



## THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION

# GENESIS 1:1-6:8

## *Parashat Beresheet* / פְּרָשַׁת בְּרֵאשִׁית

### In this week's guide...

The **COMMENTARY** welcomes us to the beginning of the beginning. You remember... “In the beginning.” *Welcome to Genesis!* We’re thrilled to start another year-long journey with you through the Torah. In this article, we are encouraged to look to the Creation account for a better understanding of how we can flourish in our day-to-day lives. It only makes sense that the way God created provides insights for how to live in the Creation well..... 1

Our **NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN** invites you to take a closer look at everyone’s favorite passage in these first chapters of Genesis: the genealogy. Wait—you don’t find the biblical genealogies riveting? Well, you’re not alone. But take heart! These lists are here for a reason and this study is going to show us at least one reason why..... 2

The **HEBREW WORD STUDY** analyzes a word that comes up in the story of Cain. This tragic biblical character is infamous. His failure to offer an acceptable sacrifice ultimately drove him to compound that with an exponentially worse failure. In between these events, God initiated a conversation with Cain, one in which this week’s Hebrew word is featured..... 3

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### OVERVIEW

The Hebrew name for the **first book** of the Torah is *Beresheet*. It is also the **first word** of the book in the Hebrew text, as well as the name for the **first Torah portion**. *Beresheet* means “in the beginning.” Of course, the English name Genesis comes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). *Genesis* means “origins.” Therefore, the Greek name for the first book of the Bible means “The Book of Origins.” The first “Book of Moses” details the origins of the universe and the Hebrew people.

## FUSION GLOBAL WITH RABBI JASON

Weekly Torah Portion – *Parashat Beresheet* / פרשת בְּרֵאשִׁית

### Genesis 1:1-6:8

#### COMMENTARY

*by Staff Contributor*

Many would agree that this week's *parsha* contains some of the most debated material in the Bible.

Here in *Parashat Beresheet*, we have Adam and Eve, their interaction with the serpent, and their expulsion from the Garden. And then we have the Cain and Abel story. But we find the most controversial section in its first two chapters—the creation narratives. Among both Christians and Jews, there are many opinions on how we should interpret these chapters regarding the age of the earth. You have “young earth” folks, “old earth” folks, and everything in between. But there is a unifying idea that I think most of us can agree with.



#### **Genesis 1-2 is unambiguously establishing God as the Creator.**

More specifically, we can all agree that these chapters indicate God brings order out of chaos. In his book, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, John Walton says, “Creation thus constituted bringing order to the cosmos from an originally nonfunctional condition.”<sup>1</sup> This idea of God bringing order is all over Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 1, we see that God brings order by consistently establishing boundaries.

*There is a boundary between night and day.*

*There is a boundary between the land and the sea.*

*And there is a clear boundary between the six days of creation and the 7th day—a day of abstaining from creating.*

God's repeated use of boundaries in creating life got me thinking about boundaries in my own life. Literally, on the night I was mulling over my personal boundaries, something minor happened in my family that made me realize something I need to work on. You guessed it. Boundaries! The boundaries “incident” I am referring to happened late at night. And I was tired and still working. Not surprisingly, when a family member approached me with a reasonable request for my assistance, I barked. Immediately, I realized that I was in the wrong and apologized. Shortly after, I realized I got frustrated because I had failed to set time boundaries earlier in the day. And I paid for it. The next day, I also saw a perfect quote along this line from James Clear.

“I estimate at least half of my frustrations with others are frustrations with myself for failing to set clear boundaries and stand by them.”

That was precisely what I was guilty of that day. I failed to set clear boundaries with my time, was frustrated with myself, and took that out on a family member.

#### **Boundaries are critical to having order in our lives.**

Ours is a God of order, and we see that in His boundaries of creation. And He created us to flourish within these “edges” in our lives. Let's think about boundaries as we begin a new year and Torah cycle. This sort of reflection is a process for all of us. There are probably multiple areas where we can improve our boundaries. But let's focus on a 1% improvement.



### What is one area where we can improve when it comes to boundaries?

It might be around time or finances. Often, it's with people. Sometimes, we need to set boundaries about people who negatively impact us. The gospels demonstrate that even *Yeshua* had boundaries. For example, the gospel writers repeatedly note that *Yeshua* spent mornings in prayer. That's a boundary.

