter before the Lord” [10.9]. By settling in Shinar, the descendants of Ham hoped to re-capture some of Nimrod’s “before-ness” with the Lord, far more valuable than any geographical locale. At the same time, Shinar, by reason of its openness, had a fine view of the towering mountain on top of which was located the garden of Eden untouched by the flood.

Obviously it was natural for these new settlers to emulate the mountain of Eden, an unfulfilled nostalgia which reached across all generations and remains to the present day. If they couldn’t ascend the mountain on which it was located, they hoped to copy what was beyond their reach. The people thought this plain of Shinar offered the ideal location and environment to at last undertake the enormous task of copying what was always in their view. As for such a herculean

effort, no time is wasted between the settlement of Shinar and the construction of a city and tower. Two words stand out in vs. 3 (‘And they said, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly’’) which occurs immediately after vs. 2. They “come” which means let’s gather together for a project even though we are scattered. At least we have “one language and few words,” an advantage which will enable us to accomplish our project in short order. The second word is “thoroughly” which in Hebrew comes off literally as “let us burn with fire to fire,” *saraph* being the verb at hand and implying baking. “And Joshua burned Ai” [Jos 8.28]. And so the sense here is of baking slowly and thoroughly in order to make the bricks as strong as possible to withstand the height of the tower under consideration. If Noah could have built such a mighty ark, surely his descendants could construct a tower. Only one essential ingredient was missing: Noah built the ark according to the Lord’s directive whereas the inhabitants of Shinar erected the tower on their own initiative minus divine guidance.

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

The purpose of constructing the tower? That the people who settled in the plain of Shinar decided to “make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” At first glance this sounds reasonable because the people had a tenuous grip on the land after their recent migration from the east. The presumption of reaching “in the heavens” noted just above is based in the fact that the people didn’t realize the value of their “one language and few words” (vs. 1), that this unity was sufficient to sustain them in their newly settled territory. If they assumed

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

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

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

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

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

Vs. 6 continues with “this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” The word expressing the Lord’s astonishment (*hen* or behold) now comes to a observation based upon reason, not emotion. The verb *chalal* is used for the noun “beginning” which had been commented upon earlier, essentially conveying the idea of to perforate, pierce through. Thus *chalal* is a perforation or an opening which, in turn, signals the start of an event. It’s different from *re’shyth* as in 1.1 (‘In the beginning’), the first of any kind. *Chalal* is appropriate because it intimates an opening—let’s say a small one—not unlike a nozzle behind which tremendous water pressure has been building up, so with its release, there’s no telling how powerful it will be and what manifestation it’ll assume. *Batsar* is the verb for the English “impossible” which can be rendered as to restrain as well as to cut off. It’s the opposite to *chalal*, that is, that there will be no means of cutting off this *chalal* once it is unleashed. The Hebrew thus reads “now nothing will be cut off from them all which they propose to do.” As for the verb “propose,” it’s *zamam* which suggests laying in wait, to plot. “As they plot to take my life” [Ps 31.13]. While out and about in the city, the Lord got wind of this *zamam*, that what the people were celebrating was the start of future, even grander projects. If they could construct such a city

and erect such a tower which was as high as the mountain on which lay the garden of Eden, there was no limit what they could accomplish. The next tower would pierce the heavens which is really why the Lord had decided to come down and check things out. Use of the verb *zamam* is telling: because it applies more to scheming as opposed to planning, truly what the Lord heard in the streets was alarming. After all, the one language and few words the people enjoyed enabled information and therefore their building plans to be processed much more quickly without writing them down but passing them from mouth to mouth.

Vs. 7 restates the Lord's descent in vs. 5: "Come, let us go down (*yarad*) and there confuse their language." *Havah* is an adverb of exhortation ('come') as used in vs. 4 when the inhabitants of the city rallied themselves together for building both the city and the tower. Here is a second descent by the Lord, the first one being in vs. 5. He saw how raucous was the celebration over completion of their impressive works, this being the first city built since the one constructed by Cain and named after his son, Enoch (cf. 4.17). The Lord didn't come down to that city since it wasn't raised imitation of the garden of Eden on the mountaintop and posed no threat of usurpation. He wanted to compare the both cities, the former having no tower. As for the first person plural ('Come, let us go down'), two suggestions: a spontaneous desire on the Lord's part to check things out. The Lord is not so much uttering these words aloud as pondering them, so there's no one around to hear what he intends. Then again, it could refer to Moses, author of the Book of Genesis. The Lord wished Moses to come in order to make an accurate report of his findings.

