

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
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⁹You stand this day, all of you, before the LORD your God—your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel, ¹⁰your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer—¹¹to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions; ¹²to the end that He may establish you this day as His people and be your God, as He

אַתֶּם נִצְבִים הַיּוֹם בְּלִפְנֵי יְהוָה
 אֲלֵהֵיכֶם רְאִשֵׁיכֶם שְׁבִטֵיכֶם וְקִנְיֹכֶם
 וְשִׁטְרֵיכֶם כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל: ¹⁰ טַפְּכֶם
 נְשֵׁיכֶם וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ מִחֹטֵב
 עֵצִיךָ עַד שֹׁאֵב מִיַּמֶּיךָ: ¹¹ לְעִבְרְךָ בְּבְרִית
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְאֵלֹתָו אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 שָׁנִי כֹרֵת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם: ¹² לְמַעַן הִקִּים-אֶתְךָ
 הַיּוֹם | לֹא לְעַם וְהוּא יְהִי-לְךָ לְאֱלֹהִים

*Moses' Third Discourse: A Summons to Ratify the
 Covenant Made in Moab (continued)*

THE COVENANT CEREMONY (29:9–20)

Every Israelite participates in the ceremony establishing the covenant with God. The text does not tell us when the ceremony took place or of what it consisted. Other covenant texts from the ancient Near East likewise allude to ceremonies without describing the actual proceedings; they recount only the content of the agreement.

9. Moses lists those present in the order of their social status.

You stand You are presenting yourselves before God.

10. your children, your wives Not only the leaders and the adult males but each individual member of the community takes part in affirming the covenant. The responsibility is so momentous, and the consequences of disobedience so dire, that all must commit themselves personally, and not through the action of a parent, husband, or superior.

stranger Although they are not Israelites (14:21), resident aliens are subject to the civil law

and certain religious prohibitions, enjoy particular rights, and are permitted to participate in various religious celebrations. For this reason, they, too, must take part in the covenant ceremony and listen as the Teaching is read. This probably consisted of the laws of Deuteronomy beginning with chapter 12.

from woodchopper to water drawer Because all categories of Israelites have already been listed, this phrase must refer to aliens who served as menial laborers. The wording includes other types of menial laborers as well.

11. the covenant . . . with its sanctions Hebrew: *b'rit v'alab*; more literally, “a covenant guarded by imprecations.” The word *alab* means “curse” or “imprecation” (also v. 13), alluding to the curses detailed in chapter 28.

12. He promised you Refers to the mutual relationship God promised to the Exodus generation (in Exod. 6:7; Lev. 26:12). Among those Moses is now addressing, the older people were alive then and received the promise, although they were minors.

This *parashah* is read (usually together with *Va-yeilekh*) on the *Shabbat* before *Rosh ha-Shanah*, a time for taking to heart the commitment to God's covenant.

9. all of you The whole of the community is greater than the sum of its parts. Each individual Israelite may be flawed and imperfect, but when all of them join together, the strengths and good qualities of each are reinforced and magnified. This also teaches that no one should say, “It is not my responsibility.”

Everyone must do his or her share (Barukh of Medzibozh).

11. to enter into the covenant To reaffirm the covenant that was entered into at Mount Sinai. Just as a husband and wife need to reaffirm their commitment to each other when the early days of romantic attraction have given way to the day-to-day struggle to overcome accumulated disappointments, so too God and the people Israel need to reaffirm the covenant at this later date (Shneur Zalman).

promised you and as He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ¹³I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, ¹⁴but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here this day.

¹⁵Well you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we passed through the midst of various other nations; ¹⁶and you have seen the detestable things and the fetishes of wood and stone, silver and gold, that they keep. ¹⁷Perchance there is among you some man or woman, or some clan or tribe, whose heart is even now turning away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations—perchance there is among you a stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood. ¹⁸When such a

בְּאִשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּךָ וּבְכֹאשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב: ¹³ וְלֹא אֶתְכֶם לְבַדְכֶם אֲנֹכִי כִּירַת אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת: ¹⁴ כִּי אֶת־אִשֶׁר יִשְׁנוּ פֹה עִמָּנוּ עִמְדַּת הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵת אִשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ פֹה עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם: ¹⁵ כִּי־אַתֶּם יֹדְעֵתֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבְּנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־עֲבַרְנוּ בְּקִרְבֵּי הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עֲבַרְתֶּם: ¹⁶ וְתָרְאוּ אֶת־שְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גְּלִילֵיהֶם עֵץ וְאֶבֶן בְּסֹף וְזֹהָב אִשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם: ¹⁷ פְּנִי־יֵשׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ אֹי־אִשָּׁה אוֹ מִשְׁפָּחָה או־שֹׁבֵט אֲשֶׁר לָבְבוּ כִּנְהַת הַיּוֹם מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְלַכֵּת לַעֲבֹד אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם פְּנִי־יֵשׁ בְּכֶם שָׂרֵשׁ פְּרָה רֹאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה:

He swore to your fathers Refers to the Lord's promise that He would be God to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:7–8).

14. those who are not with us here this day Future generations. The mutual commitments made here by God and by the people Israel are binding for all future generations. Ancient Near Eastern treaties likewise stipulate that they are binding on the parties' descendants.

15. various other nations Literally, "the nations through which you passed." It refers to the nations of Transjordan, particularly Moab, which exposed Israel to the pagan cult of Baal-peor (see 4:3; Num. 25:1–3).

16. detestable things Hebrew: *shikkutzim*, a disparaging term used in the Bible for idols. It comes from the verb *shakketz* (spurn, reject as abominable; see 7:26). It is commonly employed in connection with the ban on impure foods.

silver and gold Used as plating on the statues.

17. Advocates of idolatry are to be punished whether they are individuals, males or females, relatives, or entire cities. The concern to make the warning as comprehensive as possible is also found in other ancient treaties and oaths.

Perchance there is Beware in case there is. **gods of those nations** This refers to the fetishes mentioned in verse 16. In the Bible's view, there is no substance to foreign gods beyond their images; and pagans worship the images themselves, mistakenly thinking that they have power. Moses fears that Israel's exposure to those images may have left some people with a temptation to worship them, which is what happened at Peor (4:3).

stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood A person, clan, or tribe whose delusions would have bitter, deadly consequences.

14. those who are not with us here this day The souls of all future Jews—present at this moment, as they had been at Mount Sinai (Tanḥ.). Moses' words can also be understood as referring to the physically or mentally handicapped, who perhaps could not be present but were still part of the community, or to those Jews who reject the covenant but are still claimed by it and included in it.

What right did our ancestors have to impose

the obligations of the covenant on us? Why do we have to feel bound by their actions? Many aspects of our lives were determined by decisions of our parents and ancestors, including when and where we would be born, what skills and physical qualities we would possess, and where and how we would be educated. Maturity consists in accepting those conditions as the facts of our lives, rather than fantasizing about how our lives would have been easier had we been born otherwise.

one hears the words of these sanctions, he may fancy himself immune, thinking, “I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart”—to the utter ruin of moist and dry alike. ¹⁹The LORD will never forgive him; rather will the LORD’s anger and passion rage against that man, till every sanction recorded in this book comes down upon him, and the LORD blots out his name from under heaven.

