

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
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whoever sought the LORD would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp. <sup>8</sup>Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he had entered the Tent. <sup>9</sup>And when Moses entered the Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the Tent, while He spoke with Moses. <sup>10</sup>When all the people saw the pillar of cloud poised at the entrance of the Tent, all the people would rise and bow low, each at the entrance of his tent. <sup>11</sup>The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. And he would then return to the camp; but his attendant, Joshua son of Nun, a youth, would not stir out of the Tent.

<sup>12</sup>Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Lead this people forward,’ but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me. Further, You have said, ‘I have singled you out by name, and you have, indeed, gained My favor.’ <sup>13</sup>Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor. Con-

**9. at the entrance of the Tent** Not inside the tabernacle, where the divine Presence is said to rest continuously and where God converses with Moses from within the Holy of Holies. The place of communication here is at the entrance, where God’s self-manifestation is intermittent.

**11. face to face** The same expression is used in Deut. 34:10, whereas in Num. 12:6–8 it is said that God communicated with Moses “mouth to mouth.” This figurative language is intended to convey the pre-eminence and uniqueness of Moses as a prophetic figure who experiences a special mode of revelation. His experience is personal and direct, not mediated through visions or dreams, and the message always is plain and straightforward, free of cryptic utterances.

**Joshua** He remained inside the tent and did not share in Moses’ direct experience with God.

DIALOGUE WITH GOD (vv. 12–23)

This section depicts how Moses and God engage in the intimate talk mentioned in verse 11.

מועד וְהָיָה כָּל־מִבְקֵשׁ יְהוָה יֵצֵא אֶל־  
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר מִחוּץ לַמִּחֲנֶה: <sup>8</sup> וְהָיָה  
כְּצֵאת מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֹהֶל יָקוּמוּ כָּל־הָעָם  
וְנִצְּבוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אֹהֶלוֹ וְהִבִּיטוּ אַחֲרֵי  
מֹשֶׁה עַד־בָּאוּ הָאֹהֶלָה: <sup>9</sup> וְהָיָה כִּבְּאֵ  
מֹשֶׁה הָאֹהֶלָה יֵרֵד עֲמוּד הָעָנָן וְעָמַד  
פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְדִבֶּר עִם־מֹשֶׁה: <sup>10</sup> וְרָאָה  
כָּל־הָעָם אֶת־עֲמוּד הָעָנָן עֹמֵד פֶּתַח  
הָאֹהֶל וְקָם כָּל־הָעָם וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ אִישׁ  
פֶּתַח אֹהֶלוֹ: <sup>11</sup> וְדִבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים  
אֶל־פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ  
וְשָׁב אֶל־הַמִּחֲנֶה וּמִשְׁרָתוֹ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נוּן  
נֹעַר לֹא יָמִישׁ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל: <sup>ס</sup>

<sup>12</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה רְאֵה אֵתָּה אֹמֵר  
אֵלַי הֲעַל אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאֵתָּה לֹא  
הוֹדַעְתָּנִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־תִּשְׁלַח עִמִּי וְאֵתָּה  
אֹמְרָתָּ יְדַעְתִּיךָ בְּשֵׁם וְגַם־מָצָאתָ חֵן  
בְּעֵינַי: <sup>13</sup> וְעַתָּה אִם־נָא מָצָאתָ חֵן  
בְּעֵינֶיךָ הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת־דַּרְכְּךָ וְאֶדְעֶךָ

**12.** Moses now reverts to the subject matter of 32:34 and 33:1–3—the order to proceed to the Promised Land without the tabernacle, the token of God’s immediate presence in the camp of Israel. He complains that the aforementioned “angel” is unidentified. Is it to be human or celestial? Is God’s name to “be in him,” as is promised in 23:21, or not?

**I have singled you out by name** Literally, “I know you by name.” This Hebrew idiom, with God as the subject, is applied to no one else in the Bible. It signifies a close, exclusive, and unique association with God.