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

"So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city" [vs. 8]. *Puts* is the verb for "scatter abroad" used in vs. 4, the fear of being broken into pieces (the fundamental sense of *puts*) and the rationale behind constructing both the city and tower to emulate the garden of Eden. The Lord effected this scattering by the breathe of his mouth, his *ruach*, blowing them like so many leaves over the earth from the plain of Shinar. Vs. 8 concludes with "they left off building the city," *chadal* being the verb which means just this, they ceased their work. When the Lord first descended under the guise of a man, both the city and

tower were complete; more work remained with finishing and the city, even entertaining thoughts to go beyond the limits originally laid down. Nothing is said of the tower. It remained there for many years afterwards as a reminder to the former inhabitants' hubris. The structure was so lofty that no matter where the people were scattered they could see it looming in the horizon as a reminder of their vain efforts. While looking back at it, everyone were unable to express their frustration; although they retained the one language, many words had been injected into it instead of the original few.

The city on the plain in the land of Shinar—no specific name had been given to it yet most likely went by Shinar—was called Babel “because there the Lord confused (*balal*) the language of all the earth.” Perhaps the tower had another name before this, tower of Shinar. Now it stood as a perpetual reminder of *balal* until the day of Pentecost. Vs. 10 to the end of Chapter Eleven recounts the descendants of Shem, the son whom Noah had blessed in 10.26, and ends with the birth of Abram. These intervening generations, having been scattered from the city of Shinar-turned-Babel, were in some ways worse off than the generations noted in Chapter Ten. At least they had that one language and few words. The more the succeeding generations increased, the greater became their confusion of that one language, confused so much that in time other languages sprang from it. Finally there came a day when a descendant...Abram...arose, the first person to attempt ending this continuous scattering. First he had to remove himself from the land in which it had happened, rather, he needed to be removed by the Lord himself, hence Chapter Twelve begins with Abram leaving his native land.

Chapter Twelve

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

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

Abram's goal isn't clear to him, just the order to leave and leave at once, not unlike the Israelites later who left Egypt for a destination unknown to them. However, it turned out to be the land of Canaan (vs. 5) which wasn't mentioned in God's initial command. That became clearer as he left Haran because like his ancestors, Enoch and Noah, Abram was walking with God. Although Lot came along, he was unaware of this invisible companion and must have wondered why Abram walked with such lively steps at the age of seventy-five. The same applied to those in their retinue, not having a clue as to Abram walking (apparently) all alone and apart from their group. With hindsight Abram appears heroic, though he must have jumped at the chance of leaving his native land which had been tainted by the confusion of language and scattering of his ancestors. Thus he welcomed the opportunity to leave that environment. With this in mind, the words addressed to Abram to go "to the land that I will show (the verb is the common *ra'ah*, to see) you" made him bolt even though he had to walk through the part of his own country, kindred and father's house. Thus Abram's walking was done in earnest. His family and relatives were glad to see him leave as well, not unlike the Israelites urged on by the Egyptians who "were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste" [Ex 12.33].