²⁰The LORD will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for misfortune, in accordance with all the sanctions of the covenant recorded in this book of Teaching. ²¹And later generations will ask—the children who succeed you, and foreigners who come from distant lands and see the plagues and diseases that the LORD has inflicted upon that land, ²²all its soil devastated by sulfur and salt, beyond sowing and

וְהָיָה בְשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֹּאת וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם יְהִי־לִי כִּי בִשְׁרָרוֹת לִבִּי אֵלַי לְמַעַן סְפוֹת הָרָוּחַ אֶת־הַצְּמִמָּה: ¹⁹ לֹא־יִאֱבֹה יְהוָה סְלַח לּוֹ כִּי אָז יַעֲשֶׂן אֶף־יְהוָה וְקִנְאָתוֹ בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וְרִבְצָה בּוֹ כָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים הַפְּתוּבָה בְּסֹפֵר הַזֶּה וּמַחָה יְהוָה אֶת־שְׁמוֹ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

וְהִבְדִּילוֹ יְהוָה לְרַעָה מִכָּל שְׁבֹטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֱלֹת הַבְּרִית הַפְּתוּבָה בְּסֹפֵר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה: ²¹ וְאָמַר הַדּוֹר הָאֲחֵרֹן בְּנִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר יָקוּמוּ מֵאַחֲרֵיכֶם וְהִנְכִּרֵי אֲשֶׁר יָבֵא מֵאַרְץ רְחוֹקָה וְרָאוּ אֶת־מִכּוֹת הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא וְאֶת־תַּחֲלָאֵיהָ אֲשֶׁר־חָלָה יְהוָה בָּהּ: ²² גְּפָרִית וּמֶלַח שִׂרְפָה כָּל־אֲרָצָהּ לֹא תִזְרַע וְלֹא תִצְמַח

18. such a one Man or woman, clan or tribe. **fancy himself immune** The culprit may delude himself or herself, thinking that by remaining silent while others swear allegiance to the covenant he or she will be exempted from its consequences.

be safe Literally, “have *shalom* (safety, well-being).”

willful heart Refers to one who says, “I’ll follow my own sights, doing as I see fit.”

moist and dry alike The unique and problematic Hebrew phrase probably is an expression meaning “everything.” Moses is commenting on the consequences of the sinner’s delusion: God will sweep away everything that belongs to the sinner or to the entire nation.

19. will never forgive him Nothing that one does will assuage God’s anger.

passion Illustrates the Decalogue’s warning that the Lord, in reaction to the worship of other gods, is an “impassioned God” (see 5:9).

every sanction Such as those in chapter 28.

blots out his name Such a person’s fate will

be the same as that which God threatened to inflict on worshipers of the Golden Calf (9:14) and which He commands that Israel impose on the Canaanites and the Amalekites (7:24, 25:19).

20. single . . . out The would-be sinner should not imagine that God deals only with the community as a whole, that individuals can escape punishment as long as the community is virtuous.

THE AFTERMATH OF PUNISHMENT (vv. 21–27)

Future generations and foreigners will ask what caused the disaster and give the answer themselves: It is because Israel violated the terms of God’s covenant. Foreign nations, who would admire Israel’s wisdom if it obeys God’s laws (see 4:6), would recognize its folly if it disobeys.

21. plagues and diseases This is a metaphoric reference to the natural disasters of verse 22.

22. sulfur and salt As a severe punishment, conquerors sometimes spread salt on the soil of

18. moist and dry alike Honest and deceitful alike. The wicked person calculates that a society can tolerate a certain amount of dishonesty. As long as most people tell the truth, a liar will be believed. If most people are honest, a swindler can

take advantage of their presumption of good faith.

21. Later generations will ask, “How did those who lived before us permit themselves to despoil the earth, air, and water, not leaving us a livable environment?”

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producing, no grass growing in it, just like the upheaval of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His fierce anger—²³all nations will ask, “Why did the LORD do thus to this land? Wherefore that awful wrath?” ²⁴They will be told, “Because they forsook the covenant that the LORD, God of their fathers, made with them when He freed them from the land of Egypt; ²⁵they turned to the service of other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not experienced and whom He had not allotted to them. ²⁶So the LORD was incensed at that land and brought upon it all the curses recorded in this book. ²⁷The LORD uprooted them from their soil in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is still the case.”

²⁸Concealed acts concern the LORD our God; but with overt acts, it is for us and our children ever to apply all the provisions of this Teaching.

וְלֹא-יַעֲלֶה בָּהּ כָּל-עֵשֶׂב כַּמְהִפְכַּת סֹדֶם
וְעַמֹּרָה אֲדָמָה וְצִבְיִים וְצִבְוִיִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפָּךְ
יְהוָה בְּאָפּוֹ וּבַחֲמָתוֹ: ²³ וְאָמְרוּ כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם
עַל-מָה עָשָׂה יְהוָה כִּכָּה לְאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת
מִה חָרִי הָאֵף הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה: ²⁴ וְאָמְרוּ עַל
אֲשֶׁר עֲזָבוּ אֶת-בְּרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָם
אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת עִמָּם בְּהוֹצִיאֹ אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם: ²⁵ וַיִּלְכוּ וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדְעוּם
וְלֹא חָלַק לָהֶם: ²⁶ וַיַּחֲרֹאֲף יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ
הַהוּא לְהַבִּיא עָלֶיהָ אֶת-כָּל-הַקְּלָלָה
הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה: ²⁷ וַיִּתְּשֶׂם יְהוָה
מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם בָּאָף וּבַחֲמָה וּבְקֶצֶף גָּדוֹל
וַיִּשְׁלַכְכֶם * אֶל-אֶרֶץ אַחֵרָת כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה:
²⁸ הַנְּסֻתָרֹת לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהַנְּגַלֹּת לָנוּ
וְלְבָנֵינוּ * עַד-עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֵי

הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת: ס רביעי [שני]

v. 27. ל' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

v. 28. נקוד על ל' נ' ו' ל' ב' נ' י' נ' ו', ולפי נוסחים מקובלים גם נקוד על ע'

conquered lands to render it infertile. An Aramaic treaty warns that the gods will sow salt on the city that violates its terms. Apparently, the effect of sulfur was also known in antiquity: Excessive amounts make soil too acidic for cultivation.

grass In the sense of vegetation, herbage.
just like the upheaval of Sodom That is, just like Sodom and its sister cities, which were overturned (see Gen. 19:24–25). The comparison is not to the manner of destruction but to its consequences.

23. The devastation will be so great that the entire world will learn of it and join future Israelites and passersby in asking about it.

24. covenant See Comment to 28:69.

25. gods whom they had not experienced Who had done nothing for them.

whom He had not allotted to them As ob-

jects of worship. They were to worship the Lord alone (see 4:19–20).

27. as is still the case In the days of the exile, when this question and answer will take place.

28. Concealed acts Sins committed secretly are known to God, and He will punish them.

for us and our children In Hebrew texts of the Torah, dots are placed over these words and the first letter of the following word. In 15 places in the Bible, such dots appear over letters or words. They were a scribal device to call attention to an otherwise unspecified problem in the text. Frequently, the Sages interpreted via *midrash* the words marked with these points.

apply all the provisions Overt acts (known sins) are the community's responsibility to punish by applying to the perpetrators the stipulations in the Covenant.

28. In scrolls and printed volumes of the Torah (*humashim*), dots appear above some of the letters in this challenging verse. The dots, which probably indicate the Sages' perplexity over the verse, have prompted several interpre-

tations: God will punish secret sins, but society must punish sins committed openly (Targ.). We cannot always understand God's will, but we must do what we are called on to do nonetheless (or do what we can understand

30 When all these things befall you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the LORD your God has banished you,² and you return to the LORD your God, and you and your children heed His command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day,³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. He will bring you together again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.⁴ Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, from there He will fetch you.⁵ And the LORD your God will bring you

ל וְהָיָה כִּי-יָבֹאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי
לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִשְׁבַּתְתָּ אֶל-לִבְּךָ בְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם
אֲשֶׁר הִדְיִיחְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה² וְשִׁבַּתָּ
עַד-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלוֹ כְּכֹל
אֲשֶׁר-אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה הַיּוֹם אֶתְּךָ וּבְנֶיךָ בְּכָל-
לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשֶׁךָ³ וְשָׁב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
אֶת-שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ מִכָּל-
הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפְיָצְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה⁴
אִם-יִהְיֶה נִדְחֶךָ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם
יִקְבְּצֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ⁵
וְהִבְיָאֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-

רביעי
[שני]

THE POSSIBILITY OF RESTORATION (30:1–10)

Moses now offers assurance that if Israel should be exiled, God will reinstate it if the people sincerely repent of their rebellion and return to Him and His instruction.

