

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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26 When you enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, ²you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name. ³You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, “I acknowledge this day before the LORD your God that I have en-

כֹּ וְהָיָה כִּי-תָבוֹא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ נַחֲלָה וּיְרֻשְׁתָּהּ וַיֵּשְׁבֶתָ בָּהּ: ² וְלָקַחְתָּ מִרְאשֵׁית אֶת-כָּל-פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּבְיֵא מֵאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וְשָׂמְתָּ בַסֵּנַי וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם: ³ וּבֵאתָ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה בְּיָמֵינוּ הָהֵם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו הִגַּדְתִּי

Moses' Second Discourse, Part 3: The Laws Given in Moab (continued)

TWO LITURGICAL DECLARATIONS (26:1–15)

When farmers bring the first fruits to the Temple each year, and after they give the poor tithe every third year, they are to make certain declarations. These declarations (and the declaration of 21:7–9) are the only instances in the Torah that present the precise wording that must be recited in a layman's address to God. They convey what Deuteronomy wished the farmers to find meaningful in these ceremonies.

THE FIRST-FRUITS CEREMONY (26:1–11)

The first-fruits ceremony leads the farmers from a recognition of the land's fertility to an awareness of God's guidance of the Israelites from their beginnings, freeing them from oppression and giving them the land. The change in the focus of a religious ceremony from exclusive attention to God's role in nature to an emphasis on God's role in history is one of the most significant original features of the Bible. The declaration spoken by the farmers evokes the very heart of monotheism, which acknowledges God as the power behind all phenomena, historical as well as natural.

2. The farmer, the typical Israelite, is being addressed. The context suggests that farmers brought their first fruits individually. No date is specified for bringing them, and it probably var-

ied for different farmers, depending on their workload, the species that each grew, and the date of the harvest of each species in each part of the country.

some of every first fruit Some of every species must be brought, not only those that 18:4 assigns to the priests. Because the first fruits are a token gift, no specific amount is prescribed. The Talmud states that the minimum quantity is one-sixtieth of the crop, with no maximum. According to the Talmud, a farmer who sees the first ripe fruit of each species ties a cord or blade of grass on it for identification.

3. I acknowledge The Hebrew can be understood in one of two ways: “By this declaration I acknowledge” or “By bringing the first fruits I acknowledge.” In the latter case, the act of giving the first fruits constitutes an acknowledgment, tangible proof that the farmer has entered the Land.

the LORD your God The farmer is addressing the priest. The Lord, of course, is the farmer's God as well, as the chapter states several times. People would often say “your God” or “so-and-so's God” when speaking to, or about, priests, prophets, and kings, because their offices were established by God and they were considered especially close to Him.

CHAPTER 26

Deuteronomy now moves toward its climax, invoking blessings on those who will be faithful to God's message and calling down a series

of curses on those who would depart from the Torah's norms. The curses culminate in a warning, called the *Tokheḥah* (Reproach), similar to the one found in the final *parashah* of Leviticus.

tered the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to assign us.”

⁴The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God.

⁵You shall then recite as follows before the LORD your God: “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. ⁶The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. ⁷We cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. ⁸The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. ⁹He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O LORD, have given me.”

5. my father It could refer to Jacob, who went down to Egypt; it could be collective, referring to Jacob’s entire family, who went with him; or it could refer to all the ancestors, Abraham and Isaac as well as Jacob and his sons.

fugitive Could also mean “perishing” or “straying.”

Aramean Probably refers to the fact that the ancestors of the Israelites came from the region known as “Aram alongside the River.” The recitation contrasts the homeless beginnings of the Israelites with their present possession of a fertile land. In the *Pesah Haggadah*, a well-known *midrash* interprets these words to

הַיּוֹם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי־בָאתִי אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתָּנוּ לָתֵת לָנוּ:
4 וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן הַטָּהוֹר מִיָּדְךָ וְהִנִּיחוֹ לִפְנֵי
מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

5 וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶרְמִי
אֲבִד אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִמָּה וַיִּגַּר שָׁם בְּמֵתֵי
מִעֶט וַיְהִי־שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל עֲצוּם וְרַב:
6 וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ
עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה: 7 וַנִּצְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת־קִלְנוּ
וַיִּרְא אֶת־עַנְיָנוּ וְאֶת־עֲמָלְנוּ וְאֶת־לַחֲצוֹנוּ:
8 וַיּוֹצֵאנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְיָרֵעַ
נְטוּיָה וּבְמִרְא גָדֹל וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבְמִפְתֵּי:
9 וַיְבִיאנוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן־לָנוּ אֶת־
הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ:
10 וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הֵבִיתִי אֶת־רֵאשִׁית פְּרִי
הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּה לִּי יְהוָה

mean, “Laban the Aramean sought to destroy my father.”

9. this place The land of Israel.

10. After reciting a brief history of Israel and speaking about God, the farmers now turn to speak to God. In this way they express their feeling that they stand directly in God’s presence. Then, after speaking of Israel in the first person plural while describing the history of God’s benefactions to Israel, they switch to the first person singular, expressing the feeling that they personally are participating in that history.

which You, O LORD, have given me Refers to the soil, not to the first fruits.

5. The words that the farmer utters here and in verse 3 are called “The First-Fruits Recitation” in the Mishnah, which requires that it be said in Hebrew. At first those who were able to recite it on their own did so, while those who could not were assisted by a prompter. When the latter group, out of embarrassment, ceased to bring their first fruits, the procedure was changed so that everybody was led by a prompter (M Sot. 7:2–3, Bik. 3:7).

This is a rare instance of the Torah prescribing the precise words of a prayer rather than

leaving it to the inspiration of the worshiper’s own heart. This recitation summarizes the historical basis of Jewish identity and has found a featured place in the *Pesah Haggadah*. One of the advantages of a set liturgy, in addition to uniting all Jews across barriers of time and space, is that it reminds us of themes we might not think of on our own.

10–11. Gratitude and generosity do not seem to come naturally to most people. Most of us must be taught to remember to thank God for our good fortune and must learn through ex-

You shall leave [the basket] before the LORD your God and bow low before the LORD your God. ¹¹And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you and your household.

¹²When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, ¹³you shall declare before the LORD your God: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments: ¹⁴I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was

וְהִנַּחְתּוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ¹¹ וְשָׂמַחְתָּ בְכָל-הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבֵיתְךָ אִתָּהּ וְהַלּוֹי וְהַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ: ¹² כִּי תִכְלֶה לְעֹשֶׂר אֶת-כָּל-מַעֲשֶׂיךָ תְּבוּאָתְךָ בַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁת שָׁנַת הַמַּעֲשֶׂר וְנָתַתָּה לְלוֹי לַגֵּר לַיְתוּם וְלְאִלְמָנָה וְאָכְלוּ בְשַׂעְרֶיךָ וּשְׂבָעוּ: ¹³ וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּעִרְתִּי הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִן-הַבַּיִת וְגַם נָתַתִּיו לְלוֹי וְלַגֵּר לַיְתוּם וְלְאִלְמָנָה כְּכָל-מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתַנִּי לֹא-עֲבַרְתִּי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי: ¹⁴ לֹא-אֲכַלְתִּי בְּאֵנִי מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא-בְעִרְתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ בְטָמֵא

11. you shall enjoy That is, you shall celebrate all the bounty. The celebration takes the form of a festive meal at the sanctuary.

the stranger in your midst The farmers, whose ancestors sojourned as strangers in Egypt where they were oppressed, now provide generously for the strangers in their land.

THE TITHE DECLARATION (vv. 12–15)

Every third year, when farmers have removed all the tithe from their premises and have given it to indigents and to Levites (see 14:28–29), they are to make a formal declaration before God that they have divested themselves of all the portions of the crop that must be donated and have not violated their sanctity by handling or using them improperly. Then they are to pray for God’s continued blessing of the land and the people of Israel.

13. before the LORD your God The worshippers address God from their hometowns, either at their home, at wherever they deposit the tithe, or at some local place of prayer.

cleared out Not held back the slightest amount.

the consecrated portion The poor tithe. Even though it is not brought to a sanctuary, it is to be treated as holy until it is handed over for distribution to the poor. Giving it to the poor is no less a sacred purpose than bringing it to the sanctuary.

You commanded me The first-person formulation expresses the idea that God commanded the farmer personally, not only his or her ancestors. This wording is part of the liturgy’s attempt to enhance the farmers’ feeling of personal involvement in the history of their people.

commandments That is, about the tithe in 14:28–29. It is not a blanket claim of virtue, but a statement about the obligation that has just been discharged.

14. The requirement to declare full compliance with the tithe obligation is also found in the ancient Hittite “Instructions for Temple Officials.” There the herdsmen responsible for deliv-

perience the satisfaction of sharing our bounty with others.

12. The first tithe goes to the Levites, to maintain Israel’s spiritual core. The second tithe is consumed in Jerusalem, to teach us to celebrate our good fortune in God’s presence and in the presence of our fellow Israelites.

Once in three years, the second tithe is given to the poor, to perfect Israelite society by minimizing poverty (Hirsch).

13. I have . . . [not] neglected any of your commandments I have not performed any of these *mitzvot* mindlessly, perfunctorily, without feeling (*S’fat Emet*).

impure, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done just as You commanded me. ¹⁵Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.”

¹⁶The LORD your God commands you this day to observe these laws and rules; observe them faithfully with all your heart and soul. ¹⁷You have affirmed this day that the LORD is your God, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments

וְלֹא־נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ לְמַת שְׁמַעְתִּי בְקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי עֲשִׂיתִי כְכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתַנִּי: ¹⁵הַשְׁקִיפָה מִמַּעוֹן קְדֹשְׁךָ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבִרְךָ אֶת־עַמְּךָ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵת הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה לָּנוּ כִּי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ: ס

¹⁶הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְצִוְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלִישִׁי אֶת־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וְשִׁמְרַתָּ וְעָשִׂיתָ אוֹתָם בְּכֹל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל־נַפְשְׁךָ: ¹⁷אֶת־יְהוָה הָאֱמֶרְתָּ הַיּוֹם לְהִיּוֹת לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים וּלְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכָּיו וּלְשַׁמֵּר חֻקָּיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וּלְשַׁמֵּעַ בְּקוֹלוֹ:

ering cattle offerings to the temple must declare on oath, when they bring the cattle, that they have not misappropriated any of the cattle that were due.

mourning Mourners, who become impure from being in the same tent as a dead body, from handling it during burial, or from contact with others who have become impure in one of these ways, would defile any food they touched.

impure The tithe would be defiled if handled by someone who is in a state of impurity.

deposited any of it with the dead To feed their spirits. The ancients believed that the living can assist the spirits of the dead by providing them

with food and drink. This widespread belief was also found among Jews in Second Temple times and later. The Torah does not forbid the practice, but because contact with the dead is ritually defiling, it prohibits the use of the tithe for it.

just as You commanded me Regarding the tithe.