Another reason for Abram to depart was "I will make of you a great nation." Who in their right mind wouldn't want to be remembered for that? While the details aren't clear, they do come from the Lord which is a sure-fire guarantee it will succeed. Furthermore, the Lord throws in three more benefits: first he will bless (*barak* being the common verb) Abram, make his name great and this with the purpose of him becoming a blessing (*berakah*). So sandwiched in between the Lord's promise to bless Abram in the future and him becoming a recipient of this blessing, we have his name becoming great. The purpose of *barak* is for other people to find *berakah* in him, not especially for himself. In other words, this blessing is intended to set the previously corrupt and distorted history of mankind straight. While it doesn't do so in a way to include all humanity at once, it is a start which will take root, flourish and persist despite the continued sinful behavior of humanity. Vs. 3 continues with "I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you I will curse." In addition to *barak* the Lord introduces a curse, *qalal* being the verb as noted in 8.21 with

regard to the Lord “never again cursing the ground because of man.” So with blessing and cursing, there’s an interchange between Abram and God. At the end of these promising verses God adds that all the earth’s families shall be blessed in him implying that he is a new Adam not being driven from the garden of Eden but being asked to forsake his country, kindred and father’s house. It was a kind of re-entry into the garden of Eden. After the tragedy of Adam’s expulsion, the flood and scattering of people God said enough is enough. You can pick up his determination that it will succeed not so much by what Abram said (i.e., nothing) but by his swift and decisive response: “So Abram went as the Lord had told him” [vs. 4].

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

The second part of lengthy vs. 5 says that Abram and Lot (plus their respective retinues) “set forth to go to the land of Canaan,” that is, made the journey from Haran in northwest Mesopotamia to Canaan. Immediately the third and final part of this same verse says that “when they had come to the land of Canaan.” We have no information about this journey commencing from the northern part of the Fertile Crescent, not a lengthy distance, yet it involved considerable peril given the fact that Abram was an elderly man. Despite this age, it was reduced considerably from the time when Adam was expelled from the garden. Each succeeding generation decreased in years until what has become more or less the normal life span, and seventy-five was considered ancient for those days. While Abram and Lot walked part of the way, they must have ridden in carts to compensate for the former’s advanced age. Lack of information as to their journey contrasts with the detailed account of the Israelites who wandered in the desert after having departed Egypt. Unlike that lengthy wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, we have no mention of divine communication. Thus their journey was direct even though the two men had a definite clue as to their destination. Nothing of real value lay in between Haran and Canaan except that it was territory the two parties had to traverse, the sooner the better, which means putting as much distance between the ancestral land of Shinar and their descendants or the people which sought to emulate the garden of Eden perched on top of a mountain by their own image, the tower.

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

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

Vs. 7 concludes with the words, "So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him." This is the second mention of *mizbeach* (altar), the first being erected by Noah immediately after the flood (cf. 8.20). Both were set up in a new land and were constructed not at a direct command from God but spontaneously, more as a gesture of gratitude. No details are given as to the type of sacrifice Abram had offered compared with the animals Noah had taken from the ark and thus had survived the worldwide flood. We have no mention about the sacrifice Abram had offered, perhaps none at the time, just construction of the altar. The most important feature is that the altar is for the "Lord who had appeared to him." Despite the appearance, emphasis is more upon the words addressed to Abram. This emphasis is in keeping with the summoning of Abram in vs. 1. Afterward having built the altar Abram continues to move in a southerly direction all the way to Egypt, his furthest point away from Haran, after which he returned to Canaan, this account

spilling over into Chapter Thirteen. Thus the altar faced in a southerly direction upon which all these lands were to be offered, more important than any animal sacrifice.

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

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

Vs. 11 begins with “when he was about to enter Egypt” which means he was in its vicinity, its northwestern boarder. With the sea to the right and desert of Sinai to the left, roads converged which meant that people making their way to Egypt for food must have clogged the highways. They were on top of each other, so much that Abram got the idea of disguising the beauty of his wife, Sarai, in preparation for entering that country. He could have picked up this idea from fellow travelers with previous bad experiences; best to act now before it was too late. Once at the border he would run the gamut of customs and military posts who were exceptionally selective as whom to let into their borders during this time of crisis. If they saw that Sarai was so stunning, they would “kill me” [vs. 12] but let her live. Things might have improved once past this frontier area and into the big cities, but still the risk of her abduction was ever present. “Say you are my sister” Abram says to her in vs. 13, words uttered more from self-interest than for the well-being of his

wife. It was a lie Abram had to sustain for some time, a lie in which his retinue must have been complicit and had to sustain just as much as Abram.

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

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