1. Moses refers not only to the curses described in chapter 29 but also to the blessings (and

curses) of chapter 28. By doing so he declares that if the Israelites should bring disaster on themselves, the stocktaking necessary for their restoration should include the recollection that while disobedience led to disaster, obedience led to success.

that I have set before you That I have offered you as alternatives.

5. This promise is perhaps intended to en-

and accept). We should be reluctant to judge others, for only God can see into a person's heart and know that person's motivation, whereas we can only see the person's deeds. And most imaginatively: Anonymous saints are a source of pleasure to God, but society needs role models whose virtuous lives escape anonymity and are conspicuous, that we might learn from them (Meir Yehiel of Ostrowiec).

CHAPTER 30

The Hebrew verb meaning "return" or "repent" (*shuv*) occurs seven times in verses 1–10. This repetition is appropriate to its being read at the season of penitence, the High Holy Day season.

1. the blessing and the curse The blessing within the curse. There is no calamity that does not have a kernel of blessing concealed

within it, even if it only motivates us to seek the cause of the calamity and prevent it from recurring.

2. return to Hebrew: *v'shavta ad*; literally, "turn around toward." Similarly, a phrase in verse 10 (*tashuv el*) means "return to." This variation in language reflects two stages in the process of repentance. The first stage is a realization that our behavior is wrong and requires a change of direction. This is "turning toward" God. The second stage is coming into the presence of God as the result of one's new way of life, "returning to" God (Malbim).

3. take you back in love God will help you repent by sharing with you the divine capacity for love and empathy. One who regards others compassionately will not sin against them. One who comes to love God, reciprocating God's love, will not sin against God.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

30:2. return *T'shuvah*, turning to God in repentance with a plea for forgiveness, is a *mitzvah* in its own right (see Comment to Num. 5:7).

to the land that your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your fathers.

⁶Then the LORD your God will open up your heart and the hearts of your offspring to love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live. ⁷The LORD your God will inflict all those curses upon the enemies and foes who persecuted you. ⁸You, however, will again heed the LORD and obey all His commandments that I enjoin upon you this day. ⁹And the LORD your God will grant you abounding prosperity in all your undertakings, in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil. For the LORD will again delight in your well-being, as He did in that of your fathers, ¹⁰since you will be heeding the LORD your God and keeping His commandments and laws that are recorded in this book of the Teaching—once you return to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.

¹¹Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is

יִרְשׁוּ אֲבֹתֵיךָ וִירִשְׁתָּהּ וְהֵיטֵבְךָ וְהִרְבֵּךָ
מֵאֲבֹתֵיךָ:

6 וּמָל יְהוָה יְהוּדָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת-לִבְּךָ וְאֶת-לֵבבְךָ וְרַעַךָ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיִּיךָ: ⁷ וְנָתַן יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת כָּל-הָאֲלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה עַל-אֹיְבֶיךָ וְעַל-שֹׂנְאֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר רָדְפוּךָ: ⁸ וְאַתָּה תָּשׁוּב וְשָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם: ⁹ וְהוֹתִירָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ בְּפָרִי בִטְנְךָ וּבְפָרִי בְהֵמָתְךָ וּבְפָרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ לְטוֹבָה כִּי יֵשׁוּב יְהוָה לְשׂוֹשׁ עֲלֶיךָ לְטוֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר-שָׂשׂ עַל-אֲבֹתֶיךָ: ¹⁰ כִּי תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁמֵר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ: פ

שׁוֹי ¹¹ כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם לֹא-נִפְלְאת הוּא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רַחֲקָה

courage a future generation to return to God, assuring it that the nation's sinful past will not be held against it in any way.

6. will open up your heart Literally, “will circumcise your heart.” In contrast to 10:16, where Moses exhorts Israel to circumcise its own heart, here he promises that once Israel returns to God, God Himself will remove the psycho-

logical impediments to wholehearted devotion.

CONCLUSION (vv. 11–20)

Moses assures the present generation that the terms of the Covenant are not too difficult to know, understand, and fulfill.

11. Instruction Hebrew: *ha-mitzvah*; Deuteronomy's instructions, the Teaching (*torah*).

11. this Instruction Hebrew: *ha-mitzvah ha-zot*. The Sages of the Talmud understand this as referring to the entire Torah. It is not so baffling that only the theologically astute can understand it, nor so challenging that only the spiritually gifted can fulfill it. It is well within the abilities of the average person.

To later scholars (Ramban, Albo), this phrase referred to the *mitzvah* of repentance, the subject of the previous 10 verses. It is difficult to break a bad habit, to change one's way of life. Yet people who have succeeded

in doing that will testify it can be done. A *midrash* offers us the image of a mirror. The figure we see in the mirror seems to be twice as far from us as it really is. But with every step we take toward the mirror, the reflection takes a step toward us. So it is with repentance. Our goal seems so far off, but God says to us, “Take one step toward Me and then another, and I will meet you more than half-way.”

not too baffling It is suitable for all, not only for scholars and philosophers.

it beyond reach. ¹²It is not in the heavens, that you should say, “Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?” ¹³Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?” ¹⁴No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

¹⁵See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶For I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, ¹⁸I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long

הוא: ¹²לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: ¹³ולא מעבר לים הוא לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: ¹⁴כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבך לעשתו: ^ס

¹⁵ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המוות ואת הרע: ¹⁶אשר אנכי מצוך היום לאהבה את יהוה אלהיך ללכת בדרךיו ולשמר מצותיו וחקתיו ומשפטיו וחיית ורביית וברכך יהוה אלהיך בארץ אשר אתה באשמה לרשתה: ¹⁷ואם יפנה לבך ולא תשמע ונדחת והשתחית לאלהים אחרים ועבדתם: ¹⁸הגדתי לכם היום כי אבד תאבדון לא תאריכון ימים על-

שביעי
[רביעי]

מפטיר

12. not in the heavens The proverbial inability of humans to reach heaven is conveyed by Prov. 30:4, “Who has ascended heaven and come down?” It is also conveyed by the Mesopotamian saying, “Who is tall enough to reach heaven, who is tall enough to encompass the earth?”

13. beyond the sea Mesopotamian literature describes the effort of crossing the sea as so difficult that only gods and heroes can accomplish it.

14. very close to you The instruction is not beyond reach (v. 11) but nearby. Because it is known and understood, it can be put into practice by everyone in the community.

in your mouth It is readily accessible to you, you know it by heart. (The Hebrew idiom *b'al peh* [by mouth] is equivalent to the English “by heart,” “from memory.”) This manner of speaking reflects a predominantly oral culture in which learning and review are accomplished primarily by recitation.

in your heart In your mind, known with understanding and not merely by rote.

15. Here Moses concludes his summons to the Covenant by urging the Israelites to obey it, for that is the only way, under its terms, to survive.

16. His ways The ways that He commands.

12. It is not in the heavens It is meant for everyone, not only for people willing to renounce earthly pleasures.

The Talmud tells of a dispute among scholars over a technical point of Jewish law. One scholar, Eliezer, called on God to affirm the correctness of his position. A voice from heaven proclaimed: “Why do you quarrel with Rabbi Eliezer, when he is correct?” The

other Sages, however, were not impressed. One of them quoted this phrase: “The Torah ‘is not in the heavens’—it has been entrusted to us, to study and to interpret.” Whereupon God approved of that declaration (BT BM 59b).