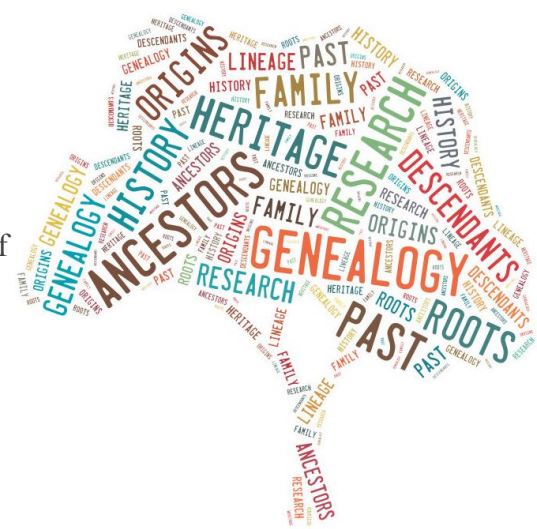
So, let's remember that when God created, He used boundaries to establish life. And good boundaries will help us to grow and live life to the fullest!

## NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN

by Staff Contributor

I'm guessing your favorite verses in the entire Bible are the genealogies. Right? Wait—no?

While the Book of Leviticus causes many Bible reading plans to stall, a robust genealogy will also induce some of the most intense skimming. This claim is more than anecdotal. In his notes introducing Genesis 5, Jewish scholar Robert Alter points out, “Nothing reveals the difference of the biblical conception of literature from later Western ones more strikingly than the biblical use of genealogies as an intrinsic element of literary structure.”<sup>iii</sup> The biblical writers loved them some family lists! Don't let any resistance one might have towards exploring these sorts of passages rob you of the wealth of insight and revelation they hold. As Rabbi Jason often says, there are no accidents with God!



Let's begin our study with Genesis 5:1-2,

**This is the Book of the Genealogies of Adam:**

**When God created Adam, in the likeness of God He made him. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name “Adam” when He created them.**

Before we go any further, it's worth sharing Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum's (Messianic scholar) commentary, “While the phrase *these are the generations of* appears a total of eleven times in Genesis, the phrase *this is the book of the generations of* is used only once in Genesis. The only other time it appears that way is in Matthew 1:1: *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ*, a logical connection since the Messiah is the Last Adam.”<sup>iii</sup> This insight is crucial to our point in this article and will be revisited shortly.



In these opening verses, we see a direct link to Genesis 1:27, “God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.” The centerpiece of this section is not just the claim that God created humans but that He created them **in His likeness** (or “image”). This detail gives the genealogy its basis. While we name our pets, the fact is, none of the deer or squirrels you may pass on the roadside have names—they do not bear the image of the Creator. This genealogy would have been profoundly meaningful to the Ancient Israelites, providing them with a divinely sourced connection back to the beginning. And it extends a message of hope and existential significance to men and women today: you’re not an accident!



The next line in this genealogy is of crucial importance: “Adam lived 130 years, then fathered a son **in his likeness, after his image, and named him Seth**” (Genesis 5:3 *emphasis added*). Adam bore God’s image, but Seth bore Adam’s and in between those two events was the Fall. In other words, Seth “inherited” Adam’s sinful state. Andrew Steinman notes that this verse marks “a distinction between Adam’s initial holiness and Seth’s initial sinful condition.”<sup>iv</sup> It is in this obscure verse that we discover a clue to the Messiah’s ultimate purpose. Even more than atoning for the individual sins we commit (which is vital, of course!), *Yeshua*’s life-death-resurrection-ascension made it possible for men and women to see the divine image and likeness once again *in themselves*.

Undoubtedly, this is at the heart of the Apostle Paul’s inspired words describing the Lord to the believers in Corinth: “So also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45). *Yeshua* is the “last” Adam. His work is finished (cf. John 19:30) and in this role He gives life—abundant life, eternal life, life as God meant it to be. *Shalom*. The first man, Adam, gave Seth a death-infected existence; the “last Adam” has given us “His precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Hence, Augustine<sup>v</sup> wrote in one of his letters:

The Lord who was heavenly became earthly that he might make heavenly those who were earthly. From immortal he became mortal by taking the form of a servant, not by changing the nature of the Lord, that he might make immortal those who were mortal by imparting the grace of the Lord, not by retaining the offense of the servant.<sup>vi</sup>

## HEBREW WORD STUDY: *paneh* (face) / פנה

*by Staff Contributor*

“But upon Cain and his offering He did not look favorably. Cain became very angry, and his **countenance** fell” (Genesis 4:5 *emphasis added*).

This verse seems like an odd turn of phrase and is, in fact, an ancient Hebrew idiom. The word scholars translated as “countenance” here is *paneh* (פנה) and means face, both anatomically and directionally. However, because the biblical writers used the word idiomatically, it has many possible meanings, too many to adequately cover here. However, we can examine some of those instances to give us insights into the contextual meanings.