**13. let me know Your ways** Moses asks for comprehension of God’s essential being—the attributes that guide His actions in dealing with humankind, the norms by which He operates in His governance of the world. “Ways” here is a play on the literal and the figurative meanings of Hebrew word *derekh*; it means both the right path through the wilderness and also God’s way of acting, His nature.

sider, too, that this nation is Your people.”  
 14And He said, “I will go in the lead and will lighten your burden.” 15And he said to Him, “Unless You go in the lead, do not make us leave this place. 16For how shall it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You go with us, so that we may be distinguished, Your people and I, from every people on the face of the earth?”

17And the LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name.” 18He said, “Oh, let me behold Your Presence!” 19And He answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. 20But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for man may

**this nation** Moses stresses that the people Israel, and none other, constitute God’s people. He wants to extend God’s favor to embrace Israel as well as himself.

**14.** God does not yet respond to Moses’ last point but addresses only his immediate personal concerns.

**lighten your burden** Literally, “I will give you rest.” This phrase is normally found in a context of giving relief from national enemies, especially in relation to the occupation of the Land. The Hebrew word for “rest,” *m’nuḥab*, probably means “camping places,” a pun on Hebrew for “camp” (*mahaneh*) (see Num. 10:33).

**15–16.** Moses, sensitive to God’s omission of any mention of Israel, reacts immediately by stressing the people’s interests, thereby affirming once again that he sees his own reputation inextricably bound up with the fate of his people. Note his repetition of “us” and “Your people.”

**we may be distinguished** Israel’s distinctiveness lies in its unique relationship with God.

**18. Oh, let me behold Your Presence!** Hebrew: *kavod* (Presence); one of the most impor-

לִמְעַן אֲמַצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְרָאָה כִּי עִמָּךְ  
 הִגְוִי הַזֶּה: 14 וַיֹּאמֶר פָּנֵי יִלְכוּ וַהֲנַחְתִּי  
 לָךְ: 15 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אִם-אֵין פְּנִיךָ הַלְלִים  
 אֶל-תַּעֲלֵנוּ מִזֶּה: 16 וּבַמָּה | יוֹדַע אֲפֹא  
 כִּי-מִצְאָתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲנִי וְעַמְּךָ הַלֹּא  
 בְּלִכְתָּךְ עִמָּנוּ וְנִפְלִינוּ אֲנִי וְעַמְּךָ מִכָּל-  
 הָעַם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: פ  
 רביעי 17 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶת-הַדְּבָר  
 הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּי-מִצְאָתָּ חֵן  
 בְּעֵינַי וְאֲדַעַךְ בְּשֵׁם: 18 וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרֵאֵנִי נָא  
 אֶת-כְּבוֹדְךָ: 19 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כָּל-טוֹבִי  
 עַל-פְּנֶיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ  
 וְחִנַּתִּי אֶת-אֲשֶׁר אֲחֹן וְרַחֲמֹתַי אֶת-אֲשֶׁר  
 אֲרַחֵם: 20 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת אֶת-

tant concepts in biblical theology. See Comment to 16:7. Here Moses is pleading for an exclusively individual experience, one close at hand and immediate, as a response to his personal request there and then.

**19. all My goodness** This refers to the compassionate attributes that God reveals in dealing with His creatures (see 34:6–7).

**proclaim . . . the name LORD** This name is *YHVH*; see Comment to 3:14. This clause parallels the immediately preceding one—“I will make all My goodness pass before you.” It reaffirms God’s intention of voluntarily disclosing to Moses His defining characteristics. This is fulfilled in 34:5.

**and the grace** Literally, “I shall be gracious to whomever I am gracious and I shall show mercy to whomever I show mercy.” The syntax indicates indefiniteness, as in 3:14. God is reminding Moses that He is a free agent. There is no magical practice that is automatically effective in influencing His behavior.

**20.** Moses’ second plea is only partially granted. By virtue of their humanity, human beings, in-

to do good in our own souls, and the love and generosity of people around us whom God has inspired to do good.