15. Your holy abode, from heaven In some biblical passages, God’s “abode” is the Temple. Here, “heaven” emphasizes the Deuteronomic idea that His abode is heaven, not the Temple.

bless With bountiful crops and prosperity.

Your people Israel Farmers are not to ask for their own prosperity but for that of the entire nation.

Moses’ Second Discourse, Part 4:

Conclusion to the Covenant Made in Moab (26:16–28:69)

MUTUAL COMMITMENTS (26:16–19)

The laws in all their detail are now concluded. This passage sums up Israel’s duty to obey them wholeheartedly and underscores the fact that, beyond being mere items of a legal code, they are the very basis of the relationship that God and the people Israel have established. It not only is an emotional or spiritual association but also entails mutual obligations with consequences.

16. commands you this day Moses, speaking at God’s command, has referred to “this day” throughout his address (e.g., 4:8, 15:5, 19:9). According to 1:3, the address was delivered on the first day of the 11th month (later known as *Sh’vat*) in the 40th year after the Exodus.

these laws and rules That Moses has just finished presenting (12:1–26:15).

17. you have affirmed The most probable interpretation of the unique form of this Hebrew verb (rendering its *hiph-il* form not as causative but intensive). God and Israel have each proclaimed acceptance of the other as parties to the covenant and have proclaimed specific commitments to each other. The principles agreed to are strongly reminiscent of the earlier covenant at Horeb (Mount Sinai), which this reaffirms.

that the LORD is your God The counterpart to this phrase in verse 18 is “that you are . . . His people.” This pair of phrases is the classic expression of the covenant relationship (see 29:12).

you will walk in His ways This clause and the remainder of the verse are virtually a definition of what it means to accept the Lord as God. In short, it requires action as well as intellectual assent.

and rules, and that you will obey Him. ¹⁸And the LORD has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised you, His treasured people who shall observe all His commandments, ¹⁹and that He will set you, in fame and renown and glory, high above all the nations that He has made; and that you shall be, as He promised, a holy people to the LORD your God.

27 Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying: Observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. ²As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster ³and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching. When you cross over to enter the land that the

18. as He promised you When He first proposed to enter into a covenant with you (Exod. 19:5).

19. This verse defines what it means to be God's treasured people.

high above all the nations That is, He will make Israel more famous, praised, and glorified

וַיְהִי־הָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְעַם סִגְלָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לָּךְ וּלְשִׁמְרָתָהּ כִּי-לֹא-תִשְׁכַּח מִצְוֹתָיו: ¹⁹ וְלִתְתִּיבָתְךָ עָלֶיךָ עַל כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְתַהֲלָה וּלְשִׁמָּה וּלְתִפְאֳרָתָהּ וּלְהִיבָתְךָ עִם-קִדְשׁ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר: **ס**

כז וַיִּצְוּ מֹשֶׁה וְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הָעָם לֵאמֹר שִׁמְרוּ אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם: ² וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבְרוּ אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וְהִקְמַתָּ לָּךְ אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת וְשָׂדַתְךָ אֹתָם בַּשִּׂיד: ³ וְכָתַבְתָּ עֲלֵיהֶן אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת בְּעִבְרָךְ

than any other nation, as a result of the abundant prosperity and victory over enemies that Israel will enjoy.

holy people Sacrosanct, inviolable; a nation that others harm at their peril (see Exod. 19:6). For another implication of the notion of Israel's sanctity, see 7:6 and 14:2,21.

CEREMONIES TO MARK ISRAEL'S ARRIVAL IN THE LAND (27:1–26)

The covenant relationship with God is so vital for Israel's existence in the Promised Land that it must be reaffirmed formally as soon as the Israelites arrive there.

MONUMENTS AND AN ALTAR (vv. 1–8)

1. Moses and the elders Only here is Moses joined by the elders in instructing the people. Similarly in verses 9–10, Moses is joined by the priests in charging the people to obey the commandments. Because these two groups would be the leaders of the people in their daily civil and religious affairs after Moses' death, they are in the best position to ensure continued adherence to his teachings.

Instruction Hebrew: *ha-mitzvah*; the instructions given in Deuteronomy, the Teaching (v. 3), not a specific law.

2. As soon as you have crossed Literally, "on the day when you cross." This is loosely understood to mean "once you have crossed," not nec-

essarily on the same day. According to verse 4, these instructions are to be carried out on Mount Ebal; that site—some 30 miles (50 km) and more than 4000 feet (1200 m) uphill from where the Israelites would cross the Jordan—could not be reached on the same day that the Jordan is crossed.

Coat them with plaster If the text was engraved through the plaster into the stone, the white plaster would highlight the dark color of the letters. It is also possible that the plaster served as a clean surface for writing in ink or paint. Writing over plaster was common in Egypt where even outdoor inscriptions would last a long time because rain is infrequent there.

3. This ceremony dramatizes Israel's obligation to live by God's Teaching. Its performance shortly after entering the land is a prerequisite for further penetration into the land. The text says that all the words of the Teaching (chapters 12–26, and perhaps chapters 1–11 and 28) are to be inscribed, placing no limit on the size or

LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you—⁴upon crossing the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I charge you this day, on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster. ⁵There, too, you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. Do not wield an iron tool over them; ⁶you must build the altar of the LORD your God of unhewn stones. You shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God, ⁷and you shall sacrifice there offerings of well-being and eat them, rejoicing before the LORD your God. ⁸And on those stones you shall inscribe every word of this Teaching most distinctly.

⁹Moses and the levitical priests spoke to all

לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר תָּבֹא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ | נָתַן לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי-אַבְרָהָם לְךָ:
וְהָיָה בְּעֵבְרְכֶם אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן תִּלְקִימוּ אֶת-
הָאֲבָנִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם
הַיּוֹם בְּהָר עֵיבָל וְשָׂדֶת אוֹתָם בְּשִׂיד:
⁵ וּבְנִיתָ שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִזְבֵּחַ
אֲבָנִים לֹא-תִנֶּיף עֲלֵיהֶם בְּרוֹזל: ⁶ אֲבָנִים
שְׁלֵמוֹת תִּבְנֶה אֶת-מִזְבֵּחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
וְהַעֲלִיתָ עָלָיו עֹלֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
⁷ וְזָבַחְתָּ שְׁלָמִים וְאֲכַלְתָּ שָׁם וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ⁸ וְכָתַבְתָּ עַל-
הָאֲבָנִים אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת
בְּאֵר הַיִּטֵּב: ט

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה וְהַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם אֶל כָּל-

number of steles (stone slabs) to be used. Two steles, each the size of the stele on which the laws of Hammurabi were written, easily could contain more than Deuteronomy.

4. Mount Ebal Just north of Shechem, it is the highest mountain in the vicinity. It rises 3083 feet (940 m) above sea level, 1200 feet (360 m) above the valley in which it stands, and commands a view of most of the Promised Land. Shechem was the site of Abraham's first stop in Canaan and the first place in Canaan where God spoke to him and identified the land as the one He would give to Abraham's descendants.

5. An altar is to be built, sacrifices are to be offered, and the people are to celebrate the erecting of the steles inscribed with the Teaching. These sacrifices are part of a one-time ceremony. Thus there is no conflict with Deuteronomy's restriction of sacrificial worship to Jerusalem, because that was to take effect only later (see 12:8–12).

stones In their natural state, uncut, following the command of Exod. 20:22. An Israelite altar of uncut stones has been found in excavations at Arad in the Negeb. Similar altars from earlier

times have been discovered at Canaanite sites as well.

iron tool Hebrew: *barzel*; literally, "iron." Here it refers to a chisel.

6–7. The two types of offerings mentioned in these verses are the same as those brought at the conclusion of the covenant at Mount Sinai (see Exod. 24:5)

offerings of well-being These offerings (*sh'lamim*) are in the category of sacrifices in which most of the flesh was eaten by the worshiper. Hence they were appropriate for a festive occasion.

8. those stones Mentioned in verses 2–4, not those of the altar. This verse repeats the requirement that the stones be inscribed with the Teaching. By making the point both before and after the provision about the altar, the text makes clear that the terms of the Teaching, not the sacrifice, constitute the heart of the ceremony.

AN APPEAL FOR OBEDIENCE (vv. 9–10)

The Israelites are now concluding the Moab covenant (see 28:69) that will be reaffirmed later in ceremonies at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. By pre-

CHAPTER 27

6. build the altar . . . of unhewn stones
Eloquent, polished prayer is like hewn, pol-

ished stone. Here the "unhewn" (literally, "whole") stones represent the inarticulate yearning of a sincere heart—which God prefers (Buber).

Israel, saying: Silence! Hear, O Israel! Today you have become the people of the LORD your God: ¹⁰Heed the LORD your God and observe His commandments and His laws, which I enjoin upon you this day.

¹¹Thereupon Moses charged the people, saying: ¹²After you have crossed the Jordan, the following shall stand on Mount Gerizim when the blessing for the people is spoken: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. ¹³And for the curse, the following shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. ¹⁴The Levites shall then proclaim in a loud voice to all the people of Israel:

¹⁵Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image, abhorred by the LORD, a

scribing these ceremonies here, in the midst of the conclusion of the covenant in Moab, Moses makes it clear that the later ceremonies are a reaffirmation of the Moab covenant (itself a reaffirmation of the Horeb covenant), not a new one.

9. Silence! Hear This is the first time that the appeal to hear is preceded by a call for silence. Absolute concentration is required at the awesome moment of solemn promises and warnings they are about to hear, when Israel becomes the people of God covenanted to Him.

Today you have become the people of the LORD Other passages in the Torah suggest that this took place earlier, at the time of the Exodus or at Mount Sinai (e.g., Exod. 6:6–7, 19:5–6; Deut. 4:20,34). There were varying views as to when the Israelites actually became God's people.

