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

Questions for PARSHAT BREISHIT

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

1. As you study Parshat Breishit, you'll probably notice several instances when NAMES are given, either by God or by man. As your review the first two chapters, make note of each instance when a name is given; then see if you can discern a pattern.

For example, see Breishit 1:5, 1:8, 1:10, AND 5:1-2, noting the names that God Himself gives to His various Creations. Note especially on which days (and stages) of creation these names are given (and on what days God does not give names).

Is there a pattern?

In what manner to those creations (to which God gave names) relate to our daily life, and man's relationship with God?

2. Next, review chapter two, noting what (or who) God gives names to. Then review 2:18-25, noting that man also gives names to certain items of Creation.

What is the meaning of these names that man gives, and (in your opinion) how does this relate to man's relationship with those creations.

3. In our daily lives, we use names when addressing others. Explain the underlying reason why people give significance to names, and why they are more meaningful than calling someone by simply an identification number (or just 'hey you').

How (and why) does a 'name' often relate to the nature of a relationship between individuals? For example, can you explain why we often find that people who share a more intense relationship (of either love or hate) often use 'special' names?

How could this phenomenon relate to the above questions, i.e. in regard to the names that both God and man give in the story of Creation?

4. Note the names given to Adam's children in 4:1-2. Can you cite other examples in Chumash where we find not only a name being given to a child, but also a reason for that name? Can you explain why this is so common?

CALLING IN GOD'S NAME!

5. Now, carefully read last two psukim of chapter four (4:25-26). Who is naming these children, and what is the meaning of each name?

Then, pay careful attention to the final phrase - "uz huchal l'kro b'shem Hashem". Attempt to explain what this phrase means, especially what it means to 'call out in God's Name'.

In this pasuk, did you understand that man is giving (or not giving) a name to God? Based on the above questions, explain why this may be significant. [The various commentaries on this pasuk are discussed in the Parshanut section below.]

6. With 4:26 in mind, note the name of Noach's 'most important' son (see 5:32, i.e. the one who receives the best blessing in Breishit 9:25-27). Attempt to explain the significance of "Shem"'s name, and why Noach may have chosen this name for his son.

Based on 4:26, what do you think was Noach's hope for the future of this son? Did anyone 'special' ever emerge from SHEM's descendants (note Breishit 11:10-26!)?

7. Finally, note in 12:5-8 how Avraham 'calls out in God's Name' immediately upon his arrival in Eretz Canaan, i.e. after he builds a MIZBAYACH in Bet-el. Note also 13:1-4!

Can you explain why this may (or must) be significant?

[Be sure to see Ramban on 12:8!]

8. Based on these questions, what in your opinion is the connection between God giving a name, and man giving a name? Can you identify an ultimate goal in this process?

Relate to Tzefania 3:8-9!

[The TSC shiurim on Parshiot Noach & Lech Lcha will relate to the topic alluded to in these questions.]

THE GENEALOGIES OF CAIN vs. ENOSH

9. Review 4:17-19, noting the names of the seven generations that follow Cain (i.e. from Chanoch thru Lemech/ father of Tuval Kayin). Then compare these names to the seven generations from Enosh found in chapter 5 (i.e. from Keynan until Lemech / father of Noach)!

Can find a parallel for each name? Note how some names are almost identical, while others are slightly different! In your opinion, is there any significance behind these parallels?

See Rashi on 4:22 where he explains the significance of Tuval Cain's name! Relate this to the above parallel.

10. Next, note how Enosh is mentioned at the conclusion of chapter four, including the very intriguing mention that in his lifetime, man began [to profane?] calling in [to] the Name of God (see 4:25-26, noting the wide range of interpretations of this pasuk). Relate this pasuk (and its ambiguity) to the above parallel of names between the genealogies of Enosh & Cain, as well as to the questions above!

11. Next, review 4:19-22, noting not only the sons of Lemech and their 'professions', but also the name of his daughter 'Naama'!

Is there any explicit reason for the mention of Naama's name? Based on the 'professions' of her brothers, would you expect for there to be something special about her as well?

Note Rashi on 4:22, where he quotes Chazal's interpretation that Naama was the wife of Noach! Based on the parallel list of names noted in the question above, what do you think led Chazal to that conclusion?

In what manner does Naama's marriage to Noach reflect the continuity of 'professional society' after the Flood. [Note who were the 'uncles' of Shem, Cham & Yefet!]

12. Finally, review 4:23-24, where it seems as though Lemech had 'accidentally' killed someone (or possibly two people). Can you suggest any logical reason for the Torah's mention of this conversation between Lemech and his wives?