**20–23.** What does it mean that a human being cannot see God’s face—but can see God’s back? In the words of the Ḥatam Sofer, we can-

## CHAPTER 33

**19. I will make all My goodness pass before you** We encounter the reality of God when we experience goodness in the world, from the gift of life itself to the discovery of the capacity

not see Me and live.”<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said, “See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock<sup>22</sup> and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by.<sup>23</sup> Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen.”

פָּנַי כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְהָיָה: <sup>21</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר  
יְהוָה הֲנֵה מְקוֹם אֶתִּי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל-הַצּוּר:  
<sup>22</sup> וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כַּבְּדֵי וְשָׁמַתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרֹת  
הַצּוּר וְשָׁכַתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד-עָבְרִי:  
<sup>23</sup> וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת-כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת-אֲחֵרַי  
וּפְנֵי לֹא יִרְאוּ: ח

**34** The LORD said to Moses: “Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered. <sup>2</sup>Be ready by morning, and in the morning come up to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to Me, on the top of the mountain. <sup>3</sup>No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen

**לד** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה פְּסֹל-לְךָ  
שְׁנֵי-לְחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֹׁנִים וְכַתְּבֵתִי עַל-  
הַלְּחֹת אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל-הַלְּחֹת  
הָרֵאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַרְתָּ: <sup>2</sup> וְהָיָה נָכוֹן  
לְבַקֵּר וְעָלִיתָ בְּבֹקֶר אֶל-הָרַם וְנִצַּבְתָּ  
לִּי שָׁם עַל-רֹאשׁ הָהָר: <sup>3</sup> וְאִישׁ לֹא-יַעֲלֶה  
עִמָּךְ וְגַם-אִישׁ אֶל-יִרְאָ בְּכָל-הָהָר גַּם-

cluding Moses, cannot directly and closely observe God.

**21. on the rock** At the top of Mount Sinai (see 34:2). For a similar scene, see 1 Kings 19.

**22. My Presence passes by** Rashbam notes that God’s action is characteristic of covenant making, as in Gen. 15:17 and Jer. 34:18,19. The manifestation of God here would then be a ceremony that signals renewal of the Covenant.

**23. My back** This daring human image for God, contrasted with the usual biblical term *panim*, “face, presence,” refers to the traces of the divine Presence, the afterglow of His supernatural radiance.

**must not be seen** No human being can ever penetrate the ultimate mystery of God’s Being. Only a glimpse of the divine reality is possible, even for Moses.

RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT (34:1–35)

PREPARATORY MEASURES (vv. 1–3)

Moses, assured that God will manifest His Presence privately to him, is instructed to prepare for the experience, which actually initiates the re-statement of the Covenant.

**1. Carve** God had given the first set to Moses. **words** They are identified as the Decalogue in verse 28.

**3. No one else** This time Aaron is excluded, because of his role in the episode of the Golden Calf.

not see God directly. We can only see the difference that God has made after the fact. We can recognize God’s reality by seeing the difference God has made in people’s lives.

CHAPTER 34

**1.** The first set of tablets was fashioned by God alone. Moses passively received them. The second set will be a joint divine-human effort (Y. Nissenbaum). This second set was written with a greater knowledge of human weakness, at the hand of an imperfect human being,

rather than by a perfect deity. Heschel taught that God revealed the Torah to Moses in all its fullness; and Moses, a finite human being, wrote down what he could comprehend. The Talmud tells us that the fragments of the first set of tablets were carried in the Ark along with the replacement set (BT Ber. 8b). That which was once holy retains its holiness even when it is broken. So too the elderly, the senile, and the infirm may not be cast aside. They must be accorded the reverence they have earned in their lives.

anywhere on the mountain; neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain.”