PROCLAIMING BLESSINGS AND CURSES (vv. 11–13)

When the 12 tribes of Israel arrive in the Promised Land, they are to proclaim the blessings and the curses—the divinely imposed consequences of either obeying or disobeying the terms of the Covenant—at Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. Such blessings and curses are integral elements of ancient Near Eastern covenants. The best known biblical examples are found in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

12–13. on Mount Gerizim . . . on Mount Ebal North and south of Shechem. The precise location where the tribes were to stand is not given, but their pronouncements would be most audible if they stood on the slopes of the moun-

יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הַסִּבֶּת | וּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נְהִייתָ לְעַם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
¹⁰ וּשְׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ
אֶת־מִצְוֹתוֹ מִצְוֹתָיו וְאֶת־חֻקָּיו אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם: ס

חמישי ¹¹ וַיִּצְוֶה מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

לֵאמֹר: ¹² אַל־הָיִיתֶם לְבָרֶךְ אֶת־הָעָם
עַל־הַר גְּרִזִים בְּעִבְרַתְכֶם אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן
שְׁמַעוֹן וְלֵוִי וַיהוּדָה וַיִּשְׁשָׁכָר וַיֹּסֵף
וּבְנֵימִן: ¹³ וְאֵלֶּה יַעֲמְדוּ עַל־הַקְּלָלָה בְּהַר
עֵיבָל רְאוּבֵן גָּד וְאַשֶׁר וְזְבוּלֹן דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי:
¹⁴ וְעַנּוּ הַלְוִיִּם וְאָמְרוּ אֶל־כָּל־אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
קוֹל רָם: ס

¹⁵ אָרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וּמִסֻּכָּה

tains rather than on their peaks (which are 2.2 miles [3.5 km] apart). The text indeed says that the blessings and the curses shall be recited “on,” not “atop,” the mountains.

the blessing for the people is spoken Literally, “to bless the people.”

And for the curse Literally, “And these shall stand for the curse.” A circumlocution to avoid saying that the tribes would actually curse the people.

CURSES FOR SECRET SINS (vv. 14–26)

Verses 14–26 refer to a different ceremony from that prescribed in verses 11–13, although it may have been intended to be performed on the same occasion. This ceremony consists only of curses. The 11 specific sins mentioned here (the 12th sin is all-inclusive) often escape detection because, as Ibn Ezra and Rashbam note, commonly they are committed in secret or it is difficult for their victims to publicize them. The intent of this ceremony is to discourage such offenses by providing for their punishment by God. A curse is pronounced on those who commit them, and the people express their assent by responding “Amen,” which also constitutes an oath to avoid these acts.

14. Levites They act here in their priestly role. Although blessings and curses by any individual could be effective, those uttered by priests and prophets were thought to possess particular potency.

15. Cursed Those who commit these sins are destined for divinely imposed misfortune, such as

craftsman's handiwork, and sets it up in secret.—And all the people shall respond, Amen.

¹⁶Cursed be he who insults his father or mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

¹⁷Cursed be he who moves his fellow countryman's landmark.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

¹⁸Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

¹⁹Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

²⁰Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, for he has removed his father's garment.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

²¹Cursed be he who lies with any beast.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

תועבת יהוה מעשה ידי חרש ושם
בסתתר וענו כל־העם ואמרו אמן: ס
אָרוֹר מִקְלָה אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעַם
אָמֵן: ס
אָרוֹר מְסִיג גְּבוּל רֵעֵהוּ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעַם
אָמֵן: ס
אָרוֹר מְשַׁגֵּה עֵינָיו בְּדַרְךְוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעַם
אָמֵן: ס
אָרוֹר מַטֵּה מִשְׁפַּט גְּרֵי־יְתוּם וְאֶלְמָנָה
וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעַם אָמֵן: ס
אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־אִשְׁתֹּ אָבִיו כִּי גִלָּה כְּנָף
אָבִיו וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעַם אָמֵן: ס
אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־כָּל־בְּהֵמָה וְאָמַר כָּל־
הָעַם אָמֵן: ס

childlessness, the death of children, slavery, and the calamities listed in Deut. 28.

image Any kind of idol, whether of the Lord or any other deity.

craftsman's handiwork The fact that idols are made by mortals is the Torah's most telling argument against their divinity.

in secret To avoid detection. The Torah, which seems to expect that open idolatry would be stigmatized and punished by the sinner's contemporaries, here seeks to deter idolatry practiced in secret. The archaeological evidence indicates that idols were indeed rare in ancient Israel. Very few have been found in Israelite sites compared to those of neighboring peoples.

Amen The ancient Greek translation of this word is, "Let it be so." The term, derived from the root meaning "firm" (אמן), expresses assent to what someone has just said. As the Talmud puts it, "Answering 'Amen' after an oath is equivalent to pronouncing the oath with one's own mouth" (BT Shevu. 29b).

16. insults Treats them disrespectfully. The crime is not limited to verbal insults and would include the actions of a rebellious son (Deut. 21:18–21).

17. This curse is based on the prohibition against moving landmarks (19:14). Because this crime is committed in secret, and fear of detection is not as effective a deterrent as in the case of other crimes, ancient literature is replete

with curses and warnings of divine punishment against those who commit it. Babylonian boundary stones were inscribed with curses directed against those who would move them or alter their inscriptions. The crime was a direct affront to God because property was assigned by lot, which was believed to be directed by God and expressive of His will.

18. The same principle is expressed in Lev. 19:14. Similarly, Egyptian wisdom literature teaches: "Do not laugh at a blind man or tease a dwarf, nor injure the affairs of the lame."

19. the stranger, the fatherless and the widow Because they do not have power to prosecute or defend their rights, the Torah often points out that God is their protector, as in 10:18.

20. Unlike 23:1, which refers only to his father's former wife, this could refer to his current wife and even to the sinner's own mother. Only sexual relations are mentioned here. Marriage to a father's former wife, which is prohibited in 23:1, is inherently a public act and hence irrelevant in this context. The laws of Hammurabi likewise oppose a man's having intercourse with his stepmother after his father's death. In the Hittite laws, it is a crime only if the father is still alive.

21. Bestiality is not uncommon, especially in rural areas. The Hittite laws prohibit it only with certain animals but not others. Ancient Near Eastern myths sometimes describe sexual intercourse between gods and animals.

²²Cursed be he who lies with his sister, whether daughter of his father or of his mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

²³Cursed be he who lies with his mother-in-law.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

²⁴Cursed be he who strikes down his fellow countryman in secret.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

²⁵Cursed be he who accepts a bribe in the case of the murder of an innocent person.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

²⁶Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Teaching and observe them.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־אָחֹתוֹ בִּתְּאֵבִיו אֹ

בֵּת־אִמּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן: ס

אָרוֹר שֹׁכֵב עִם־חֵתְנָתוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם

אָמֵן: ס

אָרוֹר מַכֵּה רֵעֵהוּ בַסֶּתֶר וְאָמַר כָּל־

הָעָם אָמֵן: ס

אָרוֹר לִקַּח לִקְחֵי שֹׁחַד לְהַכּוֹת נַפְשׁ דָּם נָקִי

וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן: ס

אָרוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יְקִים אֶת־דְּבָרֵי

הַתּוֹרָה־הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם וְאָמַר כָּל־

הָעָם אָמֵן: פ

28 Now, if you obey the LORD your God, to observe faithfully all His commandments

כַּח וְהָיָה אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל־
יְהוָה יִלְהִיף לְשִׁמּוֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־

22. whether daughter of his father or of his mother This explanatory phrase makes it clear that one may not have sexual relations with, and hence may not marry, even a half-sister. Marriage with a half-sister from a different mother was permitted at one time. Thus Abraham told Abimelech that Sarah was his half-sister, and David's daughter Tamar told his son (her half-brother) Amnon that David would permit them to marry (see Gen. 20:12; 2 Sam. 13:13). The practice was also known in Greece and Arabia. There were brother-sister marriages in Egypt and in Phoeni-

cia, found mostly among the royalty.

24. strikes down Hebrew: *makkeh*, which can refer either to lethal or to nonlethal blows.

25. Refers to a judge who accepts a bribe to condemn an innocent defendant to death.

26. The final curse refers to all other provisions of the Teaching and constitutes an oath to uphold the entire Teaching. If this ceremony was to be performed at Mount Ebal, at the same time as the other ceremonies in this chapter, "this Teaching" may refer to the copy of the Teaching inscribed on the stones that stood nearby.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE (28:1–68)

This chapter details the consequences of Israel's obeying or disobeying the terms of the covenant that Moses reviewed in chapters 5–26. Promises and threats such as these are well known in the Bible and elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature. See Comment to 27:11–13.

In this chapter, "blessing" and "curse" do not refer to promises and threats but to the benign and the destructive forces that blessings and curses

call for. They are almost personified by the verbs used to depict them; they "come," "pursue," and "overtake" (vv. 2, 15, 22, 45), and God "lets [them] loose" (vv. 20, 48, cf. 32:24). True personification of these forces, however, is absent in Deuteronomy, which avoids any suggestion of independent supernatural powers other than God. Instead, the blessings and the curses are treated as impersonal forces under God's absolute control.

26. The Talmud derives a positive principle from this verse, inferring that one who does uphold the Teaching (i.e., Torah) will be blessed. This applies even to those in-

dividuals who never studied and never taught but give financial support to those who study Torah (JT Sot. 7:4; Barukh Halevi Epstein).

which I enjoin upon you this day, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ²All these blessings shall come upon you and take effect, if you will but heed the word of the LORD your God:

³Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country.

⁴Blessed shall be the issue of your womb, the produce of your soil, and the offspring of your cattle, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock.

⁵Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

⁶Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings.

⁷The LORD will put to rout before you the enemies who attack you; they will march out against you by a single road, but flee from you by many roads. ⁸The LORD will ordain blessings

מְצוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם וּנְתַתֶּנָּה
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֲלֶיךָ עַל כָּל-גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ:
וּבָאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל-הַבְּרָכּוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהַשִּׁיגָה
כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

³ בְּרֹוֹף אֶתְּהָ בְּעִיר וּבְרֹוֹף אֶתְּהָ בְּשָׂדֶה:

⁴ בְּרֹוֹף פְּרִי-בִטְנְךָ וּפְרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ וּפְרִי

בְּהֶמְתְּךָ שֹׁגֵר אֶלְפֶיךָ וְעִשְׂתָּרוֹת צֹאנְךָ:

⁵ בְּרֹוֹף טְנָאֶךָ וּמִשְׁאֲרֶתְךָ:

⁶ בְּרֹוֹף אֶתְּהָ בְּבֵאֵךָ וּבְרֹוֹף אֶתְּהָ בְּצִאתְךָ:

⁷ יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת-אִיבֶיךָ הַקָּמִים עֲלֶיךָ

נִגְפִים לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ אַחַד יֵצְאוּ אֵלֶיךָ

וּבְשִׁבְעָה דְרָכִים יָנוּסוּ לְפָנֶיךָ: ⁸ יֵצֹו יְהוָה

THE BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE (vv. 1–14)

1. Moses reviews the conditions and the promises of 26:16–19 regarding the covenant now being made in Moab and then spells out the consequences that will ensue if the Israelites are loyal or disloyal to it.