13. Neither is it beyond the sea It applies to our own place and time, not only to people living in other countries, in other eras.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

30:12. It is not in the heavens The Sages derive their authority to interpret and apply Scripture to changing circumstances from this verse, among others (BT BM 59b; see Deut. 17:9).

endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—²⁰by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the LORD swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹבֵר אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא
שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ¹⁹הָעֵידוּתִי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם
אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת
נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרָתָּ
בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה אֶתָּה וְזַרְעֶךָ:
²⁰לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַת בְּקוּלוֹ
וּלְדַבְּקָה-בּוֹ כִּי הוּא חַיִּיךָ וְאַרְךָ יָמֶיךָ
לְשֹׁבֵת עַל-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה
לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לָתֵת
לָהֶם: * פ

19. Choose life The Sages derived from this the obligation of a parent to teach a child a trade.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH
30:19. Choose life See Comment to Lev. 18:5.

* For the haftarah for this portion, see p. 1180.

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31

Moses went and spoke these things to all Israel. ²He said to them:

I am now one hundred and twenty years old, I can no longer be active. Moreover, the LORD has said to me, “You shall not go across yonder Jordan.” ³The LORD your God Himself will cross over before you; and He Himself will wipe out those nations from your path and you shall dispossess them.—Joshua is the one who shall cross before you, as the LORD has spoken.—⁴The LORD will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, and to their countries, when He wiped them out. ⁵The LORD will deliver them up to you, and you shall deal with them in full accordance with the Instruction that I have enjoined upon you. ⁶Be strong and resolute, be not in fear or in dread of them;

וילך
לא

וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל: ² וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם
בְּנֵי־מִאֲדָה וְעַשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנֹכִי הַיּוֹם לֹא־
אוּכַל עוֹד לְצַאת וּלְבוֹא וַיְהִי הָאָמַר אֵלַי
לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה: ³ יְהוָה
אֶלְהֵיךָ הוּא | עֹבֵר לְפָנֶיךָ הוּא־יִשְׁמָד
אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וַיִּרְשָׁתֶם
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הוּא עֹבֵר לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאִשֶׁר דִּבַּר
שְׁנֵי יְהוָה: ⁴ וַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה לָהֶם כְּאִשֶׁר עָשָׂה
לְסִיחֹן וּלְעוֹג מִלְכֵי הָאֲמֹרִי וּלְאֲרָצֵם
אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁמִיד אֹתָם: ⁵ וַנִּתְּנָם יְהוָה
לְפָנֶיכֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם לָהֶם כְּכָל־הַמִּצְוָה
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֹתְכֶם: ⁶ חֲזָקוּ וְאַמְצוּ אֶל־
תִּירְאוֹ וְאֶל־תַּעֲרָצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי | יְהוָה

Epilogue: Moses' Last Days (31:1–34:12)

Chapters 31–34 are the epilogue both to Deuteronomy and to the entire Torah. They describe the steps taken by Moses, on concluding his major

addresses, to prepare the Israelites for the future; and they end with his death and the people's mourning.

PREPARING FOR NEW LEADERSHIP (31:1–30)

MOSES' DEPARTURE AND REPLACEMENT
(vv. 1–6)

God denied Moses' request to enter the Promised Land (in 3:23–28), instructing him to appoint Joshua as his successor and then ascend the mountain where he would die. Now Moses proceeds to carry out God's instructions.

2. He said to them After saying the “things” to which verse 1 refers, Moses went on to inform the Israelites that he could not continue as their leader.

be active I can no longer come and go, perform the task at hand, exercise military leadership.
the LORD has said to me See 3:27.

3. Moses is voicing a fundamental biblical concept: God, not Joshua, will lead the Israelites across the Jordan. God's role, not Joshua's, will be the decisive factor in the conquest of the Land.

as the LORD has spoken To Moses, in 3:28.

4. To bolster the people's confidence, Moses reminds them of their recent victories (2:31–3:7).

6. The promise that God will accompany someone is a succinct assurance of divine assistance and protection; it is often given by God, or in His name, when He charges an individual with a mission, especially a military one. Trusting in God's strength, not their own, they may be fully confident of victory.

CHAPTER 31

2. one hundred and twenty years old The maximum span of human life (Gen. 6:3), which

is a notion also found in ancient Sumerian literature. This is the origin of the Jewish wish for a long and full life: “May you live to 120!” See 34:7.

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for the LORD your God Himself marches with you: He will not fail you or forsake you.

7Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: “Be strong and resolute, for it is you who shall go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their fathers to give them, and it is you who shall apportion it to them. 8And the LORD Himself will go before you. He will be with you; He will not fail you or forsake you. Fear not and be not dismayed!”

9Moses wrote down this Teaching and gave it to the priests, sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant, and to all the elders of Israel.

10And Moses instructed them as follows: Every seventh year, the year set for remission, at the Feast of Booths, 11when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Teach-

אֱלֹהֵיךָ הוּא הַהֲלִיךְ עִמָּךָ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבְךָ: פ

7 וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לְעֵינַי כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲזַק וְאַמֵץ כִּי אַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶת-הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאַבְתָּם לָתֵת לָהֶם וְאַתָּה תִּנְחַלְנָה אוֹתָם: 8 וַיְהִי הָיָה הוּא | הַהֲלִיךְ לְפָנֶיךָ הוּא יְהִי עִמָּךָ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבְךָ לֹא תִירָא וְלֹא תַחַת:

9 וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וַיִּתְּנֶהָ אֶל-הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי הַנִּשְׁאָאִים אֶת-אֲרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה וְאֶל-כָּל-זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

10 וַיִּצַו מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מִקֵּץ | שְׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּמַעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בַּחַג הַסֻּפּוֹת: 11 בְּבוֹא כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְרֹאוֹת אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר תִּקְרָא אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֹגֵד כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַזְנֵיהֶם:

רביעי 10 וַיִּצַו מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מִקֵּץ | שְׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּמַעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בַּחַג הַסֻּפּוֹת: 11 בְּבוֹא כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְרֹאוֹת אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר תִּקְרָא אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֹגֵד כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַזְנֵיהֶם:

MOSES APPOINTS JOSHUA (vv. 7–8)

Following God’s instructions (1:38, 3:28), Moses now publicly appoints Joshua as his successor.

7. Speaking to Joshua in the hearing of the people, Moses emphasizes that Joshua is one of them (“you . . . shall go with”) to avoid any implication that Joshua rather than God is the real leader. But in verse 23, God says to Joshua, “you who shall bring.” Speaking privately to Joshua, God is unconcerned about that implication.

8. The same encouragement that Moses addressed to Joshua privately in 3:22 he now addresses to him publicly, making his appointment known to all.

WRITING AND READING THE TEACHING (vv. 9–13)

Moses has finished expounding the Teaching (1:5), which he has imparted orally until now. He writes it down and arranges for its regular public reading so that the people may be reminded reg-

ularly of its contents and future generations may learn it.

9. *Moses wrote down this Teaching* The laws and other parts of Deuteronomy.

gave it to the priests . . . and to all the elders These were the religious and civic leaders of the people, who would be responsible for guiding the nation’s affairs in accordance with the Teaching and for having it read to the public every seven years. The priests were to keep the text in the Ark that was in their charge (see 31:25–26, 10:8).

10. *at the Feast of Booths* See 16:13–15. This festival attracted the largest number of pilgrims and lasted seven days. Because it came after the harvest was stored, the people would feel secure about their food supply for the coming year and could absorb the lessons of the reading with minds free of concern.