<sup>4</sup>So Moses carved two tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets with him. <sup>5</sup>The LORD came down in a cloud; He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name LORD. <sup>6</sup>The LORD passed before him and proclaimed: “The LORD! the LORD! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup>extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

#### GOD’S SELF-DISCLOSURE (vv. 4–9)

**5. stood . . . proclaimed** The text is ambiguous. The subject of the two verbs may be either Moses, as verses 2 and 33:21 indicate, or God, as the first clause and 33:19 would suggest. Or perhaps the first verb is governed by Moses and the second by God.

#### THE DIVINE RESPONSE (vv. 6–7)

These verses are the divine response to Moses’ two requests—that he “know” God’s ways (33:13) and that he “behold” God’s Presence (33:18). God’s mysterious passing before Moses answers to the second; the recital of the divine attributes, to the first. God’s self-disclosure is confined to a proclamation of His moral qualities. To “know” them is to achieve a higher conception of Deity.

**6. The LORD! the LORD!** The Hebrew text also allows the first *YHVH* to be taken as the subject of the antecedent verb; thus “And the LORD proclaimed.”

6–7. These two verses contain a passage recited and chanted on the High Holy Days and the Festivals. This summary of God’s compassionate qualities is known as the “Thirteen Attributes of God” or the “Covenant of the Thirteen” (*b’rit sh’losh esrei*).

**visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children** Bothered by the ap-

הִצָּאן וְהִבָּקֵר אֶל-יָרְעוּ אֶל-מֹול הָהָר  
הָהוּא:

4 וַיִּפְסֹל שְׁנֵי-לֶחֶת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֵׁי  
וַיִּשְׁפֹּם מֹשֶׁה בַּבֶּקֶר וַיַּעַל אֶל-הָר סִינַי  
כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ שְׁנֵי  
לֶחֶת אֲבָנִים: 5 וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה בְּעָנָן וַיִּתְיַצֵּב  
עִמּוֹ שָׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: 6 וַיַּעֲבֹר  
יְהוָה | עַל-פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה | יְהוָה אֵל  
רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת:  
7 נִצְרָ\* חֶסֶד לְאֱלֹפִים נִשְׂא עֵינָי וּפָשַׁע  
וְחַטָּאת וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקֶה פֶקֶד | עֵינָי אָבוֹת  
עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בָּנֵי בָנִים עַל-שְׁלִשִׁים וְעַל-  
רַבְעִים:

v. 7. נ' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

**compassionate and gracious** In the Decalogue (20:5–6) the order of attributes, unlike here, presents judgment before kindness. Emphasis and priority are here given to God’s magnanimous qualities rather than to His judgmental actions.

**kindness and faithfulness** The Hebrew words *hesed v’emet* appear frequently together to express a single concept. *Hesed* involves acts of beneficence and obligation that flow from a legal relationship. See Comment to 15:13. *Emet*, usually translated “truth,” encompasses the notions of reliability, durability, and faithfulness. When used together, the two words express God’s absolute and eternal dependability in dispensing His benefactions.

**7. extending kindness** The phrase may express either God’s continuous *hesed* or the idea that merit for the *hesed* that people perform endures beyond their own generation.

**He does not remit** Divine mercy does not mean that sinners can expect wholly to escape the consequences of their wrongs.

parent unfairness of the text, a Hasidic interpretation takes it to mean that God holds parents responsible for not giving their children a proper religious and moral upbringing. We recognize the unfairness of such punishment, yet it is true that the bad habits of parents are too often repeated by their children, for whom parents are the primary role models.

<sup>8</sup>Moses hastened to bow low to the ground in homage, <sup>9</sup>and said, “If I have gained Your favor, O Lord, pray, let the Lord go in our midst, even though this is a stiffnecked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your own!”