2. The promise of 26:19 is conditional. The Israelites are not promised automatic special treatment. They must earn it. To make this clear, the condition is repeated here.

3. Blessed Prosperous.

city . . . country These opposites express a totality, meaning that wherever you live and work, your undertakings will prosper.

5. basket . . . kneading bowl These containers were used for gathering produce and preparing bread. The blessing means that the harvest will be abundant and that food will be plentiful.

6. comings . . . goings Literally, “entering and going out.” Abravanel takes blessedness in these activities to mean safety in traveling to and from the city, a common theme in descriptions of blessing and prosperity.

7. by a single road They will be too numerous and confident to bother separating their forces for safety.

by many roads Literally, “by seven roads.” The enemy will scatter in every direction. Seven is often used to express a complete number.

CHAPTER 28

2. take effect Literally, “overtake you.” Sometimes God intends to bless us, but we are so busy running after success that the blessings cannot catch up to us. Instead of chasing after fulfillment, perhaps we need to slow down and let the good things of life catch up to us (*Ha-amek Davar*).

3. In the city, God will reward you for your service to the community. In the country, God will reward you for sharing the harvest of your

fields with the poor and the needy (Deut. R. 7:5).

Blessed shall you be in the city May your home be in a good neighborhood, close to the synagogue, surrounded by good neighbors (BT BM 107a).

6. Here “comings” and “goings” may refer to business dealings, for the previous blessings refer to material well-being (Deut. R. 7:5). Prosperity brings its own dangers; this blessing asks that God guard us from the temptations that wealth occasions (*Ha-amek Davar*).

for you upon your barns and upon all your undertakings: He will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ⁹The LORD will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. ¹⁰And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the LORD's name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you. ¹¹The LORD will give you abounding prosperity in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to assign to you. ¹²The LORD will open for you His bounteous store, the heavens, to provide rain for your land in season and to bless all your undertakings. You will be creditor to many nations, but debtor to none.

¹³The LORD will make you the head, not the tail; you will always be at the top and never at the bottom—if only you obey and faithfully observe the commandments of the LORD your God that I enjoin upon you this day, ¹⁴and do not deviate to the right or to the left from any of the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day and turn to the worship of other gods.

¹⁵But if you do not obey the LORD your God

אתָּךְ אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה בְּאַסְמִיךָ וּבְכָל מְשָׁלַח יְדֶךָ וּבְרִבְכָךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: ⁹ וַיְקִימְךָ יְהוָה לֹוּ לְעַם קָדוֹשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע־לָךְ כִּי תִשְׁמֹר אֶת־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו: ¹⁰ וְרָאוּ כָּל־עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ וַיִּרְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ: ¹¹ וְהוֹתֵרְךָ יְהוָה לְטוֹבָה בְּפִרְי בִטְנְךָ וּבְפִרְי בְּהֵמָתְךָ וּבְפִרְי אֲדָמָתְךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאֲבֹתֶיךָ לֵאמֹר לָךְ: ¹² יִפְתַּח יְהוָה לְךָ אֶת־אוֹצְרוֹ הַטּוֹב אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם לְתֵת מְטֵר־אֲרָצְךָ בְּעֵתוֹ וּלְבָרְכֶךָ אֶת כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֶךָ וְהִלֹּוֹיתָ גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְאֵתָּה לֹא תִלְוֶה:

¹³ וְנִתְּנָךְ יְהוָה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב וְהִיִּיתָ רֶק לְמַעַלָּה וְלֹא תִהְיֶה לְמַטָּה כִּי־תִשְׁמַע אֶל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם לְשִׁמּוֹר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת: ¹⁴ וְלֹא תִסּוֹר מִכָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל* לְלַכַּת אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרִים לְעַבְדָּם: ט

¹⁵ וְהִיָּה אִם־לֹא תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה

v. 14. מלא ר

8. barns Namely, stores, granaries such as silos, underground storage pits, and storehouses.

9. the LORD . . . the LORD your God These two ways of referring to God are used throughout the chapter. When acts of divine reward and punishment are described, God is called simply “the LORD.” The full phrase, “the LORD your/our God,” is reserved for passages that refer to the Israelites’ duty of obeying God or refer to His gift of the Land. It has the connotation of “the LORD, who has kept His promises to you and whom you are obligated to obey.”

if you keep The conditional nature of Israel’s sanctity is repeated.

10. the LORD’s name Israel is known as “the

people of the LORD” (*am YHVH*). The connection between God’s name and protection is expressed in prayers that appeal to God for security on the grounds that the supplicant is called by His name.

11. abounding That is, surpassing. Because of the surplus, Israel will be able to lend to other nations and it never will need to borrow (v. 12).

12. store The ancients pictured rain, snow, hail, wind, and other natural phenomena as kept in celestial storehouses that God opens as needed.

creditor to many nations Because of your surplus wealth.

14. The promises end with a final reminder that they depend on a key condition: that the Israelites shun all other gods.

10. peoples . . . shall stand in fear of you Not that they will be afraid of you, but that they will learn from you how to fear (i.e., revere) God (Vilna Gaon).

to observe faithfully all His commandments and laws which I enjoin upon you this day, all these curses shall come upon you and take effect:

¹⁶Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the country.

¹⁷Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

¹⁸Cursed shall be the issue of your womb and the produce of your soil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock.

¹⁹Cursed shall you be in your comings and cursed shall you be in your goings.

²⁰The LORD will let loose against you calamity, panic, and frustration in all the enterprises you undertake, so that you shall soon be utterly wiped out because of your evildoing in forsaking Me. ²¹The LORD will make pestilence cling to you, until He has put an end to you in the land that you are entering to possess. ²²The LORD will strike you with consumption, fever, and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew; they shall hound you until you perish. ²³The skies above your head shall be copper and the earth under you iron. ²⁴The LORD will make the rain of your land dust, and sand shall drop on you from the sky, until you are wiped out.

²⁵The LORD will put you to rout before your enemies; you shall march out against them by

אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־פְּלִמְצוֹתַי וְחֻקֹּתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מִצְוֶה הַיּוֹם וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל־הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהִשְׁיִגּוּךָ:

אָרוּר אַתָּה בְּעִיר וְאָרוּר אַתָּה בַּשָּׂדֶה: ¹⁶
אָרוּר טְנֵאָה וּמִשְׁאֲרֵתָה: ¹⁷

אָרוּר פְּרִי־בִטְנֶךָ וּפְרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ שָׁגַר אֲלֵפִיךָ וְעִשְׂתָּרוֹת צֹאנֶךָ: ¹⁸

אָרוּר אַתָּה בְּבֹאֶךָ וְאָרוּר אַתָּה בְּצֵאתְךָ: ¹⁹

יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת־הַמָּאֲרָה אֶת־הַמְּהוּמָה וְאֶת־הַמְּגֵעֶרֶת בְּכָל־מִשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה עַד הַשְּׂמֹדָה וְעַד־אֲבֹדְךָ מִהָרַם מִפְּנֵי רֵעַ מֵעַלְלֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר עֲזַבְתָּנִי: ²⁰

יִדְבֹק יְהוָה בְּךָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר עַד כְּלִתּוֹ אֶתְךָ מֵעַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה בֹּא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ²¹

וּבִקְדֻחַת וּבִדְלֻקַּת וּבִחְרָחֵל וּבִחְרָב וּבִשְׂדֵפוֹן וּבִיִּרְקוֹן וּרְדִפוֹךָ עַד אֲבֹדְךָ: ²²

וְהָיוּ שְׂמִיךְ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשְׁךָ נִחַשְׁתָּ וְהָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־תַּחְתֶּיךָ בְּרוֹזֶל: ²³

אֶת־מִטֵּר אֶרְצְךָ אֲבֹק וְעָפָר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם יֵרֵד עָלֶיךָ עַד הַשְּׂמֹדָה: ²⁴

יִתְנֶנְךָ יְהוָה אֶת־לִפְנֵי אִיְבֹיֶךָ בְּדַרְךָ: ²⁵

יִתְנֶנְךָ יְהוָה אֶת־לִפְנֵי אִיְבֹיֶךָ בְּדַרְךָ: ²⁵

THE CURSES FOR DISOBEDIENCE

(vv. 15–68)

The remainder of the chapter, like the threats in Lev. 26, is known as the *Tokbehab*, or “Warning” (literally, “rebuke”) in postbiblical sources. As in the Leviticus passage, the threats are more numerous than the promises.

FIRST GROUP (vv. 15–44)

20. calamity Hebrew: *m'erab*; literally, “curse.” The antonym of “blessing” in verse 8. It probably refers to drought and plant-destroying pests (as in Mal. 3:9–11).

panic Refers to the tumult and confusion caused by war, social disorder, and pestilence.

frustration Hebrew: *mig-eret*; literally, “ob-

struction, encumbrance.” Here it may refer to the drought (vv. 23–24) and crop failure (vv. 38–42) resulting from God’s rejection of their prayers.

forsaking Me Here Moses speaks in God’s name, as sometimes happens in Deuteronomy (see v. 68).

21. pestilence A virulent epidemic.

22. The exact nature of the seven afflictions listed in this verse is uncertain. The terms refer to symptoms that could stem from various causes.

23. The sky will be too hard to yield rain and the soil too hard to plow.

24. In the absence of rain, the land will be exposed to duststorms and sandstorms stirred up from the waterless soil.

a single road, but flee from them by many roads; and you shall become a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶Your carcasses shall become food for all the birds of the sky and all the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off.

²⁷The LORD will strike you with the Egyptian inflammation, with hemorrhoids, boil-scars, and itch, from which you shall never recover.

²⁸The LORD will strike you with madness, blindness, and dismay. ²⁹You shall grope at noon as a blind man gropes in the dark; you shall not prosper in your ventures, but shall be constantly abused and robbed, with none to give help.

³⁰If you pay the bride-price for a wife, another man shall enjoy her. If you build a house, you shall not live in it. If you plant a vineyard, you shall not harvest it. ³¹Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your ass shall be seized in front of you, and it shall not be returned to you; your flock shall be delivered to your enemies, with none to help

25. horror Instead of respectful fear (v. 10), you will inspire horror in those who witness your ruinous defeat.

26. In the ancient world, lack of burial was regarded as a fate worse than death. It was believed that the spirits of the unburied would never find admittance to a resting place in the netherworld.

