
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER mail.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for Self Study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT NOACH

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

SIGNIFICANT NAMES

1. To the best of your memory, why was Noach named 'Noach'?

After you answer this question, see 5:28-29!

In your opinion, does this Biblical reason for Noach's name have anything to do with the Flood? If so, explain why & attempt to support your answer. If not, explain why not.

Next, review Adam ha-rishon's punishment, as described in 3:17-19. Can you relate this in any way to the reason for Noach's name as described in 5:29? [Relate as well to 4:11-12!]

[If it's not Shabbos, a calculator will now come in handy.]

Was Adam ha-rishon still alive when Noach was born? If so, how old was he? [Base your answer on the genealogies recorded in Breishit chapter 5!]

How old was Adam when Lemech (Noach's father) was born? [Was Adam still alive?]

Again, base your answer on 5:1-28.

Based on the above questions, can you explain why Lemech may have named his son 'Noach' (as explained in 5:29)?

2. In your opinion, why do you think that Noach named one of his children **Shem**? In your answer, relate to 4:26 (& 12:8)!

Relate this as well to Noach's blessing to Shem in 9:26!

Relate this as well to the famous Midrash of Chazal that **Shem** established the first Yeshiva, together with his great grandson Ever!

3. Based on the relative life spans of Shem's offspring (as described in 11:10-25), can you explain why specifically Ever is identified as the 'second Rosh Yeshiva'?

Based on the genealogies in chapter 10, were Shem and/or Ever alive during the life of Avraham? Were either alive during the lifetimes of Yitzchak and Yaakov?

Then, note the special relationship between Shem & Ever, as implicit from 10:21, and from the focus specifically on Ever's offspring (even though he was Shem's great grandson) in 10:21 thru 10:31. [Note as well how the average 'life-span' changes after the life of Ever.]

Finally, note the names that Ever gives to his two sons. Do they suggest any 'prophetic' potential?

For an interesting discussion of this topic, see Rashi on 10:25; Seforno on 10:21 & 10:25, and Radak on 10:25.

4. Can you suggest a reason for the Biblical names of Noach's two other children, **Cham & Yefet**? [Note Ibn Ezra on 9:27.]

Relate to the countries into which their children dispersed, as described in 10:1-15.

As you review those names, attempt to identify the various continents to where this dispersion took place.

Does this correspond to anything that you are familiar with from world history?

THE LAND OF 'CANAAN'

5. Review chapter 10, noting its primary topic based on 10:1 and 10:32; and how it divides into three 'parshiot'. As you study this chapter, attempt to identify the primary topic of each 'parshia'. Did the three 'parshiot' relate to the three 'sub-topics' that you expected to find?

How do these parshiot correspond to Noach's three sons?

Does there appear to be anything 'non-symmetric'? If so, can you explain why?

Can you explain why an entire parshia is dedicated to

Canaan and his children and the borders of their land? Do we find this type of detail in relation to any other of Noach's grandchildren?

In your answer, relate to Breishit 17:7-8 and the primary theme of Sefer Breishit. Relate as well to Shmot 6:2-4, and to when and why Sefer Breishit was given to Am Yisrael. [See also first Rashi on Chumash.]

THE FIRST ZIONIST

6. Review 11:26-32. Note how the Torah informs us that Terach planned to 'make aliya' to Eretz Canaan, even **before** God commanded Avraham to do so in 12:1-3. Is there any reason given for this decision?

In your opinion, is it possible that the reason for Terach's original journey to Canaan was because of God's commandment to Avraham Avinu (as described in 12:1-3)?

See the commentaries of Seforno, Ibn Ezra, and Radak (on 11:31); as they deal with this topic.

Does Terach ever reach Eretz Canaan? If not, can you explain why he did not? Later on (in Sefer Breishit), do we find that the other descendants of Terach, such as Betuel & Lavan, are still residing in Charan? Can you explain why?

FAMILY TIES

7. Review 11:27-29. Based on these psukim, determine who were Haran's three children. Who took care of each of them after he died? Be sure that you can explain how and why!

Based on these psukim, can you explain why Chazal identify Yiska as Sara? Relate as well to 12:13, 20:5, and 20:12. See Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Radak (on 11:29)!

