

בראשית ♦ B'reishit

GENESIS 1:1–6:8

Creation and Transformation

WHO ARE WE? The question is answered in the first portion of Genesis as follows: We are God's prized creation, inhabiting a good world that God has made. We are a constellation of four relationships: with the earth from whence we came and whither we return (Genesis 2), with each other as women and men equally blessed and jointly commissioned to care for the world (Genesis 1), with the animal world toward which we have responsibility (Genesis 1 and 2), and with God in whose image we are made (Genesis 1) and whose breath animates us (Genesis 2). Human disobedience complicates these relationships but does not destroy them.

Genesis 1 emphasizes the power of language and the reality of goodness. Humankind is embedded in a larger world over which God reigns supreme, but within which human beings can and do play a unique, decisive role.

A wide-angle lens that encompasses the whole world in Genesis 1 is augmented in Genesis 2–3 with a zoom lens that discloses an “up close and personal” relationship with God. This split-screen view characterizes the Torah as a whole and introduces a biblical practice of offering more than one perspective on important events.

The subsequent narratives, through Genesis 11, continue to respond to universal human questions about origins. They account for

human suffering and inequality while affirming the sovereignty of a God who deeply cares for the world and its creatures.

Genesis 1–11 depicts God as still discovering the qualities of the material at hand (humankind) and (re)assessing its potential. De-

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spite repeated disappointments, God remains faithful and hopeful, adjusting expectations and offering humankind new tools and guidance.

The parashah concludes at a nadir, with God's disappointment in humankind when violence corrupts goodness (6:6). However, the text also makes clear the possibility of renewal despite decline (a theme throughout the Bible). Goodness and connectedness persist.

No biblical story has had more influence on women's lives and identity—and none has been more often reinterpreted through later cultural biases—than the creation of woman in Genesis 2 and the expulsion from the Garden in Genesis 3. The version of creation of humankind in 1:26–28, which portrays equality between the sexes and their shared reflection of God's image, is typically overlooked in favor of the more ambiguous one in Genesis 2, which is typically read as one in which man precedes