How does it relate to the early details in chapter four?

Then, if you have ample time, see the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban on these two psukim; noting how each commentator offers a totally different interpretation! Note however, how each commentary relates back to Cain (the opening topic of this chapter); and how both Ibn Ezra and Ramban relate to the fact that seven generations have passed!

Attempt to relate the opinions of these commentators to the topics discussed in the above questions, and to the purpose (or underlying theme) of Sefer Breishit as a book of "nevuah".

YESHAYAHU'S 'COMMENTARY' ON SEFER BREISHIT!

13. Review Yeshayahu 42:5-6; which just so happens to be the first two psukim of the Haftara for Parshat Breishit - noting the rather obvious parallel to Breishit 2:7.

Attempt to explain how Yeshayahu may be relating to an overall theme in Sefer Breishit - in regard to purpose of the Creation of man, and to the purpose of God's choice of Am Yisrael to become His nation.

As you study this Haftara, note how it relates to the recognition of God's Name by the nations of the world (as do many other chapters in Yeshayahu, see the famous psukim in 2:1-6).

Likewise, as you continue your study Sefer Breishit, and attempt to better understand its theme - keep these questions in mind.

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)

[The TSC shiur on Parshat Breishit will discuss the meaning of the 'double presentation' by Chumash of the story of Creation. The following questions will help guide your preparation.]

PEREK ALEPH [Chapter One of Sefer Breishit.]

1. Quickly scan from 1:1 to 2:3 noting how (and why) these psukim form a distinct unit. How would you title this entire unit?

Clearly, this unit divides into seven individual "parshiot", corresponding to each day of Creation. Carefully study its first six 'parshiot', noting how there are certain key phrases that are repeated on each day (e.g. "va'yomer Elokim...", "va'yar Elokim...", "va'yhi erev...", etc.).

As you study this pattern, pay attention to the topics that follow each of these phrases; and attempt to identify a basic 'form' that repeats itself in each day of Creation?

Up until what point does this pattern continue? Can you explain why?

If you are able to discern a pattern, attempt to explain its significance.

2. Relating to this pattern (created by these repeated phrases), determine what phrase introduces each day. Then, by relating to this phrase, determine what was the primary Creation of each day. [It will be helpful to keep a list.]

Based on this opening phrase, are there certain days that contain two 'acts of Creation'? If so what are these days, and how are they thematically related?

Review your list of the primary creation(s) of each day, and then try to subdivide these six days of Creation into two sub-units: i.e. contrasting the first three days and the second three days. [In other words, compare day #1 to day #4, day #2 to day #5, and day #3 to day #6.]

If you notice a pattern, attempt to explain its meaning!

3. Review chapter one once again, this time noting each time the verb "bara" (to create) is used in its active form. To the best of your recollection, is this verb ever used again in Chumash (after chapter one). If so, where?

[If you give up, see Bamdibar 16:30. Note as well that whenever this verb is used in Chumash, it describes an act of God, but never an act of man.]

Based on the Torah's use of the word "yatzar" (in 2:7 and 2:19), in what manner is the verb "bara" different than the verb "yatzar"? In your answer, relate to creation from 'nothing' vs. creation from 'something'.

[Relate this as well to the definition work (according to Halacha) that is forbidden on Shabbat!]

4. As you should have noticed, the Hebrew verb "bara" is used in the opening pasuk of Breishit (1:1), at the beginning of the fifth day, and when man is created on the sixth day.

Can you discern a pattern that may be significant?

Is there anything 'evolutionary' in this pattern?

[See also Ramban on 1:26 (towards the middle).]

5. According to what transpires on the seventh day, the 'process of creation' (that took seven days) is now complete. Explain what is now 'complete', compared to what existed (or didn't exist) beforehand.

In your opinion, does this 'complete' universe now remain 'static', or does there remain something 'dynamic' about it?

If so, what can 'change' and what cannot?

For example, we find common characteristic that all living things created on the third, fifth and sixth days, are able to reproduce (even though the individuals die). [See 1:11-12, 21-22, and 1:25-28.]

How does this relate to a 'completed' universe?

Relate what has been created during these seven days to what we refer now of days to as 'nature'. [Would be correct to conclude the creation of 'nature' completed during these seven

days?]

6. In your opinion, is [what we call] 'nature' a phenomenon that man can discern on his own? Is there any way for a person to figure out on his own that the creation of nature was the act of one God?

How would this relate to what the Torah informs us in Perek Aleph of Sefer Breishit?

Is it clear to man where nature comes from, or who controls it? Would it be logical to arrive at other conclusions in regard to the underlying reasons for the various phenomena that we call nature?