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)

Ila - Shiur #1: The primary theme of Sefer Breishit

[In our introductory shiur for Sefer Breishit, we concluded with a set of questions showing a methodology for studying the theme of Sefer Breishit. Be sure to complete those questions before continuing.]

1. If you have adequate time (and patience), make a (vertical) list of the primary topic of each of the 'parshiot' from the beginning of Sefer Breishit through chapter 13. While doing so, summarize each parshia in one short phrase. [Remember, only one line for each parshia.]

Then, review your list, and group the parshiot together into larger blocks that share a common topic. For example, the seven days of creation would group together, as would the lists of "toladot" that we find in chapters five and ten.

Let's consider these titles (that you have given for these 'groups of parshiot') as sub-topics. Then, continue this process once again by making a list of all of your 'sub-topics' - to see if you can identify a more general topic that would group some of these sub topics together. [You will notice that you are actually building an outline for Sefer Breishit.]

[Alternately, if you don't have time for the above, then simply attempt to make an outline of the main topics in Sefer Breishit, up until chapter 13. Attempt to ascertain the logic of progression of these topics.]

2. In your study of chapter five, you should have noticed a certain 'template' that repeats itself in almost every individual 'parshia'. Try to create a blank 'template' that would reflect the 'form' of each of these 'parshiot'.

In what way does the 'parshia' that begins with 5:28-29 slightly deviate from this pattern? Can you explain why? [See Rashi & Chizkuni on 5:28 / see also Ibn Ezra.]

How does the 'parshia' that begins with 5:32 deviate from the pattern found in all the parshiot of 'toladot' that preceded it?

In your opinion, do these psukim relate to the previous unit (i.e. the story of Gan Eden); or to the unit that follows (i.e. the story of the Flood, or to both (or to neither)?

Can you explain why chapter six begins where it does? Do you agree with this chapter division, or is the 'parshia' division more 'accurate'?

3. In your outline of sub-topics, you surely noticed that lists of "toladot" appear several times in the first 12 chapters.
[To verify this, note how 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27 are all psukim that introduce parshiot that also begin with a statement introducing "toladot".]

In your opinion, do these lists 'conclude' the preceding topics or do they 'introduce' the forthcoming topics? [This question may cause you to rethink (or redo) your outline.]

Then, see 9:28-29, noting how these psukim relate to 5:1-31 and the 'template' discussed in the above question)! How does this observation help you answer the above question in regard to the thematic connection between the "toladot" and the stories that follow them?

4. Attempt to identify **one** general topic that summarizes the entire story that follows each set of toladot from chapter two thru twelve. After constructing a list of these topics, see if these topics relate in any manner to how God intervenes in the history of mankind? Does these topics relate as well to what God 'expects' from mankind? If so, explain.

In your answer, consider the progression of topic that develops from one major unit to the next. Note as well how the lists of "toladot" are usually followed by stories that relate divine retribution ['sechar ve-onesh'].

Attempt to find thematic significance in this pattern.

5. Note how the sub-topic that begins in chapter 12 - which follows the list of "toladot" in chapter 11 - focuses on God's choice of Avraham Avinu, and appears to quite different than all the previous sub-topics thus far in Sefer Breishit.

How can this observation help provide us with a thematic explanation for **why** Avraham Avinu is chosen by God (and for what purpose)? Considering the primary topic of Sefer Breishit from chapter twelve until its conclusion, can this help you suggest an overall **theme** for the entire Sefer?

6. Note that at the end of each major section of your outline, there is a story that relates in some manner or other to the word 'shem'. For example, see 4:26, 9:26, 11:4, and 12:8.

Explain what the word "shem" refers to in each example.

In 4:26 and 12:8, explain the meaning of the phrase 'likro be-shem Hashem' in its context, [See Ramban on 12:8, Rashi & Seforno on 4:26.]

Based on 4:26 and this context, attempt to explain why Noah may have named one of his children Shem! What was his hope for this child? [Relate to 9:26, and see Radak!]

