

## ספר בראשית

## Bereishis/Genesis

### טעמי המקרא / Cantillation Marks

פִּשְׁטָא מְנַח זֶרְקָא מְנַח סְגוּלָּה מְנַח | מְנַח רְבִיעִי מְהַפֵּךְ  
פִּשְׁטָא זֶרְקָא קֶטֶן זֶרְקָא גְדוֹל מְרַבָּא טַפְחָא מְנַח אֲתַנְחַתָּא  
פֶּזֶר תְּלִישָׁא קֶטְנָה תְּלִישָׁא גְדוֹלָה קְדָמָא וְאַזְלָא  
אֲזַלָּא גְרֵשׁ גְרֵשִׁים דְרָגָא תְּבִיר יְתִיב פְּסִיק | סוּף־פְּסוּק:  
שְׁלֹשֶׁת קַרְנֵי־פָרָה מְרַבָּא כְּפוּלָה יֵרַח־בֶּן־יֹזָבָב:



## PARASHAS BEREISHIS

- 1** <sup>1</sup>In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth — <sup>2</sup>when the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters — <sup>3</sup>God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
- The Beginning:* <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and God separated between the light and the darkness.
- First Day:* <sup>5</sup>God called to the light: "Day," and to the darkness He called: "Night." And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

essence of creation is not primarily the story of mountains and valleys, of oceans and deserts, or even of human and animal life. Creation is the story of the birth of Israel, the nation that inherited the task of Adam and Eve. In this first Book of the Torah we trace Israel's story from the life of Abraham and Sarah until their offspring develop into a family and then a nation.

Ramban comments that the Torah relates the story of the six days of Creation *ex nihilo* to establish that God is the sole Creator and to refute the theories of those who claim that the universe is timeless or that it came into being through some massive coincidence or accident. This is implicit in the narrative of the first six days, for Scripture gives no specific details regarding the process of Creation, just as it makes no mention of the angels or other incorporeal beings. The story of Creation tells of when the major categories of the universe came into existence only in very general terms, because its primary purpose is to state that nothing came into being except at God's command.

**1. בראשית ברא אלהים** — *In the beginning of God's creating.* This phrase is commonly rendered *In the beginning God created*, which would indicate that the Torah is giving the sequence of Creation — that God created the heaven, then the earth, darkness, water, light, and so on. Rashi and *Ibn Ezra* disagree, however, and our translation follows their view.

According to Ramban and most other commentators, however, the verse is indeed chronological. It begins with a general statement: *At the very first moment* — from absolute nothingness — *God created the heaven and the earth*, i.e., the basic substance from which He then fashioned the universe as we know it, as expounded in the following verses. The chapter continues the day-to-day process until it reaches its climax in the Creation of Man — the prime goal of Creation.

Homiletically, the word *בראשית* can be rendered *בשכיל ראשית*, [the world was created] for the sake of [the things that are called] "beginning," meaning that God brought the world into being for the sake of things that are of such basic importance that the Torah calls them *ראשית*, first or beginning. These things are the Torah and Israel; thus the reason for Creation is that Israel would accept and fulfill the Torah (Rashi). The Midrash adds other things called *ראשית*, such as the commandments regarding the firstborn, first fruits, and gifts to the Kohanim, which must be taken from crops and dough before they may be consumed. The implication is that the purpose of Creation is to enable Jews to dedicate their first efforts and successes to the service of God.

**אלהים** — God. This Name denotes God in His Attribute of

Justice [מלך תדין], as Ruler, Lawgiver, and Judge of the world. By using this Name exclusively in the narrative of Creation, the Torah indicates that Justice is the ideal state of the world, meaning that Man should be treated exactly as he deserves, according to his deeds. However, because Man is not virtuous enough to survive such harsh scrutiny, God added His Attribute of Mercy to the story of Creation, so that judgment would be tempered with mercy (see 2:4).

**2. חשך** — *Darkness*. This is not merely the absence of light, but a specific creation, as is clearly stated in *Isaiah 45:7*: *יוצר אור ובורא חשך, He Who forms the light and creates darkness*. This is also indicated by the Sages' characterization that until light and darkness were separated from one another, they functioned "in a mixture," implying that patches of light and darkness were intermixed with one another.

**3.** This verse begins a detailed chronology of Creation, but, as noted above, the narrative of Creation is beyond our comprehension. The commentary will be limited to a brief selection from pertinent commentaries.

**4-5. בראשית . . . היה אור** — *God saw that . . . was good.* In the plain sense, God saw that the light was good, so He decreed that it should not be mingled with the darkness, but should function independently during the day (Rashi). Ramban maintains that the term *saw that it was good* means that God expressed His approval and decreed permanence to the phenomenon under discussion, in this case that the light required no further perfection. Then (v. 5), "God summoned the light and appointed it for duty by day, and He summoned the darkness and appointed it for duty by night" (Pesachim 2a).

According to the Midrash, the original light was of an intense spiritual quality and God saw that the wicked were unworthy of enjoying it. Therefore, He separated it from the rest of the universe and set it aside for the use of the righteous in the World to Come (Rashi).