11. *in the place* Where the Feast of Booths was celebrated (16:16) and where the Ark was kept (1 Kings 8:1–9).

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

31:10–13. *Every seventh year, . . . read this Teaching aloud* The Torah takes steps to ensure that its contents would be known not only by the intellectual or priestly elite but also by the entire Jewish people, “men, women, and children.” To accomplish this even more effectively, it has been Jewish practice from very early times to read a section of the Torah in the synagogue four times each week: on Monday morning, Thursday morning, *Shabbat* morning, and *Shabbat* afternoon. We now read the entire Torah through the course of one year or, in some synagogues, three years.

ing aloud in the presence of all Israel. ¹²Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere the LORD your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching. ¹³Their children, too, who have not had the experience, shall hear and learn to revere the LORD your God as long as they live in the land that you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.

¹⁴The LORD said to Moses: The time is drawing near for you to die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may instruct him. Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁵The LORD appeared in the Tent, in a pillar of cloud,

וְהִטָּף וְגִרָף אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ
וּלְמַעַן יִלְמְדוּ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וּשְׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה
הַזֹּאת: ¹³ וּבְנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ יִשְׁמְעוּ
וּלְמַדּוֹ לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כָּל־
הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל־הָאָדָמָה
אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: פ

¹⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֵן קָרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ
לְמוֹת קְרָא אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְהִתִּיצְבוּ בְּאֹהֶל
מוֹעֵד וְאַצְוֶנּוּ וַיִּלָּךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּתִּיצְבוּ
בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: ¹⁵ וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה בְּאֹהֶל בְּעַמּוּד

חמישי
[ששי]

read Hebrew: *tikra*, in the singular; Moses often addresses the entire people in this manner. Presumably, in speaking directly here to the priests and elders (v. 9), he means that they are the ones who must either read aloud the Teaching or arrange for the reading.

this Teaching All of Deuteronomy, which can be read aloud in three to four hours.

12. women, children, and the strangers Although normally only adult male Israelites are obligated to appear at the festival, on this occasion women, children, and strangers must also attend so that all may hear their duties and rights read to them and be inspired with reverence for God. The verse, addressing the need to learn the Teaching, makes no distinction between men and women.

that they may hear and so learn to revere The Teaching's account of God's mighty deeds on behalf of Israel and its presentation of His laws

will inspire the people to venerate Him and obey the commandments.

13. The children especially, who have not experienced the wonders of the present generation, need to hear of those experiences and the lessons they impart. Conducting the impressive public reading every seven years will ensure that every child would be imbued with the Teaching soon after reaching an educable age.

GOD MEETS WITH MOSES AND JOSHUA (vv. 14–15)

God informs Moses that He will appoint Joshua as Moses' successor. This will confirm Moses' action in verses 1–8 and remove any doubt that the appointment is divinely authorized.

15. in the Tent . . . at the entrance The Septuagint reads: "The LORD came down in a cloud and stopped at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting," thereby avoiding the possible inconsistency

12. Gather the . . . women . . . that they may . . . learn Some authorities in the Talmud contend that there is no obligation to teach Torah to women. Such opinions, however, are products of the Greco-Roman view of women as intellectually weak, a notion that began to appear in Jewish sources in the 3rd century B.C.E., during the Hellenistic period. In contrast, Ben Azzai held that a man is obliged to teach his daughter Torah (JT Hag. 1:1).

14. The time is drawing near for you to die The Midrash pictures God appearing to Joshua in a cloud. When the cloud lifted, Moses asked Joshua, "What did the LORD say to you?" Joshua replied, "When the LORD spoke to you, did you share the message with me?" At that moment, Moses became reconciled to his imminent death, saying to himself, "It is a hundred times better to depart now than to be jealous of my successor" (Deut. R. 9:9).

the pillar of cloud having come to rest at the entrance of the tent.

¹⁶The LORD said to Moses: You are soon to lie with your fathers. This people will thereupon go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with them. ¹⁷Then My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them. And they shall say on that day, “Surely it is because our God is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us.” ¹⁸Yet I will keep My countenance hidden on that day, because

of the cloud being both inside the Tent and remaining outside at the entrance.

pillar of cloud The cloud is the vehicle by which God descends to earth.

COUNTERING ISRAEL'S FUTURE APOSTASY (vv. 16–22)

ISRAEL'S BETRAYAL (vv. 16–18)

16. lie with your fathers The idiom stands for “die and lie with one’s fathers.” It refers specifically to the reunion of one’s spirit after death with the spirits of one’s ancestors in Sheol, the netherworld, as in the phrase “be gathered to one’s kin” in 32:50.

go astray Literally, “fornicate,” “go whoring.”

This metaphor for apostasy reflects the understanding that the bond between God and Israel is like a marriage bond. Worship of other gods is an act of betrayal as repugnant as adultery.

forsake Me Israelite idolaters did not literally cease worshiping the Lord; they worshiped Him along with gods, as was common in polytheism. But the exclusive, monotheistic character of the re-

עָנַן וַיַּעֲמֵד עִמּוֹד הָעָנָן עַל-פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל: ס

¹⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה שׁוֹכֵב עִם-אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וְזוֹנָה | אַחֲרַי | אֱלֹהֵי גֵכַר-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא בָא-שָׁמָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְעִזְבָנִי וְהִפֵּר אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אִתּוֹ: ¹⁷ וְחָרָה אַפִּי בּוֹ בַיּוֹם-הַהוּא וְעִזְבֹתָיִם וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם וְהָיָה לְאֹכֶל וּמִצָּאָהוּ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֹא עָלַי כִּי-אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקִרְבֵּי מִצָּאוֹנֵי הָרַעוּת הָאֵלֶּה: ¹⁸ וְאָנֹכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנָי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל-הָרָעָה

lationship between God and Israel is so integral to biblical religion that the worship of any other deities is regarded as abandonment of the Lord. Any rapport the idolater continues to maintain with the Lord is viewed by the Bible as meaningless.

17. I will abandon them Punishing them in kind for abandoning Me (v. 16).

hide My countenance from them Withdraw My favor and protection; abandon them and ignore their pleas for help. (When God hides His countenance, His attentive presence, the Israelites are exposed and unprotected.)

because our God is not in our midst Israel will realize from its setbacks that it has lost divine protection. But it will not admit its own guilt and instead will complain that God is not involved, He no longer controls events and protects Israel, He has broken His promise and abandoned His people.

18. Yet I will keep My countenance hidden God is saying, “But it is because of all the evil they have done . . . that I will hide My countenance,” thus explaining that He was justified in abandoning them.

17. I will . . . hide My countenance from them To understand the *Sho-ah*, Martin Buber, who fled Germany for Palestine when the Nazis came to power, fastened on this image of God’s hiding. God is always present, but sometimes turns aside and hides the divine countenance. Terrible things happen when God’s countenance is hidden, when God’s attention is turned away.

Dov Ber of Mezeritch once found his young child crying. “I was playing hide-and-seek with my friends,” the child explained, “and I hid so well that they stopped looking for me and went away.” Dov Ber mused, “This must be how God feels, hiding the divine countenance from us to the point where some of us stop looking—and start living our lives without God.”

of all the evil they have done in turning to other gods. ¹⁹Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be My witness against the people of Israel. ²⁰When I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised on oath to their fathers, and they eat their fill and grow fat and turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and breaking My covenant, ²¹and the many evils and troubles befall them—then this poem shall confront them as a witness, since it will never be lost from the mouth of their offspring. For I know what plans they are devising even now, before I bring them into the land that I promised on oath.

²²That day, Moses wrote down this poem and taught it to the Israelites.

אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל-אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים: ¹⁹ וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁימָה בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה-לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבִנְי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ²⁰ כִּי-אָבִיאוּנוּ אֶל-הָאָדָמָה | אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְתָּיו זֶכֶת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ וְאָכַל וְשָׂבַע וְדָשַׁן וּפָנָה אֶל-אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעַבְדוּם וְנֶאֱצָוּנִי וְהִפָּר אֶת-בְּרִיתִי: ²¹ וְהִיא כִּי-תִמְצָאן אֹתוֹ רְעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְעַנְתָּה הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְפָנָיו לְעֵד כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ כִּי יִדְעֵתִי אֶת-יִצְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר הוּא עָשָׂה הַיּוֹם בְּטַרְם אָבִיאוּנוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי:

²² וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיְלַמְדָהּ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

turning to other gods That is, relying on them or displaying loyalty to them.

WRITING A POEM (vv. 19–22)

19. write down Hebrew: *kitvu lakhem*; literally, “write for yourselves” (i.e., Moses and Joshua) in the plural, although the remaining verbs in the verse (“teach it,” “put it in their mouths”) are in the singular. A written copy of the poem was made, and the intended audience heard it read aloud, as in the case of the Teaching (vv. 9–13).

put it in their mouths See Comment to 30:14. Memorization would be facilitated by the poetic form.

be My witness The poem will testify that God had treated the Israelites with justice and kindness, but that His people betrayed Him (see 32:1–18, esp. vv. 4–5). It will rebut their charge

that God violated His promise to remain with them; it will show that God’s abandonment of the Israelites was justified.

20. Their prosperity will lead them to forget God, the true source of their well-being; they will attribute their comfort to false Canaanite gods they believe responsible for fertility.

21. shall confront them . . . since it will never be lost Literally, “shall speak up . . . since it will never be forgotten.” The poem will be known by heart and will virtually speak up by itself. When the predicted disasters transpire, the poem will irresistibly spring to the lips of the people and bear witness to their guilt.

For I know what plans they are devising even now God concludes by repeating the point made at the beginning: The incidents of the Golden Calf and Baal-peor (4:3, 9:12–29) have revealed how susceptible the people are to idolatry.

19. that this poem may be My witness Does God need a poem as a reminder? The purpose of the poem would be to remind God not

to judge the people Israel harshly in the future, for God was aware of their nature (v. 27) and chose them nonetheless (Malbim).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

31:19. write down this poem This verse is the source for the commandment for each Jew to write a personal copy of the Torah. One who commissions a ritual scribe (*sofer*) to write even one letter on one’s behalf is considered to have fulfilled this *mitzvah* (BT Men. 30a). Many congregations that acquire a new Torah scroll celebrate its completion (*Siyyum Seifer Torah*) by having individuals who have contributed to its purchase fill in a letter of the Torah.

²³And He charged Joshua son of Nun: “Be strong and resolute: for you shall bring the Israelites into the land that I promised them on oath, and I will be with you.”

²⁴When Moses had put down in writing the words of this Teaching to the very end, ²⁵Moses charged the Levites who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD, saying: ²⁶Take this book of Teaching and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, and let it remain there as a witness against you. ²⁷Well I know how defiant and stiffnecked you are: even now, while I am still alive in your midst, you have been defiant toward the LORD; how much more, then, when I am dead! ²⁸Gather to me all the elders of your tribes and your officials, that I may speak all these words to them and

וַיִּצְוֵנוּ אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון וַיֹּאמֶר חֲזַק
וְאַמֵץ כִּי אַתָּה תָבִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לָהֶם וְאֲנֹכִי
אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ:

וַיְהִי | כְּכֹלֹת מֹשֶׁה לְכַתֵּב אֶת־דְּבָרֵי
הַתּוֹרָה־הַזֹּאת עַל־סֵפֶר עַד תָּמָם: ²⁵ וַיִּצְוֵנוּ
מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם נְשֹׂאֵי אֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה
לֵאמֹר: ²⁶ לְקַח אֶת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה
וְשַׂמְתֶּם אֹתוֹ מִצַּד אֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהָיָה־שָׁם בְּךָ לְעֵד: ²⁷ כִּי אֲנֹכִי
יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־מַרְיָךְ וְאֶת־עַרְפָּךְ הַקָּשָׁה הֵן
בְּעוֹדֵנִי חַי עִמָּכֶם הַיּוֹם מִמָּרִים הָיִיתֶם
עִם־יְהוָה וְאַף כִּי־אַחֲרַי מוֹתִי: ²⁸ הַקְהִילוּ
אֵלַי אֶת־כָּל־זִקְנֵי שְׁבֵטֵיכֶם וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם
וְאֲדַבְּרָה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

GOD APPOINTS JOSHUA (v. 23)

23. He charged This is the first time that God speaks directly to Joshua.

I will be with you God confirms what Moses promised Joshua in verse 8.

CONVEYING BOTH THE TEACHING AND THE POEM (vv. 24–30)

24. put down in writing Hebrew: *likhtov* . . . *al seifer*. In the Bible, *seifer* means any kind of written document—even a brief letter, a legal document, or an inscription, whether written on a sheet or scroll of papyrus or parchment, or on stone, plaster, or pottery. The *seifer* in this verse is undoubtedly a leather scroll.

this Teaching Deuteronomy.

25. Levites See verse 9.

26. Ark of the Covenant The Ark containing the two tablets of the Covenant on which the Decalogue was written (4:13; 10:1–5). Ancient treaties were commonly deposited in sanctuaries. Keeping the Teaching next to the Ark of the Covenant indicates that it embodies the principles of the covenant and is as binding as the Decalogue itself because it comes from the same divine source. The scroll with the Teaching was undoubtedly to be kept in a container, such as a jar

or a box, to protect it from damage by moisture or worms.

as a witness against you Against the Israelites, whom the Levites here represent. Moses assigns the Teaching a new function: It is to be a witness, like the poem (v. 19). Unlike the poem, however, it does not testify to Israel’s betrayal of God after settling in Canaan. He probably means that the Teaching will serve as evidence that Israel accepted the terms and conditions of the Covenant; this will enable the people to understand their misfortunes.

27. Well I know No one knows better than I, having experienced your defiance so often.

defiant and stiffnecked Moses used these terms to characterize Israel’s behavior earlier, particularly its refusal to advance on the Promised Land and the incident of the Golden Calf (see 9:13,23).

how much more, then Even Moses, despite his authority, could not restrain the Israelites while he was alive; how much more likely are they to rebel after his death.

28. Gather As the people are to be gathered to hear the Teaching (v. 12), so their leaders are to be gathered to hear the poem.

elders of your tribes Because verse 30 indicates that Moses addressed the entire people, one

24. This included the description of his own death. Moses’ final challenge, indeed the final challenge for anyone, was coming to terms with his own mortality.

that I may call heaven and earth to witness against them. ²⁹For I know that, when I am dead, you will act wickedly and turn away from the path that I enjoined upon you, and that in time to come misfortune will befall you for having done evil in the sight of the LORD and vexed Him by your deeds.

³⁰Then Moses recited the words of this poem to the very end, in the hearing of the whole congregation of Israel:

would have expected the text to contain a statement referring to all of the Israelites and not only the elders. The Septuagint has a longer reading, “the heads of your tribes, your elders, judges, and officials.”

all these words The poem.

heaven and earth to witness Heaven and earth will be the third “witness” (after the poem and the Teaching) that Israel was warned.

וְאָעִידָהּ בָּם אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ :
²⁹ כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אַחֲרַי מוֹתִי כִּי־הִשְׁחַת
 תִּשְׁחַתּוּן וְסָרְתֶם מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי
 אֶתְכֶם וְקָרָאת אֶתְכֶם הָרָעָה בְּאַחֲרִית
 הַיָּמִים כִּי־תַעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה
 לְהַכְעִיסוֹ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיכֶם :
³⁰ וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בְּאָזְנוֹ כָּל־קֶהֱל יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת עַד תָּמָם : פ

29. in time to come The situation described in the poem fits several periods in Israel’s later history, beginning with the time of the chieftains (“Judges”) after Joshua’s death.