27. Egyptian inflammation The 6th of the Ten Plagues in Egypt, perhaps skin anthrax (see Exod. 9:8–12).

28. madness Ranting and carrying on wildly. **blindness** Because the other two afflictions in this verse are psychological, this may be a metaphor for stupefaction or disorientation. In some ancient Near Eastern texts, fear in the face of battle is described as blurring of eyesight.

29. in the dark Ibn Janah takes the phrase to mean, “you will grope at noon [as if] in darkness, like a blind man.”

29. as a blind man gropes in the dark Isn't a blind man equally disadvantaged both in daylight and in darkness? In daylight, he can hope

אֶחָד תִּצָּא אֵלָיו וּבִשְׂבַע דְּרָכִים תָּנוּס לְפָנָיו וְהָיִיתָ לְזַעֲזָה לְכָל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ: ²⁶וְהָיְתָה נְבִלְתְּךָ לְמֵאֲכָל לְכָל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְבְּהֵמַת הָאָרֶץ וְאִין מִחְרִיד:

²⁷יִכְכֶּה יְהוָה בְּשַׁחִין מִצְרִיִּם וּבַעֲפָלִים וּבִשְׂחָרִים וּבִגְרָב וּבַחֲרָס אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תוּכַל לְהִרְפֹּא:

²⁸יִכְכֶּה יְהוָה בְּשִׁגְעוֹן וּבַעֲוֹרוֹן וּבַתְּמָהוֹן לִבָּב: ²⁹וְהָיִיתָ מִמְשֵׁשׁ בַּצְּהָרִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יִמְשֵׁשׁ הָעוֹר בְּאִפְלָה וְלֹא תִצְלִיחַ אֶת-דְּרָכֶיךָ וְהָיִיתָ אַךְ עָשׂוּק וְגִזּוּל כָּל-הַיָּמִים וְאִין מוֹשִׁיעַ:

³⁰אִשָּׁה תִאָּרֵשׁ וְאִישׁ אַחֵר יִשְׁגַּלְנָה יִשְׁכַּבְנָה בֵּית תִּבְנֶה וְלֹא-תִשָּׁב בּוֹ כִּרְם תִּטַּע וְלֹא תִחַלְלֶנּוּ: ³¹שׁוֹרְךָ טָבוּחַ לְעֵינֶיךָ וְלֹא תֹאכְלֶנּוּ מִמֶּנּוּ חֲמֹרְךָ גִזּוּל מִלִּפְנֵיךָ וְלֹא יָשׁוּב לָךְ צֹאנְךָ נִתְּנֹת לְאִיֲבִיךָ וְאִין

abused and robbed “Abused” refers to maltreatment and being cheated out of one’s property; “robbed,” to robbery and extortion. In the light of verses 30–33, they must refer to oppression by conquerors.

none to give help Refers to kings, officials, or others who could save the oppressed and to military leaders who could give the nation relief from foreign assailants.

30. The most important personal achievements, those that constitute grounds for draft deferment (see 20:5–7), will be worthless.

will enjoy her The unvocalized letters of the text (ישגלנה) mean “will rape her.” Because that verb (שגל) was considered too vulgar for public reading in the synagogue, another verb is read in its place, literally meaning “will lie with her” (*yishkavennah*).

31. The extortion of another’s ox or ass is a proverbial example of oppression.

that others will see him and help him. In the dark, however, there will be “none to give help” (BT Meg. 24b).

you. ³²Your sons and daughters shall be delivered to another people, while you look on; and your eyes shall strain for them constantly, but you shall be helpless. ³³A people you do not know shall eat up the produce of your soil and all your gains; you shall be abused and down-trodden continually, ³⁴until you are driven mad by what your eyes behold. ³⁵The LORD will afflict you at the knees and thighs with a severe inflammation, from which you shall never recover—from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

³⁶The LORD will drive you, and the king you have set over you, to a nation unknown to you or your fathers, where you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone. ³⁷You shall be a consternation, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples to which the LORD will drive you.

³⁸Though you take much seed out to the field, you shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. ³⁹Though you plant vineyards and till them, you shall have no wine to drink or store, for the worm shall devour them. ⁴⁰Though you have olive trees throughout your territory, you shall have no oil for anointment, for your olives shall drop off. ⁴¹Though you beget sons and

לְךָ מוֹשִׁיעַ: ³² בְּנֵיךָ וּבָנֹתֶיךָ נִתְּנִים לְעַם אַחֵר וְעֵינֶיךָ רְאוֹת וְכָלוֹת אֲלֵיהֶם כָּל-הַיּוֹם וְאֵין לְאֵל יָדָךְ: ³³ פְּרִי אֲדָמְתְךָ וְכָל-יִגְיַעֲךָ יֹאכַל עִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ וְהָיִיתָ רַק עֲשׂוּק וְרָצוּץ כָּל-הַיָּמִים: ³⁴ וְהָיִיתָ מְשֻׁגָע מִמַּרְאֵה עֵינֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה: ³⁵ יִכְבֶּה יְהוָה בְּשִׁחִין רָע עַל-הַבְּרָפִים וְעַל-הַשְּׁקִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תוּכַל לְהִרְפֹּא מִכָּף רַגְלְךָ וְעַד קֶדְקֶדְךָ:

³⁶ יוֹלֶךְ יְהוָה אֶתְךָ וְאֶת-מְלִכְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּקֶּים עָלֶיךָ אֶל-גּוֹי אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ אֶתְהָ וְאֲבֹתֶיךָ וְעַבַדְתָּ שָׁם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עֵץ וְאֶבֶן: ³⁷ וְהָיִיתָ לְשִׁמָּה לְמַשַׁל וְלִשְׁנִינָה בְּכָל-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר-יִנְהַגְךָ יְהוָה שָׁמָּה:

³⁸ זֶרַע רַב תּוֹצִיא הַשָּׂדֶה וּמַעֲט תֶּאֱסֹף כִּי יִחְסְלוּ הָאֲרָבָה: ³⁹ בְּרָמִים תִּטַּע וְעַבַדְתָּ וַיִּזַּן לֹא-תִשְׁתֶּה וְלֹא תִאָּגֵר כִּי תֹאכְלוּ הַתְּלַעַת: ⁴⁰ זֵיתִים יִהְיוּ לְךָ בְּכָל-גְּבוּלְךָ וְשֶׁמֶן לֹא תִסּוֹף כִּי יִשַׁל זֵיתְךָ: ⁴¹ בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת תוֹלִיד וְלֹא-יִהְיוּ לְךָ כִּי

32. delivered to another people They will be sold as slaves to a foreign land, so that their parents will never see them again.

your eyes shall strain for them Literally, “your eyes shall run out [of tears] over them.”

35. Suggested diagnoses include universalized eczema, smallpox, “joint leprosy,” and psoriasis.

36. The Israelites will be exiled from their land. The partial or complete deportation of defeated populations was a common practice in the ancient world, to provide laborers or slaves for the conqueror or to break the resistance of rebellious peoples.

unknown to you or your fathers You will feel completely alien there.

37. consternation You will be a source of consternation, or shock, to those who see your condition.

proverb People will refer to you when they wish to give an example of horrid catastrophe.

byword An object of repeated discussion.

all the peoples to which the LORD will drive you The northern Israelites and the Judahites were exiled to various lands by their original captors, and migrated yet farther afterward.

38. consume it The crop. Locusts are types of grasshoppers that migrate in immense groups and constitute one of the world’s most devastating natural disasters. The daily food consumption of a large swarm is equivalent to that of 1.5 million people.

39. worm The larva of some type of moth such as the grape-leaf folder, whose larvae defoliate grapevines; or the grape moth or berry moth, whose larvae eat the grapes.

40. oil for anointment In the hot, dry climate of the Middle East, one of the most important uses of olive oil was for anointing the skin, a necessary act of personal hygiene.

41. The act of raising children will be frustrated just as the raising of crops will be. Children

daughters, they shall not remain with you, for they shall go into captivity. ⁴²The cricket shall take over all the trees and produce of your land.

⁴³The stranger in your midst shall rise above you higher and higher, while you sink lower and lower: ⁴⁴he shall be your creditor, but you shall not be his; he shall be the head and you the tail.

⁴⁵All these curses shall befall you; they shall pursue you and overtake you, until you are wiped out, because you did not heed the LORD your God and keep the commandments and laws that He enjoined upon you. ⁴⁶They shall serve as signs and proofs against you and your offspring for all time. ⁴⁷Because you would not serve the LORD your God in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything, ⁴⁸you shall have to serve—in hunger and thirst, naked and lacking everything—the enemies whom the LORD will let loose against you. He will put an iron yoke upon your neck until He has wiped you out.

⁴⁹The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, which will swoop down like the eagle—a nation whose lan-

יִלְכוּ בְשָׁבִי: ⁴²כָּל-עֵצֶךָ וּפְרֵי אֲדָמָתְךָ יִירֶשׁ הַצִּלְצָל:

⁴³הִגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ יַעֲלֶה עֲלֶיךָ מֵעֵלָה מֵעֵלָה וְאַתָּה תִרְדּוּ מִטָּה מִטָּה: ⁴⁴הוּא יִלְוֶךָ וְאַתָּה לֹא תִלְוֶנּוּ הוּא יִהְיֶה לְרֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לְזָנָב:

⁴⁵וּבָאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל-הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּרְדְּפוּךָ וְהִשְׁיגוּךָ עַד הַשְּׂמֹדָה כִּי-לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְרַת מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךָ: ⁴⁶וְהָיוּ בְּךָ לְאֹת וּלְמוֹפֶת וּבְזִרְעֶךָ עַד-עוֹלָם: ⁴⁷תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרֹב כָּל: ⁴⁸וְעֲבַדְתָּ אֶת-אֱיֹבֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַחְנוּ יְהוָה בְּךָ בָרֶעִב וּבְצָמָא וּבְעִירָם וּבְחָסֶר כָּל וְנָתַן עָלַי בְּרוּל עַל-צִוְאוֹתֶיךָ עַד הַשְּׂמִידוֹ אִתְּךָ:

⁴⁹יִשָּׂא יְהוָה עֲלֶיךָ גּוֹי מִרְחֹק מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִדְאֶה הַנְּשָׁר גּוֹי אֲשֶׁר

and crops are also associated in the blessings of 28:4 and 7:13, and in the curses of verses 31–33.

42. Either the fields will be ravaged by destructive insects (such as grasshoppers or katydids) or, after the captivity of the children (v. 41), there will be too few people to work the fields, which then will be overrun by insects. These would include mole crickets, which eat roots though they do not cause large-scale aboveground destruction.