Relate your answer to what may be the 'prophetic purpose' of the first chapter of Sefer Breishit?

7. Note how the Torah use the name ELOKIM to refer to God throughout this entire unit. What is the meaning of the word "elo-him" in Hebrew? What does the Hebrew word "el" imply, and why is it used in the plural form to describe God?

Can this word refer to anything (or anyone) else in Chumash?

See Ramban's explanation of this Name in 1:3! Relate this to the above questions. [See also Sefer Kuzari - fourth ma'amar!]

PEREK BET

[The second & third chapters of Parshat Breishit]

1. Note that 2:4 begins a new "parshia" that continues almost all the way until the end of chapter 3. What can we infer from this in regard to the thematic connection between the details in chapters two three?

2. Review the 'story of creatoin' as detailed in chapter two, while carefully following the sequence of these events (and their purpose). In your opinion, do these details complement or contradict the details of the story of Creation as detailed in chapter one? According to either answer, can you explain why these details were not included in chapter one?

In its context, would you say that 2:4 forms an introduction to what follows in chapter two, or a summary of what has transpired in chapter one? Why would (or should) this affect how you understand the connection between these two units?

3. Review 2:5, noting its statement that nothing could grow without man to work the field. Technically speaking, is this statement correct? See Rashi on this pasuk. How does Rashi relate to this question?

How is the description of the creation of man, as described in 2:7-25 different from his creation as described in 1:26-29.

In your answer, relate to the difference between a commandment (see 2:16) and a blessing (see 1:28).

4. Many modern commentators have suggested that there are TWO INDEPENDENT stories of Creation:

I. 1:1->2:3 / The story of Creation in seven days [better known as PEREK ALEPH]

II. 2:4-> 3:24 / The story of Gan Eden [better known as PEREK BET]

Attempt to either support or refute this suggestion, based on a literary and textual analysis of those chapters. In your answer, relate to:

- God's Name in each account
- The progression and order of events
- How and when Chava was created
- The purpose (implied by the text) of man's creation
- Man's relationship with his surroundings, and with God
- The overall flow and structure of each story

5. If you did notice two accounts of the story of creation, in your opinion which of these two accounts more closely reflects man's physical existence and which account would you say reflects his more 'spiritual' side?

PART III - PARSHANUT

1. "LIKRO B'SHEM HASHEM"

Carefully review 4:25-26, and attempt to translate each word of 4:26.

In your opinion, did the word "huchal" mean: to begin (like "hatchala") or to defile (like "chilul")?

How would these two possible translations affect your understanding of this pasuk?

See how the commentaries of Rashi, Rasag, Ibn Ezra, & Seforno relate to this question.

2. In regard to the actual 'message' of this pasuk, do these commentators agree or disagree? See Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:1. How does Rambam understand this pasuk?

In your answer, relate to the fact that this pasuk ends the literary unit (which uses shem Havaya) which began in 2:4!

3. How does this pasuk relate to the story of:

the Mabul (Note 6:1)?

Migdal Bavel (Note 11:4)?

Avraham Avinu? (Note 12:8, 13:4)?

THE 'FIRST RASHI'

1. The famous first Rashi on Chumash quotes the Midrash of Rabbi Yitzchak, which explains why the Torah begins with Breishit.

a) In your opinion, does this Midrash explain why Chumash begins with the STORY OF CREATION, or why it begins with SEFER BREISHIT?

b) See Ramban's question on this Rashi. Did you not ask yourself the same question? Which approach appears to be most logical?

c) Note that the first pasuk that the Midrash quotes is from Tehillim chapter 111. Read this entire perek, making special note of its final pasuk. What is the perek talking about? What does it have to do with "Breishit"? In your opinion, does the gist of this perek agree with the Ramban's question on Rashi?

d) Note the phrase in the Midrash "v'natna l'asher yashar b'ainav...". According to this Rashi, who is giving what land to whom? Now, look at the source of this phrase in Yirmiyahu 27:5 (See also its context in 27:1-8!) According to the pasuk in Yirmiyahu, who is giving what land to whom?!!!

According to Yirmiyahu, why is this about to take place (see Yirmiyahu 25:1-11 for a more complete explanation)? What does this have to do with why the Torah was given, and to whom it was given?

e) In your opinion, do you think that the Midrash assumes that the reader is familiar with these two sources in Tehillim & Yirmiyahu? [Back then (in Rabbi Yitzchak's time), did most people know Tehillim and Nviim?] If so, what point do you think the Midrash intended on making? Does this help answer Ramban's question on Rashi?

b'hatzlacha,
menachem

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