<sup>10</sup>He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will work such wonders as have not been wrought on all the earth or in any nation; and all the people who are with you shall see how awesome are the LORD’s deeds which I will perform for you. <sup>11</sup>Mark well what I command you this day. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>12</sup>Beware of making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land against which you are advancing, lest they be a snare in your midst. <sup>13</sup>No, you must tear down their altars, smash their pillars, and cut down their sacred posts; <sup>14</sup>for you must not worship any other god, because the LORD, whose name is Impassioned, is an impassioned

<sup>8</sup>וַיִּמְהַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְדֹּר אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה׃  
<sup>9</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֶם־נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי  
 יִלְךָ־נָא אֲדֹנָי בְּקִרְבָּנוּ כִּי עַם־קָשָׁה־  
 עִרְףָּהּ הוּא וְסָלַחְתָּ לְעֹונֵינוּ וּלְחַטָּאתֵנוּ  
 וּנְחַלְתָּנוּ׃

<sup>10</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי כֹרֶת בְּרִית נֹגֵד  
 כָּל־עַמֶּךָ אֲעֲשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נִבְרָאוּ  
 בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם וְרָאָה כָּל־הָעַם  
 אֲשֶׁר־אִתָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כִּי־  
 נֹרָא הוּא אֲשֶׁר אָנִי עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ׃ <sup>11</sup>שָׁמֵר־  
 לְךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
 גֵּרֶשׁ מִפְּנֵיךָ אֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי  
 וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי׃ <sup>12</sup>הִשָּׁמֵר לְךָ  
 פֶּן־תִּכְרֹת בְּרִית לְיוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אִתָּה  
 בָּא עָלֶיךָ פֶּן־יִהְיֶה לְמוֹקֵשׁ בְּקִרְבְּךָ׃  
<sup>13</sup>כִּי אֶת־מִזְבְּחֹתָם תִּתְצֹוּן וְאֶת־מִצְבֹּתָם  
 תִּשְׁבֹּרוּן וְאֶת־אֲשֵׁרֵי תִכְרֹתוֹן׃ <sup>14</sup>כִּי לֹא  
 תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאֵל אֲחֵר\* כִּי יְהוָה קָנָא שְׁמוֹ

v. 14. ר' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

**9.** Moses emphasizes God’s merciful qualities in asking that the punishment in 33:3 be set aside. *even though* Allow for human frailty.

**INAUTHENTIC AND AUTHENTIC WORSHIP**  
 (vv. 10–26)

This section concentrates on two fundamental issues that flow directly from the people’s sin: false modes of worship (vv. 10–17) and the legitimate festivals and ritual obligations to God (vv. 18–26).

**APOSTASY** (vv. 10–17)

Mindful of the act of apostasy, the renewed covenant contains stricter admonitions than those

given before (23:23,24) regarding the inroads of foreign forms of worship into the religion of Israel. If the people Israel is to be “distinguished . . . from every people on the face of the earth” (33:16), they must make themselves unique by exclusive loyalty to their covenantal relationship with God.

**13. sacred posts** Hebrew: *asherim* (singular *asherah*); pagan objects of worship often mentioned in the Bible. These wooden poles derive their name from the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah, whom they symbolized.

**14. any other god** This Hebrew phrase in the singular—*el aher*—appears nowhere else in the

**10.** The Decalogue proclaims universal laws applicable to all humanity. This supplemental covenant deals with the specific rituals of the Israelite people. Our calendar and our kitchens would keep the Jewish people distinctive.

**13.** Why this troubling emphasis on destroying the holy places of the Canaanites and shunning their sacrificial occasions? The

Israelites were a young, impressionable nation, and the Torah is concerned that the highly sexualized, orgiastic fertility cult of the Canaanites would be irresistibly seductive for them (as the incident of Baal-peor in Num. 25 attests). Even decent people can be vulnerable to sexual temptation, which is why the Torah speaks out in such extreme, uncompromising terms against the Canaanite cult.

God. <sup>15</sup>You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for they will lust after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices. <sup>16</sup>And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will lust after their gods and will cause your sons to lust after their gods.

<sup>17</sup>You shall not make molten gods for yourselves.

<sup>18</sup>You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread—eating unleavened bread for seven days, as I have commanded you—at the set time of the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you went forth from Egypt.