7. Note that the word 'HuChal' [or a similar "shoresh"] is used several times in Parshiot Noach and Breishit:

- 4:26 - "az **huchal** likro be-shem Hashem"
- 6:1 - "vayehi ki **hechel** ha-adam larov al pnei ha-adama..."
- 9:20 - "va-**yachel** Noach ish ha-adama..."
- 10:8 - "...Nimrod, hu **hachel** lihiyot gibbor ba-aretz..."
- 11:6 - "... ve-zeh **hachilam** la'asot...."

In each of these cases, the simple meaning of the word is to 'begin', yet each of the related stories all relate to some sort of 'downfall' of mankind. To verify this statement, review those psukim and their context.

Relate this to Chazal's interpretation of 'huchal' in 4:26. See Rashi, Rasag, Ibn Ezra, and Sforno.

See also Rambam Sefer Mada, Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:1.

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Ibb for Shiur #2: Parshat Noach / The MABUL - pre & post A Divine Duality

1. In Breishit 6:5-8, God declares His intention to destroy all of mankind, and provides a reason for this decision (note also how these psukim form an independent 'parshia'). Then, in 6:11-13 we find yet another declaration of God's intent to destroy the world, but phrased somewhat differently.

Compare the reasons given for the planned destruction in these two parallel 'parshiot'. Are they the same or different? If they are the same, explain the reason for the repetition. If they are different, explain the primary differences between them.

Is there any apparent thematic need for these two parallel passages?

2. As you review these two 'parshiot' once again, note the different Names that the Torah uses to describe God in each respective 'parshia'. What is the significance of this 'switch'?

Relate your answer to our discussion of the two stories of Creation presented in the first two chapters of Sefer Breishit?

3. Next, compare God's commandment to Noah in 6:13-22, to His commandment in 7:1-5. Again, what Name does the Torah use to describe God in the two passages? Again, what is similar and what is different? [Note the opening and closing psukim of each unit.]

4. Finally, notice God's instructions to Noah **after** the Mabul: i.e. compare 8:20-21 to 6:5-8, and compare 9:9-17 to 6:11-19. Relate this to your answer to the above questions.

A New Beginning

5. After the Mabul, (in 9:1-7) God presents Noah with a set of instructions that will now guide mankind's behavior. Review these psukim. Would you consider them **mitzvot**? If so, how many mitzvot do they include? If not, how would you define them?

6. Then, compare these psukim to God's instructions to Man after his creation (on the sixth day) in 1:28-31.

What is similar and what is different? Would you consider this a 'contrasting parallel'? If so, explain how.

7. Based on the events of the **mabul**, can you explain the reason for this 'new' relationship between man and God?

Would you say that man is now on a 'higher' or 'lower' level?

[Relate to the phrase 'yerek eisev' and its context in both 9:3 and 1:29-30!]

8. What other parallels can you find between the story of Creation as detailed in the first chapter of Sefer Breishit and the Torah's description of the events that conclude the Mabul in 8:1-9:29? Can you suggest a reason for this parallel?

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PART III - PARSHANUT

THE FIRST COVENANT 've-hakimoti et briti'

1. Carefully review 6:17-21 and attempt to explain the flow of topic in these psukim. In your opinion what covenant does the word 'brit' in 6:18 refer to? Up to this point in Chumash, have we ever encountered any sort of a brit?

Did you understand this brit as a one-sided **promise** by God, or a two-sided '**deal**' between man & God?

How does this affect your answer to the above question?

Next, review 9:8-17 (and its context). Is the brit described in 9:8-17 (i.e. brit ha-keshet) the same brit that God refers to in 6:18?

Explain why yes, or why no - based on both thematic and textual considerations.

2. Now, see Rashi on 6:18.

How does Rashi understand this brit? Note how his commentary is based on 'simple pshat! Be sure that you understand how (and why) his commentary is based on 6:21.

How would Rashi answer question #1 above?

3. Next, see Ibn Ezra on 6:18.

According to Ibn Ezra, how do the parallel [but different] stories relating to the "meraglim" in Bamidbar and Devarim help explain this pasuk (i.e. 6:18) based on what will be explained later on in 9:8-17?

How does he explain specifically what this brit is referring to? Be sure that you can explain how his commentary is based on 6:17 and 6:19.