43. The economic collapse will be so calamitous that resident aliens, who normally are poor and dependent on Israelites, will prosper more than the Israelites and be in a position to make loans to them and thereby achieve economic superiority. Contrast the blessing of verses 12–13.

SECOND GROUP (vv. 45–57)

46. signs and proofs Of the guilt of this sinful generation, as elaborated in 29:21–27.

48. The punishment is the precise reversal of the prior situation (v. 47). This will make the justice of the punishment obvious.

iron yoke The yoke is a familiar, not always unfavorable, metaphor expressing submission to the rule of gods and kings in the ancient Near East. Here, however, the context is punitive. Because yokes were normally made of wood, an iron yoke implies an exceptional burden or unbreakable servitude.

49. a nation . . . from afar No specific nation is meant. The enemy will be utterly alien to Israel, even stranger than the “people you do not know” of verse 33. It will come from so far away that its language will be unintelligible, unlike Israel’s close neighbors who spoke languages similar to Hebrew.

like the eagle Or the griffon vulture. The simile refers to the suddenness, speed, and power of the attack.

47. you would not serve . . . in joy Ingratitude keeps us from true devotion to God. The image here is not of refusing to worship, but of worshipping grudgingly (Hayyim of Volozhin).

guage you do not understand, ⁵⁰a ruthless nation, that will show the old no regard and the young no mercy. ⁵¹It shall devour the offspring of your cattle and the produce of your soil, until you have been wiped out, leaving you nothing of new grain, wine, or oil, of the calving of your herds and the lambing of your flocks, until it has brought you to ruin. ⁵²It shall shut you up in all your towns throughout your land until every mighty, towering wall in which you trust has come down. And when you are shut up in all your towns throughout your land that the LORD your God has assigned to you, ⁵³you shall eat your own issue, the flesh of your sons and daughters that the LORD your God has assigned to you, because of the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you. ⁵⁴He who is most tender and fastidious among you shall be too mean to his brother and the wife of his bosom and the children he has spared ⁵⁵to share with any of them the flesh of the children that he eats, because he has nothing else left as a result of the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you in all your towns. ⁵⁶And she who is most tender and dainty among you, so tender

לֹא-תִשְׁמַע לְשׁוֹנוֹ: ⁵⁰ גּוֹי עֵז פָּנִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִשָּׂא פָנִים לְזָקֵן וְנָעַר לֹא יִחֹן: ⁵¹ וְאָכַל פְּרִי בְהֵמָתְךָ וּפְרִי-אֲדָמָתְךָ עַד הַשְּׂמֹדָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִשְׁאִיר לְךָ דָּגָן תִּירוֹשׁ וְיִצְהָר שֶׁגֶר אֶלְפִיךָ וְעִשְׂתָּרֶת צֹאנֶךָ עַד הָאֲבִידוֹ אִתָּךְ: ⁵² וְהִצַּר לְךָ בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ עַד רֵדַת חֲמֹתֶיךָ הַגְּבוּהוֹת וְהַבְּצֻרוֹת אֲשֶׁר אִתָּה בְּטֹחַ בְּהֵן בְּכָל-אֶרֶץךָ וְהִצַּר לְךָ בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּכָל-אֶרֶץךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ: ⁵³ וְאָכַלְתָּ פְרִי-בִטְנְךָ בְּשָׂר בְּנֶיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמִצּוֹר וּבְמִצּוֹק אֲשֶׁר-יִצִּיק לְךָ אִיבָה: ⁵⁴ הָאִישׁ הָרַךְ בְּךָ וְהָעֲנָג מֵאֹד תִּרַע עֵינָיו בְּאֲחִיו וּבְאִשְׁתּוֹ חִיקוֹ וּבִיתֵךְ בְּנָיו אֲשֶׁר יוֹתִיר: ⁵⁵ מִתַּת | לְאֶחָד מֵהֶם מִבֶּשֶׂר בְּנָיו אֲשֶׁר יֹאכֵל מִבְּלֵי הַשְּׂאִיר-לוֹ כֹּל בְּמִצּוֹר וּבְמִצּוֹק אֲשֶׁר יִצִּיק לְךָ אִיבָה בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ: ⁵⁶ הָרַפָּה בְךָ וְהָעֲנָגָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-נִסְתָּה כְּפִרְגָּלָה הִצַּג עַל-הָאָרֶץ מִהֵתְעַנֵּג

50. ruthless Literally, “harsh of face.” Alludes to the enemy’s shameless brutality in treating the old and the young.

51. The list of what the enemy will consume is the same as the list of blessings promised in verse 4, with one omission, “the issue of your womb.” In the grisly climax of the invasion, that blessing will be consumed by Israel itself (v. 53).

52. shut you up Literally, “press you,” “distress you.”

in all your towns There will be no place to escape.

until every . . . wall . . . has come down Until the enemy has breached the walls with battering rams and has razed them.

in which you trust A warning against misplaced trust. If the people disobey God, powerful

fortifications will provide no more protection than they did for the Canaanites and the Amorites (see 1:28, 3:5, 9:1).

53. Besieged and starving, the people will lose every vestige of compassion, and they will resort to cannibalism. (Under such circumstances, cannibalism has taken place throughout history; ancient cases are reported from Samaria, Jerusalem, and elsewhere in the Near East.)

54. spared Children whom he has not yet slaughtered and eaten.

56-57. The most pampered of women will likewise turn to the most loathsome of foods and guard it jealously. Newly delivered mothers will secretly devour their newborn along with the afterbirth to avoid sharing them with their husbands and older children.

53. you shall eat . . . the flesh of your sons and daughters One commentator, unable to bear the horrifying literal meaning,

takes this to mean: “In old age, you will have to depend on your children to feed and sustain you.”

and dainty that she would never venture to set a foot on the ground, shall begrudge the husband of her bosom, and her son and her daughter,⁵⁷the afterbirth that issues from between her legs and the babies she bears; she shall eat them secretly, because of utter want, in the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you in your towns.

⁵⁸If you fail to observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching that are written in this book, to reverence this honored and awesome Name, the LORD your God, ⁵⁹the LORD will inflict extraordinary plagues upon you and your offspring, strange and lasting plagues, malignant and chronic diseases. ⁶⁰He will bring back upon you all the sicknesses of Egypt that you dreaded so, and they shall cling to you. ⁶¹Moreover, the LORD will bring upon you all the other diseases and plagues that are not mentioned in this book of Teaching, until you are wiped out. ⁶²You shall be left a scant few, after having been as numerous as the stars in the skies, because you did not heed the command of the LORD your God. ⁶³And as the LORD once delighted in making you prosperous and many, so will the LORD now delight in causing you to perish and in wiping you out; you shall be torn from the land that you are about to enter and possess.

⁶⁴The LORD will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and

וימרף תרע עינה באיש חיקה ובבנה ובבתה: ⁵⁷ובשליטה היוצת* | מבין רגליה ובבניה אשר תלד פיתאכלם בחסר-כל בסתר במצור ובמצוק אשר יציק לך איבה בשעריך:

⁵⁸אם-לא תשמר לעשות את-כל-דברי התורה הזאת הכתובים בספר הזה ליראה את-השם הנכבד והנורא הזה את יהוה אלהיך: ⁵⁹והפלא יהוה את-מכתך ואת מכות זרעך מכות גדלות ונאמנות וחלים רעים ונאמנים: ⁶⁰והשיב בך את כל-מדוה מצרים אשר יגרת מפניהם ודבקו בך: ⁶¹גם כל-חלי וכל-מפה אשר לא כתוב בספר התורה הזאת יעלם יהוה עליך עד השמדך: ⁶²ונשארתם במתי מעט תחת אשר הייתם ככוכבי השמים לרב בי-לא שמעת בקול יהוה אלהיך: ⁶³והיה כאשר-שש יהוה עליכם להיטיב אתכם ולהרבות אתכם בן ישיש יהוה עליכם להאביד אתכם ולהשמיד אתכם ונסחתם מעל האדמה אשר-אתה בא-שמה לרשתה:

⁶⁴והפיצה יהוה בכל-העמים מקצה הארץ ועד-קצה הארץ ועבדת שם

v. 57. חסר א'

dainty Pampered, indulged.
would never venture to set a foot on the ground She was accustomed to being carried on a litter or a portable chair or to riding in a carriage.

THIRD GROUP (vv. 58–68)

58. If you fail to observe To prevent the lengthy list of threats from inducing hopeless resignation, Moses again reminds the Israelites that the curses are conditional.

Name God's name is synonymous with God's being. This is a common usage in the Bible,

especially in poetry. One loves and fears God's name—and blesses, thanks, and praises it—while sinners scorn and revile it.

59. strange Literally, “great.” That is, unusually severe.

60. God will afflict the Israelites with the sicknesses of Egypt, from which He had promised to protect them if they would obey Him (see 7:15; Exod. 15:26).

61. plagues that are not mentioned Ancient Near Eastern documents often conclude with statements like this to indicate that the document stands for more than it contains.

stone, whom neither you nor your ancestors have experienced. ⁶⁵Yet even among those nations you shall find no peace, nor shall your foot find a place to rest. The LORD will give you there an anguished heart and eyes that pine and a despondent spirit. ⁶⁶The life you face shall be precarious; you shall be in terror, night and day, with no assurance of survival. ⁶⁷In the morning you shall say, “If only it were evening!” and in the evening you shall say, “If only it were morning!”—because of what your heart shall dread and your eyes shall see. ⁶⁸The LORD will send you back to Egypt in galleys, by a route which I told you you should not see again. There you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but none will buy.

⁶⁹These are the terms of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to conclude with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.

65. no peace Even in exile, the Israelites will find no relief from the terrors left behind at home.

despondent spirit Literally, “a parched throat.” A symptom of grief or depression.

68. The final reversal of history: the Israelites will be returned to Egypt.

a route which I told you you should not see again In 17:16, God said, “You must [or will] not go back that way again”; and in Exod. 14:13 He promised, “The Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.” With this punishment, God will rescind that promise.