Throughout the narrative, the term *that it was good* means that the creation of the item under discussion was completed. Thus, for example, the light is described as good, because its existence and function were now final. The waters, however, did not receive their final form until the third day, when they were gathered into seas and oceans. Consequently, they were not called good until the third day (Rashi to v. 7).

**5. ויהי ערב ויהי בקר** — *And there was evening and there was morning.* The first day is now complete. Scripture uses the cardinal number *אחד*, one day, instead of the ordinal number *ראשית*, first day, to indicate that on this day God was One



*Second Day* <sup>8</sup> God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate between water and water." <sup>9</sup> So God made the firmament, and separated between the waters which were beneath the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so.

<sup>8</sup> God called to the firmament: "Heaven." And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

*Third Day* <sup>9</sup> God said, "Let the waters beneath the heaven be gathered into one area, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called to the dry land: "Earth," and to the gathering of waters He called: "Seas." And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: herbage yielding seed, fruit trees yielding fruit each after its kind, containing its own seed on the earth." And it was so. <sup>12</sup> And the earth brought forth vegetation: herbage yielding seed after its kind, and trees yielding fruit, each containing its seed after its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

*Fourth Day* <sup>14</sup> God said, "Let there be luminaries in the firmament of the heaven to separate between

say כי טוב, it was good. Rashi explains that this term is used only for a finished creation, but the waters, which were begun on the second day, were not completed until the third day. The Midrash gives a different reason. The waters were divided on this day, symbolizing strife, which occurs when the bonds that unite people are broken. Schism and dispute cannot be called good. *Resisei Layla* points out that because strife began on the second day, the psalm sung by the Levites during the Monday Temple service — which is also the Song of the Day in the Monday morning prayers — was one composed by the sons of Korach, the instigator of strife against Moses and Aaron.

*Rabbeinu Bachya* also comments on why the Torah does not state that the achievements of the second day were good. He states that this is because the creation of the angels and the firmament, though momentous, was not the prime purpose of Creation. Rather, the prime purpose of Creation is the "lower world," the world where Man does his work of bringing God's plan to fruition. Only when Man's interests are served do the heavens and the heavenly beings justify their existence; "the righteous are greater than the ministering angels" (*Sanhedrin* 93a).

**9-13. Third day.** Up to now, the entire earth was submerged under water. On the third day, God decreed boundaries for the water, making way for the development of land, vegetation, animal life, and, ultimately, Man.

Scarcely had God uttered the words, "Let the waters . . . be gathered" when mountains and hills appeared, and the waters collected in the deep-lying valleys. But the water threatened to flood the earth until God forced it back into the seabed, walling in the sea with sand (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*; *Zohar*). This aspect of God's activity means that He determines the proper limits — to Creation itself and to an individual human being's resources and sufferings. The concept of God as determining what is sufficient and setting limits is alluded to in His Name *Shaddai*, from the word יָכוֹל, enough, or sufficient. As Talmudic literature puts it: "כי שָׁאוֹר לֵיטוּלָוּנֵינוּ, He Who said to His world, 'It is enough!'" [See 17:1.]

**9. וַתֵּרָאֵה הַיַּבֵּשָׁה** — And let the dry land appear. The earth had been created on the first day, but it was neither visible nor dry until the waters were commanded to assemble in their

designated areas (*Rashbam*).

**10. אֶרֶץ** — Earth. This name is from רָצוּן, to run, to rush, or רָצוּה, to desire. God began by creating one rock; and it rushed to expand, in order to fulfill His desire (*Bereishis Rabbah* 5:7).

**11. עֵשֶׂב קוֹרֵיץ זָרַע** — Herbage yielding seed. God commanded that the vegetation should grow its own seed within itself, so that it could be planted elsewhere (*Rashi*).

**12. וַתֵּבֹא הָאֲרֶץ** — And the earth brought forth. The Talmudic sage Rav Assi noted the apparent contradiction between this verse and the Torah's statement that nothing had grown prior to the creation of Adam (2:5). He explains that the herbs began to grow on the third day, as they had been commanded, but stopped before they broke through the soil. It remained for Adam to pray for them, whereupon rain fell and the growth was completed. This teaches that God longs for the prayers of the righteous (*Chullin* 60b).

**14-19. Fourth day.** The luminaries, which had been created on the first day, were set in place on the fourth (*Chagigah* 12a). Indeed, all the potentials of heaven and earth were created on the first day but each was set in place on the day when it was so commanded (*Rashi*).

The *Vilna Gaon* notes that the creations of the first three days and those of the next three days paralleled and complemented one another. Light was created on the first day, and the luminaries were set in place on the fourth. The seas and atmosphere were created on the second day, and aquatic and bird life were created on the fifth. The dry land and vegetation were created on the third, and populated on the sixth.

The Midrash notes this phenomenon and comments that the Sabbath came and protested to God, as it were, saying, "You have given a 'mate' to each of the days, but You have not given me a mate." God responded that the Jewish people would be its mate, because Israel would accept the commandment to observe the Sabbath. *Bais HaLevi* explains the Sabbath's plaint. The items completed on the first three days were implemented on the next three days, but what would bear the message of the Sabbath that God is the Creator Who brought the world into being in six days and rested on the seventh? God replied that Israel would declare that testimony — it would be the mate of the Sabbath.



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