Finally, note that immediately afterward Ibn Ezra makes another statement ('ve-hakarov alai...'), claiming that this brit refers to brit ha-keshet. Does this contradict his first explanation, or complement it? Explain why Ibn Ezra adds this statement (based on 9:9-17.)

Towards the end of his peirush, Ibn Ezra explains what the word "brit" stems from. Relate this once again to question #1 above. According to this interpretation, what are the 'two sides' of the brit with Noach?

3. Next, see Ramban on 6:18. Note that he first he quotes Ibn Ezra, then he offers **two** interpretations of his own, one 'be-derech ha-pshat' and the second 'al derech ha-emet'. [Be sure that you understand the differences between them, and how they relate to questions #1 & #2 above!

Note that what Ramban refers to as "pshat" is based on 6:19. Can you explain why he calls this pshat? [Can you learn from this what Ramban means when he says a certain peirush is pshat?]

Similarly, note how what Ramban refers to as 'derech ha-emet' is based on the Torah's use of the concept of brit in other parshiot, and its connection to the overall theme of Sefer Breishit. [Can this help you understand what Ramban means when he speaks of derech ha-emet?]

Pru-u-revu - Be Fruitful and Multiply

4. Review 9:1-7, noting how 9:1 relates to 9:7. Can you explain why "pru u-revu" is repeated twice? [Relate also to 1:22 & 1:28.]

See Rashi on 9:7. What does Rashi mean when he relates to the 'pshat' and the 'drash' of these two psukim?

Next, see Ramban. What does Ramban mean when he states 'pshuto ke-midrasho'. Does this agree with Rashi, or disagree?

How (and why) does Ramban relate to 1:22 & 1:28 in his commentary? How does he explain the source for the Midrash that Rashi quotes, equating one who intentionally refrains from having children to a murderer. [Relate to 1:6]

Finally, see Chizkuni; note that he offers three interpretations. Attempt to explain the reason for each. [In other words, what exegetic principle does each interpretation stem from?] Relate to:

- a) the overall topic of Parshat Noach
- b) the previous pasuk
- c) the repetition from 9:1. [See also Radak.]

DISPERSING & GATHERING

5. Note that the final pasuk in chapter ten describes how the grandchildren of Noach dispersed. Then, in 11:1-9, we find that the nations had gathered together (see 11:1), and then later, in the aftermath of the Tower of Babel incident, God caused them to disperse (see 11:7-9).

In your opinion, what was the actual order of these events? In other words, does 11:1-9 come to explain how 10:32 came about, or did the gathering of nations (as described in 11:1) take place after they had originally dispersed (as described in 10:32)?

See Ramban on 11:2! Note how he relates to each possibility. Note as well how the Ramban explains the deeper meaning of this entire incident in 11:2. Read this Ramban carefully, and relate his commentary to this week's shiur!

THE BUILDERS' SIN

6. Review 11:1-4, noting how these psukim explain what the builders of the Tower of Babel did, even though it is not quite clear what they did wrong.

Based on the psukim alone, is there any 'hint' to what they did that angered God?

In the classic commentaries, we find a wide range of opinions. First see Rashi (on 11:1) noting how he finds fault with their original intentions, as reflected in the opening pasuk.

In contrast, see Rashbam (on 11:4) where he focuses on the reason they themselves give for building the city (in 11:4); and

hence bases his interpretation on the parallel wording of their punishment (see 11:8 /"pen nafotz" vs. "va'yafetz Hashem otam"); and God's original commandment to man that he 'spread out' and fill the earth (see 1:28).

[See similar interpretations in Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni on 11:1 thru 11:4. Note as well how they are slightly different.]

Then, see Ramban on 11:1, noting how and why he first disagrees with Rashbam and Ibn Ezra. [Be sure you understand why he refers to them as "rodfei ha'pshat" - and then explains why their explanation can not be "pshat"!] Afterward, Ramban presents his own presentation, basing it on the Torah's use of the word "shem" in 11:4. Note as well how Ramban's approach follows the direction of the TSC shiur on this topic (see this week's shiur on Parshat Noach).

Finally, see Seforno on 11:4, noting how he also focuses on the phrase "v'naaseh lanu shem" to find their sin - and how he relates this his commentary on 4:26!

be-hatzlacha,
menachem