30. This verse is the introduction to the poem in chapter 32.

whole congregation of Israel The entire nation, now formally assembled for the occasion.

הַפְטָרָה שְׁבִיעִית דְּנַחֲמָתָא

SEVENTH HAFTARAH OF CONSOLATION HAFTARAH FOR NITZAVIM

ISAIAH 61:10–63:9

(Recite on the 7th Shabbat after the 9th of Av, which is also the Shabbat before Rosh ha-Shanah. This occasion coincides with the reading of Nitzavim either alone or combined with Va-yeilekh. On the Seven Haftarot of Consolation, see p. 1032. On the Shabbat before Yom Kippur, recite the haftarah on p. 1234.)

This passage opens with the jubilant exultation of Zion after generations of desolation and exile. The city and the nation that felt abandoned and forsaken shall be espoused by God (62:5). Never again shall His people suffer defeat or disgrace. Renewal of God's beneficence (63:8–9) is the powerful theme that charges every verse with confident expectation.

The *haftarah* develops through a series of speeches that move from hopeful anticipation to thanksgiving. The shift from Zion's hope to God's advent is marked by the motif of garments, which manifest the people's new condition (cf. Isa. 52:1, "Awake, awake, O Zion! / Clothe yourself in splendor") as the redemption quickens its pace. This new reality is then mirrored in the divine garments of victory.

Marital imagery conveyed through wedding garments (61:10) is further developed in the prophet's word of encouragement. God shall take back His city and land, espousing the one and taking delight in the other: "And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (62:5). Jewish liturgy knows these words through their incorporation into the 16th-century

poem that is sung on Friday night, "L'kha Dodi."

New designations for Zion and for the Land express the new national reality (62:2,4), a transformed state of physical and spiritual renewal. As with the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, new names both create and affirm a new destiny (see Gen. 17:4–5, 35:9–12; cf. 32:29). And this transformed state is part of the recompense to come, brought by Israel's deliverer on His return to Zion (Isa. 62:11, cf. 40:10). Anticipation of this moment is the beginning of hope, which this *haftarah* celebrates. Zion's fear that "The LORD has forsaken me" (Isa. 49:14), poignantly expressed near the beginning of this *haftarah* cycle of consolation, is completely dispelled.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

This selection brings to a celebratory close the Seven *Haftarot* of Consolation. As a concluding recitation, it is replete with themes and phrases from the previous readings. For example, the call to "Clear the road [*panu derekh*] for the people" and the declaration that God comes with "reward" and "recompense" (62:10–11) echo a proclamation in the first *Haftarah* of Consolation: "Clear . . . / A road [*panu derekh*] for the LORD" who has "reward" and "recompense" with Him (Isa. 40:3,10). Repetitions like these combine to create an aura of climactic summation, at once the conclusion of consolation and the onset of redemption.

61 ¹⁰I greatly rejoice in the LORD,
My whole being exults in my God.

סא ¹⁰שׁוֹשׁ אֲשִׁישׁ בַּיהוָה
תִּגַּל נַפְשִׁי בְּאֱלֹהֵי

For He has clothed me with garments of triumph,
 Wrapped me in a robe of victory,
 Like a bridegroom adorned with a turban,
 Like a bride bedecked with her finery.
¹¹For as the earth brings forth her growth
 And a garden makes the seed shoot up,
 So the Lord God will make
 Victory and renown shoot up
 In the presence of all the nations.

כִּי הִלְבִּישׁנִי בְּגָדֵי-יִשְׁעַי
 מְעִיל צְדָקָה יַעֲטֵנִי
 כְּחַתָּן יִכְהֶן פָּאֵר
 וְכַפְלָה תַעֲרֶה כְּלִיָּהּ׃
¹¹ כִּי כְאֶרֶץ תּוֹצִיא צִמְחָהּ
 וְכַגְנֶה יִרְוַעֶיהָ תִצְמִיחַ
 כֵּן אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה
 יִצְמִיחַ צְדָקָה וּתְהִלָּה
 נִגַּד כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם׃

62 For the sake of Zion I will not be silent,
 For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still,
 Till her victory emerge resplendent
 And her triumph like a flaming torch.
²Nations shall see your victory,
 And every king your majesty;
 And you shall be called by a new name
 Which the LORD Himself shall bestow.
³You shall be a glorious crown
 In the hand of the LORD,
 And a royal diadem
 In the palm of your God.

טז לְמַעַן צִיּוֹן לֹא אֶחְשָׁה
 וּלְמַעַן יְרוּשָׁלַם לֹא אֶשְׁקוּט
 עַד-יֵצֵא כְּנֹגֶה צְדָקָה
 וְיִשׁוּעַתָּה כְּלִפִּיד יִבְעֵר׃
² וְרָאוּ גוֹיִם צִדְקָתְךָ
 וְכָל-מְלָכִים כְּבוֹדְךָ
 וְקָרָא לְךָ שֵׁם חָדָשׁ
 אֲשֶׁר פִּי יְהוָה יִקְבְּנוּ׃
³ וְהָיִיתָ עֲטֹרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת
 בְּיַד-יְהוָה
 וְצִנּוֹף וְצִנְיָף מְלוּכָה
 בְּכַף-אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

⁴Nevermore shall you be called “Forsaken,”
 Nor shall your land be called “Desolate”;
 But you shall be called “I delight in her,”
 And your land “Espoused.”
 For the LORD takes delight in you,
 And your land shall be espoused.
⁵As a youth espouses a maiden,
 Your sons shall espouse you;
 And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
 So will your God rejoice over you.

⁴ לֹא-יֵאמַר לְךָ עֲזוּבָה
 וּלֹא-רֵצָף לֹא-יֵאמַר עוֹד שְׁמָמָה
 כִּי לְךָ יִקְרָא חֲפְצֵי-בָהּ
 וּלְאַרְצֶךָ בְּעוֹלָה
 כִּי-חֲפֶץ יְהוָה הָיָה
 וְאַרְצֶךָ תִּבְעַל׃
⁵ כִּי-יִבְעַל בַּחֹר בְּתוּלָהּ
 יִבְעִלוּךָ בָּנֶיךָ
 וּמִשׁוֹשׁ חַתָּן עַל-כִּפְלֵהּ
 יִשְׂשֵׂשׂ עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

Isaiah 62:1. I will not be silent Apparently the word of the prophet, who reports that the people shall receive a new name.

6Upon your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have set watchmen,
Who shall never be silent
By day or by night.
O you, the LORD's remembrancers,
Take no rest
7And give no rest to Him,
Until He establish Jerusalem
And make her renowned on earth.

8The LORD has sworn by His right hand,
By His mighty arm:
Nevermore will I give your new grain
To your enemies for food,
Nor shall foreigners drink the new wine
For which you have labored.
9But those who harvest it shall eat it
And give praise to the LORD;
And those who gather it shall drink it
In My sacred courts.
10Pass through, pass through the gates!
Clear the road for the people;
Build up, build up the highway,
Remove the rocks!
Raise an ensign over the peoples!
11See, the LORD has proclaimed
To the end of the earth:
Announce to Fair Zion,
Your Deliverer is coming!
See, his reward is with Him,

6 על-חומתיך ירושלים
הפקדתי שמרים
כל-היום וכל-הלילה תמיד
לא יחשו
המזכרים את-יהוה
אל-דמי לבם:
7 ואל-תתנו דמי לו
עדי-כוונן ועדי-ישים את-ירושלם
תהלה בארץ:

8 נשבע יהוה בימינו
ובזרוע עזו
אם-אתן את-דגנך עוד
מאכל לאיביך
ואם-ישתו בני-נכר תירושך
אשר יגעת בו:
9 כי מאספיו יאכלהו
והללו את-יהוה
ומקבציו ישתהו
בחצרות קדשי: ס
10 עברו עברו בשערים
פנו דרך העם
סלו סלו המסלה
סקלו מאבן
הרימו נס על-העמים:
11 הנה יהוה השמיע
אל-קצה הארץ
אמרו לבת-ציון
הנה ישעך בא
הנה שכרו אתו

6. the LORD's remembrancers The "mourners of Zion" mentioned in Isa. 61:3, or perhaps others who reminded God of His promises to Israel and of Israel's present state.