I told you Here Moses speaks in God’s name, as in verse 20. According to 17:16, it was God who made this promise.

offer yourselves for sale Their crushing poverty in Egypt will force them to find sustenance by selling themselves as slaves.

none will buy The text gives no reason for the refusal, which represents the ultimate irony and tragedy: the Egyptians, who once declined to

אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִדְעֶתָ אֹתָהּ וְאַבְתִּיךָ עֵץ וְאֶבֶן: ⁶⁵ וּבְגוֹיִם הָהֵם לֹא תִרְגָּיעַ וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מְנוּחַ לְכַף־רַגְלְךָ וְנָתַן יְהוָה לְךָ שֵׁם לֵב רָגֹז וְכִלְיוֹן עֵינַיִם וְדַאֲבוֹן נַפְשׁ: ⁶⁶ וְהָיוּ חַיֶּיךָ תְּלָאִים לְךָ מִמָּוֶד וּפְחָדָת לַיְלָה וַיּוֹמָם וְלֹא תֵאֱמִין בְּחַיֶּיךָ: ⁶⁷ בְּבֹקֶר תֹּאמַר מִי־יִתֶּן עָרֵב וּבְעָרֵב תֹּאמַר מִי־יִתֶּן בֶּקֶר מִפְּחוֹד לְבִבְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּפְחֹד וּמִמְרָאָה עֵינֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה: ⁶⁸ וְהִשִּׁיבְךָ יְהוָה | מִצְרַיִם בְּאֹנִיּוֹת בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי לְךָ לֹא־תִסִּיף עוֹד לְרִאֲתָהּ וְהִתְמַכְרְתֶם שָׁם לְאִיִּבֶיךָ לְעַבְדִּים וּלְשִׁפְחוֹת וְאִין קָנָה: ס

⁶⁹ אֵלֶּה דְבָרֵי הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה לְכַרֵּת אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב מִלְּבַד הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־כָּרַת אִתְּם

שביעי בְּחֹרֵב: פ

free the Israelites from slavery, will now refuse to take them back as slaves.

CONCLUSION TO THE COVENANT (v. 69)

According to 4:13 and 5:2–19, the covenant at Horeb consisted of the Decalogue. The laws and teachings, promises and warnings outlined in chapters 6–26 and 28, constituting the terms of the present covenant made in Moab, were given by God to Moses privately. Moses first communicated them to the people in Moab in the long address just concluded (4:44–28:68), and then had the people commit themselves by covenant to observe them. Deuteronomy, however, regards these laws given in Moab as implicitly part of the Horeb covenant, because they are the direct continuation of God’s words at Horeb, and the people had pledged there to observe them (5:24). This means that the covenants of Horeb and of Moab are virtually identical. The covenant to be made at Shechem (chap. 27) is also identical to the one made at Moab.

67. because of what your heart shall dread Bad as the reality will be, you will fear that the future will be worse. Fear of misfor-

tune is often worse than the actual misfortune, as our imaginations conjure up all sorts of dreadful experiences we may feel we deserve.

29 Moses summoned all Israel and said to them:

You have seen all that the LORD did before your very eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his courtiers and to his whole country: ²the wondrous feats that you saw with your own eyes, those prodigious signs and marvels. ³Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

⁴I led you through the wilderness forty years; the clothes on your back did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet; ⁵you had no bread to eat and no wine or other intoxicant to

כט ויקרא משה אל-כל-ישראל ויאמר אליהם אתם ראיתם את כל-אשר עשה יהוה לעיניכם בארץ מצרים ולכל-עבדיו ולכל-ארצו: ²המסות הגדלות אשר ראו עיניך האותות והמפתים הגדלים ההם: ³ולא-נתן יהוה לכם לב לדעת ועינים לראות ואזנים לשמע עד היום הזה: ⁴ואולף אתכם ארבעים שנה במדבר לא-בלו שלמתיכם מעליכם ונעלף לא-בלתה מעל רגלך: ⁵לחם לא אכלתם

Moses' Third Discourse: A Summons to Ratify the Covenant Made in Moab (29:1–30:20)

Moses has presented all the terms of the second covenant to the people (4:44–26:19, 28). He now summons them to ratify it and concludes by stating that what he is offering Israel as a nation is the opportunity to choose between life and death (30:15–20).

BASIS OF THE COVENANT (29:1–8)

Moses reminds the people about the Exodus, which lies at the heart of the covenant, just as he did when God first offered the covenant to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

1. summoned Literally, “called.” “Summoned” implies that Moses had dismissed the people after his previous address, perhaps to allow them time to reflect on it so that they could enter the Covenant in full awareness of the solemnity of their action. If “called” is meant literally, it could mean that he simply continued proclaiming to the people on the same occasion as before.

You have seen . . . before your very eyes In Deuteronomy, Moses frequently stresses that he is appealing to the people on the basis of their own personal experience.

2. feats . . . signs and marvels The plagues inflicted on Egypt.

3. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand Better: “But the LORD did not give you a mind to understand until today.” Verses 6–7 indicate that now, after 40 years, the Israelites have shown that they finally understand and trust in God’s power.

4. I led you Moses speaks for God, as in 28:20 and elsewhere.

did not wear out God reminds Israel that His providence in the wilderness had an educational purpose. Having seen that Israel was incapable of recognizing His power behind the events of the Exodus (v. 3), God fed them by supernatural means for 40 years to overcome their spiritual obtuseness.

5. Israel survived on manna, quail, and water provided directly by God.

that you might know that I the LORD am your God God’s supernatural providence—His ability to make food out of any substance (8:3)—taught the Israelites that He controls all natural phenomena.

CHAPTER 29

These eight verses allow this *parashah* to end on a favorable note, rather than leave us with the series of bone-chilling curses reverberating in our souls.

3. to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand “The ability to understand, to see or hear the divine significance of events, may be granted or withheld from man. One may see great wonders but remain entirely insensitive” (Heschel).

drink—that you might know that I the LORD am your God.

⁶When you reached this place, King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan came out to engage us in battle, but we defeated them. ⁷We took their land and gave it to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh as their heritage. ⁸Therefore observe faithfully all the terms of this covenant, that you may succeed in all that you undertake.

6. *this place* Transjordan. For Sihon and Og battled with Israel at Jahaz and Edrei, respectively (2:32; 3:1), not in the Plains of Moab where Moses is speaking.

we defeated them The willingness of this generation to wage war against both Sihon and Og—in contrast to the previous generation's fear

ויִינּוּ וְשָׂכַר לֹא שְׁתִּיתֶם לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

מפסיר ⁶ וַתָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיֵּצֵא סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ־חֶשְׁבוֹן וְעוֹג מֶלֶךְ־בַּשָּׁן לִקְרֹאתֵנוּ לְמִלְחָמָה וַנִּנְכַּח ⁷ אֶת־אֲרָצָם וַנְּתַנֶּה לְנַחֲלָה לְרֵאוּבֵנִי וְלְגָדִי וְלַחֲצִי שֵׁבֶט הַמְּנַשִּׁי: ⁸ וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם לְמַעַן תִּשְׁכְּלִיּוּ אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן: פ

of fighting the Amorites—revealed that they had indeed gained a mature trust in God's power. Their victory showed them that their trust was justified.

8. The experiences of the past 40 years have taught the Israelites that the essential condition for success is adherence to the Covenant.

הַפְּטָרָה שְׁשִׁית דְּנַחֲמָתָא

SIXTH HAFTARAH OF CONSOLATION HAFTARAH FOR KI TAVO

ISAIAH 60:1–22

(Recite on the 6th Shabbat after the 9th of Av, coinciding with the reading of Ki Tavo. On the Seven Haftarot of Consolation, see p. 1032.)

In this *haftarah* the prophet dramatically announces Zion's imminent restoration, concretized through imagery of light and worldly splendor. The light is nothing less than the divine presence and redemption. The worldly splendor is the gift of nations who had oppressed the city and its inhabitants in times past. A tone of physical and spiritual transformation pervades the reading.

Powerful imagery of light frames and dominates this *haftarah*. This light is God's own glory (vv. 2, 19–20), a splendor that will illumine and be reflected in Zion, attracting all nations to her (v. 3). Earlier prophecies portray Israel—and the prophet and his teaching in particular—as the bearer of the light of hope and direction to the exiles (42:6, 49:6, 51:4). In this passage, it is Zion that is the locus of this divine illumination (v. 1).

The light of redemption is a renewal of the resplendent light of origins. Zion is reborn and re-created by the shining presence of God's immediacy, much as each day dramatizes the renewal of Creation out of the dark night. Furthermore, just as the clarity of God's first creation was celebrated by new names ("Day," "Night," "Adam," "Eve"), so now, in this re-creation, Jerusalem shall be renamed "City of the LORD, / Zion of the Holy One of Israel" (v. 14), and her walls and gates shall be called "Victory" and "Renown" (v. 18). The special identity of Zion is singled out, together with its new future. But in contrast to the abstract, oblique announcement of light at Creation ("Let there be light"), the light of re-creation and redemption presented here is personal: "your light has dawned" (v. 1).

Nothing suggests that this effulgence of light is a cosmic principle set over against the dark, in the manner of the dualism that emerges in Zo-

roastrianism at this time. Light imagery was a feature of ancient Israelite culture too, in personal exclamations such as "The LORD is my light" (Ps. 27:1) and in theological statements such as "by Your light do we see light" (Ps. 36:10). What finds expression here is the sense of the divine as source and ground of reality, as power and presence for redemption. The words in the *haftarah* announce a new light of enduring brilliance. This portrayal of redemption as illumination marks a new moment in theology.

In the redemption, God will glorify and permanently transform Zion, the Temple, and Israel. The key Hebrew phrase that marks this prophetic truth is *lo od*: "No more" (*lo od*) shall the cry of wrack and ruin be at hand (v. 18); "No longer" (*lo od*) shall Zion need an earthly sun (v. 19). "Your sun shall set no more [*lo od*], / Your moon no more [*lo od*] withdraw; / For the LORD shall be a light to you forever" (v. 20). Expectation of lasting renewal seals the prophet's words, along with the guarantee that "I the LORD will speed it in due time" (v. 22).

For later readers of this prophecy, still awaiting the end of exile, these final words were less a statement of immediate assurance than a promise of future fulfillment (BT Sanh. 98a). And the opening call for Zion to arise because "your light has come [*ba*]" was understood as "your light is coming [*ba*]"—coming but not yet realized.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

Less than seven weeks ago, the destruction of Zion was mourned on the fast of *Tish-ah b'Av*. Now, in this vision of restoration, the prophet calls Zion to arise from its sorrowful state (v. 1). In radiant glory, Zion shall be called "the city of the LORD" (v. 14); its ancient sanctuary shall be adorned by the majestic trees of Lebanon (v. 13).

60 Arise, shine, for your light has dawned;
The Presence of the LORD has shone upon
you!

²Behold! Darkness shall cover the earth,
And thick clouds the peoples;
But upon you the LORD will shine,
And His Presence be seen over you.
³And nations shall walk by your light,
Kings, by your shining radiance.