# TORAH PORTIONS

## Parashat Bereshheet

Let's start with this verse. Genesis continues, “Then *ADONAI* said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, it will lift’” (Genesis 4:6-7a). We find that anger or being upset leads to a “downcast face.” Conversely, then, being happy or pleased results in an uplifted face. This sense of the word brings new meaning to one of the most beloved passages in the Torah, “*ADONAI* turn His face toward you and grant you *shalom*!” (Numbers 6:26 *emphasis added*). It literally says, “lift His face” (ישע פניו)—the same language God used when talking to Cain. The Aaronic Blessing is, at least in part, praying that God might find us *pleasing*.

We find another noteworthy idiomatic use of *pane*h in Esther 1:14, “Those closest to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence [פְּנֵי / *penei*] and were the highest in the kingdom.” Here, the Hebrew word for “face” conveys *presence*. This creative use of *pane*h sheds a unique light on another critical passage:



So He said, “I will cause all My goodness to pass before you, and call out the Name of *ADONAI* before you. I will be gracious toward whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will be merciful.” But He also said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live.” Then *ADONAI* said, “See, a place near Me—you will stand on the rock. While My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and cover you with My hand, until I have passed by. Then I will take away My hand, and you will see My back, but My face will not be seen.”

—Exodus 33:19-23

If we take “face” to mean presence here, it brings new meaning to the text and resolves a difficulty it could seem to raise. Just a bit earlier in that chapter, it says, “So *ADONAI* spoke with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (v. 11). Many have wondered how Moses could speak face to face with God at the beginning of Exodus 33, only to discover later in the chapter that the experience will kill him. The difference here is that God would make *all* of His goodness and glory pass before Moses on the mountain, essentially the very fullness of the presence of God. What we can learn from this is that no man, not even Moses, accustomed to the presence of God, could survive the *fullness* of that holy presence. The fullness of God’s glory and goodness is too much for us, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't seek His **face**.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.



Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present  
**HEBREW WORD STUDY**

**פנה**

**פנה / paneh:** n. comm. **face.** *Refers to the front part of a person's head.*<sup>1</sup>

**FIGURATIVE SENSES**

- **appearance** ⇔ **face** — outward or visible aspect of a person or thing understood as a face.
- **front** ⇔ **face** — a place in front of or in close proximity to a person or thing understood as the face.
- **person** ⇔ **face** — the whole human person conceived of in terms of the face.
- **presence** ⇔ **face** — the presence or proximity of someone understood in terms of the face; with the implication of being before or in front of them.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>taken from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

<sup>2</sup>taken from *Lists of Words and Concepts*

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**THOUGHTS for REFLECTION**

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- We live in a culture (at least in the Western world) that generally loathes the idea of **boundaries**, as they can be seen as infringements upon one's freedom and "pursuit of happiness." Has this sort of thinking affected you? Do you resist the claim that limits and boundaries are an essential part of God's good creation and our flourishing in it? Do you have good experiences with boundaries? What areas of your life would be most helped by the establishment of godly boundaries?
- Much (understandable) emphasis is placed on "doing good" in our efforts to make sure we live the faith we claim to believe. But all of our appropriate expressions of faith and obedience are responses to the initiating work of God's Spirit in our lives (i.e., grace). Ultimately, all is gift in God's Kingdom. How does the truth that we are "joint heirs" (cf. Romans 8:17) with *Yeshua*—the "Last Adam"—affect your view of yourself and others? How does it impact your attitudes and lifestyle?

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Noach* / פְּרַשְׁת נֹחַ

**TORAH**

*Sunday* / Genesis 6:9-22

*Monday* / Genesis 7:1-16

*Tuesday* / Genesis 7:17-8:14

*Wednesday* / Genesis 8:15-9:7

*Thursday* / Genesis 9:8-17

*Friday* / Genesis 9:18-10:32

*Saturday* / Genesis 11:1-32

**Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):** Isaiah 54:1-55:5

**New Covenant Reading:** Luke 17:20-27

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<sup>i</sup> Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 22.

<sup>iii</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [\*Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis\*](#), 1st ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 131.

<sup>iv</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, [\*Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), ed. David G. Firth, vol. 1, The Tyndale Commentary Series (London: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 80.

<sup>v</sup> **Augustine of Hippo** (354–430). Bishop of Hippo and a voluminous writer on philosophical, exegetical, theological and ecclesiological topics. He formulated the Western doctrines of predestination and original sin in his writings against the Pelagians. [*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Introduction and Biographic Information* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 488.]

<sup>vi</sup> Gerald Lewis Bray, ed., [\*1–2 Corinthians\*](#), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 176.