8. His mighty arm The oath taken by God "by His own arm" anticipates the destruction "wrought" by His "own arm" (63:5).

10. Pass through, pass through Reformulating the "highway" theme in the first *Haftarah*

of Consolation (Isa. 40:3). There, the preparation was for the divine advent. Here, the expectation is for the return of the people from captivity. In both texts, God's "recompense" comes with Him (see Isa. 40:10, 62:11). Later tradition gave the image of removing stumbling blocks a moral and spiritual sense, thereby indicating the human participation that is required for redemption (Num. R. 15:16).

His recompense before Him.

¹²And they shall be called, “The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the LORD,”

And you shall be called, “Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken.”

וּפְעַלְתּוֹ לְפָנָיו:
¹² וְקִרְאוּ לָהֶם עַם־הַקֹּדֶשׁ
גְּאוּלֵי יְהוָה
וְלָךְ יִקְרָא דְרוּשָׁה
עִיר לֹא נִעְזָבָה: ס

63 Who is this coming from Edom,

In crimsoned garments from Bozrah—

Who is this, majestic in attire,

Pressing forward in His great might?

“It is I, who contend victoriously,

Powerful to give triumph.”

²Why is Your clothing so red,

Your garments like his who treads grapes?

³I trod out a vintage alone;

Of the peoples no man was with Me.

I trod them down in My anger,

Trampled them in My rage;

Their life-blood bespattered My garments,

And all My clothing was stained.

⁴For I had planned a day of vengeance,

And My year of redemption arrived.

⁵Then I looked, but there was none to help;

I stared, but there was none to aid—

So My own arm wrought the triumph,

And My own rage was My aid.

⁶I trampled peoples in My anger,

I made them drunk with My rage,

And I hurled their glory to the ground.”

סג מִי־זֶה | בָּא מֵאֲדוֹם

חֲמוּץ בְּגָדִים מִבּוֹצְרָה

זֶה הַדּוֹר בְּלָבוֹשׁוֹ

צֵעָה בְּרֹב כֹּחַו

אֲנִי מְדַבֵּר בְּצִדְקָה

רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ:

² מִדְּוַע אָדָם לְלָבוֹשׁךָ

וּבְגָדֶיךָ כְּדֹרֶךְ בְּגַת:

³ פְּוִרָה | דְּרַכְתִּי לְבִדִּי

וּמַעֲמִים אֵין־אִישׁ אֶתִּי

וְאֶדְרַכְכֶם בְּאִפִּי

וְאֶרְמָסֶם בְּחַמְתִּי

וַיִּזוּ נִצְחָם עַל־בְּגָדֵי

וְכָל־מְלָבוֹשֵׁי אֲגָאֲלֶתִּי:

⁴ כִּי יוֹם נָקָם בְּלִבִּי

וּשְׁנַת גְּאוּלֵי בָאָה:

⁵ וְאָבִיט וְאֵין עֹזֶר

וְאֶשְׁתוּמָם וְאֵין סוּמָךְ

וְתוֹשַׁע לִי זִרְעִי

וְחַמְתִּי הִיא סְמִכְתִּנִּי:

⁶ וְאָבוֹס עַמִּים בְּאִפִּי

וְאֶשְׁפָּרֶם בְּחַמְתִּי

וְאוֹרִיד לְאַרְץ נִצְחָם: ס

12. The Holy People Hebrew: *Am ha-Kodesh*, an intensification of the description in Deut. 7:6 (*am kadosh*, “holy people”).

Isaiah 63:1. Who is this coming from Edom In context, the query appears as that of the watchmen on the walls (62:6), awaiting the advent of the Lord.

3–5. Imagery of God trampling a vineyard and bespattered with blood (vv. 2–3) is connected with Edom and Botzrah (v. 1) by two puns:

me-Edom (from Edom) sounds like *m’uddam* (reddened, cf. v. 2), and *mi-botzrah* (from Botzrah) sounds like *mi-botzzer* (from picking grapes). In rabbinic tradition, Edom is a symbol for Rome and for Christendom (see Ibn Ezra). This identification gave the *haftarah* immediate relevance in antiquity and in the Middle Ages. Edom’s downfall is here attributed to divine vengeance against its evil conduct and to Israel’s merit (Rashi).

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary

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7I will recount the kind acts of the LORD,
The praises of the LORD—
For all that the LORD has wrought for us,
The vast bounty to the House of Israel
That He bestowed upon them
According to His mercy and His great kind-
ness.

8He thought: Surely they are My people,
Children who will not play false.
So He was their Deliverer.

9In all their troubles He was troubled,
And the angel of His Presence delivered
them.

In His love and pity
He Himself redeemed them,
Raised them, and exalted them
All the days of old.

7 חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה | אֲזַכִּיר
תְּהִלַּת יְהוָה
כָּל־עֲלַם אֲשֶׁר־גִּמְלָנוּ יְהוָה
וְרַב־טוֹב לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲשֶׁר־גִּמְלָם
כְּרַחֲמָיו וּכְרַב חֲסָדָיו:
8 וַיֵּאמֶר אֶן־עַמִּי הֵמָּה
בָּנִים לֹא יִשְׁקֻרוּ
וַיְהִי לָהֶם לְמוֹשִׁיעַ:
9 וּבְכָל־צָרָתָם | לֹא לוֹ צָר
וּמַלְאָךְ פָּנָיו הוֹשִׁיעֵם
בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ וּבְחַמְלָתוֹ
הוּא גֹאֲלָם
וַיִּנְטָלֵם וַיִּנְשָׂאֵם
כָּל־יְמֵי עוֹלָם:

7–9. In ending this prophetic teaching with divine praise, the Sages emphasized the positive—as was often their preference. In Isaiah, the conclusion of this passage (vv. 10–14) mentions Israelite rebellion and divine disfavor (followed by the return of grace).

The Hebrew text of verses 8–9 is difficult and ambiguous. The *k'rei* (Masoretic text as read) with its trope (cantillation marks) seems to refer to God as “their Deliverer” and then states that “In all their troubles He was troubled” (literally, “trouble was His [*lo*]”). This reading understands *lo* to be a possessive pronoun, spelled לוֹ. (This theology has enjoyed an active midrashic life. Rabbinic teachings have long held that God in heaven takes part in Israel’s sorrows, while the *Sh’khinah* [divine Presence] on earth shares in Israel’s period

of exile.) Unfortunately, it then sets up two apparently contradictory remarks: “the angel . . . delivered them,” but “He Himself redeemed them.”

On the other hand, the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation) and the *k'tiv* (Masoretic text as written) present the passage as a continuous thought: “He was their Deliverer in all their troubles; no [*lo*] angel or messenger [was with Him], [but] His own Presence delivered them.” This reading understands *lo* to be a negative particle, spelled לֹא. This version features a clear structure and verbal correlations. Moreover, it emphasizes God’s direct, exclusive deliverance. (This theology is echoed in the *Pesah Haggadah*, through its well-known statement that God alone delivered the nation from Egypt: “I and no angel, I and no messenger.”)