⁴Raise your eyes and look about:
They have all gathered and come to you.
Your sons shall be brought from afar,
Your daughters like babes on shoulders.
⁵As you behold, you will glow;
Your heart will throb and thrill—
For the wealth of the sea shall pass on to you,
The riches of nations shall flow to you.
⁶Dust clouds of camels shall cover you,
Dromedaries of Midian and Ephah.
They all shall come from Sheba;
They shall bear gold and frankincense,
And shall herald the glories of the LORD.
⁷All the flocks of Kedar shall be assembled for
you,
The rams of Nebaioth shall serve your needs;
They shall be welcome offerings on My altar,
And I will add glory to My glorious House.

⁸Who are these that float like a cloud,
Like doves to their cotes?
⁹Behold, the coastlands await me,
With ships of Tarshish in the lead,
To bring your sons from afar,

ד קומי אורי כי בא אורך
וכבוד יהוה עליך זרח:
² כִּי־הִנֵּה הַחֹשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶה־אֶרֶץ
וְעַרְפָּל לְאֲמִים
וְעַלְיֶךָ יִזְרַח יְהוָה
וְכַבֹּדוֹ עָלֶיךָ יֵרָאֶה:
³ וְהֵלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרְךָ
וּמְלָכִים לְנֹגַהּ זְרוּחֶךָ:

⁴ שְׂאִי־סְבִיב עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵי
כָּל־עַם נִקְבְּצוּ בְּאוֹרְךָ
בְּנֵיךָ מֵרְחוֹק יָבֹאוּ
וּבְנֹתֶיךָ עַל־צַד תֵּאֱמָנָה:
⁵ אִזְ תֵּרְאִי וְנִהְרַת
וּפָחַד וְרָחַב לִבְבְּךָ
כִּי־יִהְיֶה עָלֶיךָ הַמָּוֶן יָם
חֵיל גּוֹיִם יָבֹאוּ לָךְ:
⁶ שְׁפַעַת גְּמַלִּים תִּכְסֶּךָ
בְּכָרֵי מִדְיָן וְעֵיפָה
כָּל־עַם מִשְׁבָּא יָבֹאוּ
זָהָב וּלְבוֹנָה יִשְׂאוּ
וּתְהִלַּת יְהוָה יִבְשְׂרוּ:
⁷ כָּל־צֹאֵן קֶדָר יִקְבְּצוּ לָךְ
אֵילֵי נְבִיּוֹת יִשְׂרָתוּנְךָ
יַעֲלוּ עַל־רִצּוֹן מִזְבְּחֵי
וּבֵית תִּפְאָרְתִּי אֶפְאֵר:

⁸ מִי־אֵלֶּה כְּעָב תְּעוֹפִינָה
וּכְיוֹנִים אֶל־אַרְבְּתֵיהֶם:
⁹ כִּי־לִי אֵיִם יִקְווּ
וְאַנְיּוֹת תְּרַשִּׁישׁ בְּרִאשְׁנָה
לְהִבִּיא בְּנֵיךָ מֵרְחוֹק

Isaiah 60:2. Presence Hebrew: *kavod*; literally, “glory.” The first *Haftarah* of Consolation also declares that the divine Presence will be revealed (Isa. 40:5).

7. Kedar . . . Nebaioth Sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13); pastoral tribes in north Arabia.
welcome Foreigners will be welcome to worship in the Temple; see also Isa. 56:6–8.

And their silver and gold as well—
For the name of the LORD your God,
For the Holy One of Israel, who has glorified
you.

¹⁰Aliens shall rebuild your walls,
Their kings shall wait upon you—
For in anger I struck you down,
But in favor I take you back.
¹¹Your gates shall always stay open—
Day and night they shall never be shut—
To let in the wealth of the nations,
With their kings in procession.

¹²For the nation or the kingdom
That does not serve you shall perish;
Such nations shall be destroyed.

¹³The majesty of Lebanon shall come to
you—
Cypress and pine and box—
To adorn the site of My Sanctuary,
To glorify the place where My feet rest.

¹⁴Bowing before you, shall come
The children of those who tormented you;
Prostrate at the soles of your feet
Shall be all those who reviled you;
And you shall be called
“City of the LORD,
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”

¹⁵Whereas you have been forsaken,
Rejected, with none passing through,
I will make you a pride everlasting,
A joy for age after age.

¹⁶You shall suck the milk of the nations,

כֶּסֶפָם וְזָהָבָם אִתָּם
לְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
וְלִקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי פִאֲרָךְ:
10 וּבָנוּ בְנֵי־יָנֹכַח חַמְתִּיךָ
וּמַלְכֵיהֶם יִשְׁרְתוּנָךְ
כִּי בְקֶצְפִי הִפְתִּיךָ
וּבְרִצּוֹנִי רָחַמְתִּיךָ:
11 וּפְתָחוּ שַׁעְרֶיךָ תָמִיד
יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה לֹא יִסָּגְרוּ
לְהֵבִיא אֵלֶיךָ חֵיל גּוֹיִם
וּמַלְכֵיהֶם נְהוּגִים:

12 כִּי־הִגּוֹי וְהַמְּמַלְכָה
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יַעֲבֹדוּךָ יֵאָבְדוּ
וְהִגּוֹיִם חָרֵב יִחָרְבוּ:

13 כְּבוֹד הַלְּבָנוֹן אֵלֶיךָ יָבֹוא
בְרוֹשׁ תְּדַהֵר וּתְאֲשׁוּר יַחְדָּו
לְפֶאֱלֵ מְקוֹם מְקַדְּשֵׁי
וּמְקוֹם רַגְלֵי אַכְבֵּד:

14 וְהִלְכוּ אֵלֶיךָ שְׁחוֹחִי
בְנֵי מַעֲזִיךָ
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ עַל־כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֶיךָ
כָּל־מִנְאֲצֵיךָ
וְקָרְאוּ לְךָ
עִיר יְהוָה
צִיּוֹן קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

15 תַּחַת הָיִיתְךָ עֲזוּבָה
וּשְׁנוּאָה וְאֵין עוֹבֵר
וּשְׁמִתִּיךָ לְגֵאוֹן עוֹלָם
מְשׁוֹשׁ יוֹר וְדוֹר:
16 וַיִּנְקַתְּ חֶלֶב גּוֹיִם

15. forsaken, / Rejected These verbs hint at the motif of Zion as banished bride, which is developed explicitly in the third and the seventh haftarot of consolation.

Suckle at royal breasts.
And you shall know
That I the LORD am your Savior,
I, The Mighty One of Jacob, am your Redeemer.

¹⁷Instead of copper I will bring gold,
Instead of iron I will bring silver;
Instead of wood, copper;
And instead of stone, iron.
And I will appoint Well-being as your government,

Prosperity as your officials.
¹⁸The cry “Violence!”
Shall no more be heard in your land,
Nor “Wrack and ruin!”
Within your borders.
And you shall name your walls “Victory”
And your gates “Renown.”

¹⁹No longer shall you need the sun
For light by day,
Nor the shining of the moon
For radiance [by night];
For the LORD shall be your light everlasting,
Your God shall be your glory.

²⁰Your sun shall set no more,
Your moon no more withdraw;
For the LORD shall be a light to you forever,
And your days of mourning shall be ended.

²¹And your people, all of them righteous,
Shall possess the land for all time;
They are the shoot that I planted,
My handiwork in which I glory.

²²The smallest shall become a clan;

וְשׁוּד מְלָכִים תִּינָקוּ
וְיָדַעְתָּ
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מוֹשִׁיעֶךָ
וְגֹאֲלֶךָ אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב:

¹⁷תַּחַת הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אָבִיא זָהָב
וְתַחַת הַבַּרְזֵל אָבִיא כֶּסֶף
וְתַחַת הָעֵצִים נְחֹשֶׁת
וְתַחַת הָאֲבָנִים בְּרֹזֶל
וְשִׁמְתִי פְקֻדְתְּךָ שְׁלוֹם
וְנִגְשִׁיךָ צְדָקָה:

¹⁸לֹא-יִשְׁמַע
עוֹד חֲמָס בְּאַרְצֶךָ
שׁוֹד וְשֹׁבֵר
בְּגְבוּלֶיךָ
וְקָרָאתָ יְשׁוּעָה חוֹמֹתֶיךָ
וְשִׁעְרֶיךָ תִּהְיֶה:

¹⁹לֹא-יְהִי־לְךָ עוֹד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
לְאֹר יוֹמָם
וּלְנֵגַהּ הַיָּרֵחַ
לֹא-יֵאִיר לְךָ
וְהָיָה-לְךָ יְהוָה לְאֹר עוֹלָם
וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ לְתַפְאֲרָתְךָ:

²⁰לֹא-יָבֹוא עוֹד שֶׁמֶשְׁךָ
וּיִרְחֹךָ לֹא יִאֲסֹף
כִּי יְהוָה יְהִי־לְךָ לְאֹר עוֹלָם
וְשָׁלְמוּ יְמֵי אָבְלֶךָ:

²¹וְעַמֶּךָ כָּלָם צְדִיקִים
לְעוֹלָם יִירָשׁוּ אֶרֶץ
נֶצֶר מִטְעוֹ מִטְעֵי

מַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי לְהַתְּפָאֵר:
²²הַקָּטָן יְהִי לְאֵלֶיךָ

20. This prophecy transcends the need for natural light. Compare Isa. 30:26: “The light of the sun shall become sevenfold . . . when the LORD binds up His people’s wounds.” (Earlier and later

prophets exploited the contrast between light and darkness to dramatize a time of doom and death; see Amos 5:18–20, 8:9–10; Zech. 14:6–7).

The least, a mighty nation.

I the LORD will speed it in due time.

וְהִצְעִיר לְגוֹי עָצוּם

אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּעֵתָהּ אַחֲשִׁינָהּ: ט

22. I the LORD will speed it in due time A paradox to earlier commentators—for if redemption will occur “in due time,” what does “will speed it” mean? The Hebrew words of the phrase were, therefore, read as if separated: “I [the LORD] will speed it” if the people have merit, but if they do not have merit, redemption will come “in due time” (BT Sanh. 98a, see Rashi). On the other hand, the word order in the Hebrew text puts “in due time” before “I will speed it.” This prompted Radak to explain: When redemption comes “in

due time,” God “will speed it” to a complete conclusion.

The two interpretations represent two theological poles concerning redemption. According to the first interpretation, human merit may hasten God’s hand. According to the second, redemption is a divine mystery whose “time” is not influenced by human actions (see Gen. R. 65:12). Messianic movements in Jewish history have often swung between these two poles.