<sup>19</sup>Every first issue of the womb is Mine, from all your livestock that drop a male as firstling, whether cattle or sheep. <sup>20</sup>But the firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And you must redeem every first-born among your sons.

None shall appear before Me empty-handed.

אֶל קָנָא הוּא : <sup>15</sup> פְּנֵי־תְכַרְתֵּם בְּרִית לְיוֹשְׁבֵי  
הָאָרֶץ וְזָנּוּ | אַחֲרַי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְזָבְחוּ  
לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְקָרָא לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ מִזִּבְחֹוֹ :  
<sup>16</sup> וְלָקַחְתָּ מִבְּנֹתֵיו לְבָנֶיךָ וְזָנּוּ בְּנֹתָיו אַחֲרַי  
אֱלֹהֵיהֶן וְהִזְנוּ אֶת־בְּנֶיךָ אַחֲרַי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן :  
<sup>17</sup> אֱלֹהֵי מִסְכָּה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה־לָּךְ :  
<sup>18</sup> אֶת־חַג הַמִּצּוֹת תִּשְׁמֹר שְׁבַעַת יָמִים  
תֹּאכַל מִצּוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתְךָ לְמוֹעֵד  
חֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב בִּי בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב יֵצְאָתָּ  
מִמִּצְרַיִם :  
<sup>19</sup> כָּל־פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם לִי וְכָל־מִקְנֶךָ תִּזְכֹּר פֶּטֶר  
שׁוֹר וְשֵׂה : <sup>20</sup> וּפֶטֶר חֲמוֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְּשֵׂה  
וְאִם־לֹא תִפְדֶּה וְעִרְפָּתוֹ כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּנֶיךָ  
תִּפְדֶּה  
וְלֹא־יֵרָאוּ פָנַי רִיקָם :

Bible. The Hebrew word *aher* in the text of the Torah has an enlarged letter *resh* to avoid confusion with the similar-looking letter *dalet*, which would make the word read *ehad*, meaning “one.”

**impassioned** Emphasis on the punitive aspect of the divine personality is prompted by the apostasy of the Golden Calf.

**16. lust after** The Hebrew verb זָנָה, literally “to engage in prostitution,” is often used figuratively to express the people’s infidelity to the covenant with God. Its use here may allude to the sexual immorality often associated with pagan worship, particularly with the popular excesses in connection with the Golden Calf, as mentioned in 32:6.

**17–28.** The laws that follow are referred to by scholars as “The Cultic Decalogue,” though they differ among themselves as to the precise enumeration of the laws. Like the actual Decalogue (Exod. 20:2–14), these laws are considered to be terms of the Covenant (v. 27). Unlike them, they incorporate the requirement of observing the three pilgrimage festivals.

**17. molten gods** The warnings against idolatry in all its forms conclude with this prohibition

because the Golden Calf is frequently referred to in the Bible as a molten image.

#### FESTIVALS AND RELATED RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS (vv. 18–26)

The topics in this section are associated with those of the preceding because the narrative about the Golden Calf recounts that a “festival of the LORD” was proclaimed and burnt offerings and sacrifices were brought (32:5–6). Hence, there is now a need to restate briefly the list of the legitimate festivals of the Israelites, previously set forth in 23:12–19.

**18. Feast of Unleavened Bread** The list begins with this feast rather than with *Shabbat* because the Golden Calf had been identified with the God of the Exodus and because the beginning of the ancient Israelite calendar occurs in the spring. See Comment to 12:2.

**19–20.** The law of the firstborn follows because it too is grounded in the Exodus (13:2, 11–15). The text presupposes our familiarity with that passage. See Comments to 13:13 and 22:29.

**None shall appear** See Comment to 23:15.



<sup>21</sup>Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor; you shall cease from labor even at plowing time and harvest time.

<sup>22</sup>You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest; and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. <sup>23</sup>Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup>I will drive out nations from your path and enlarge your territory; no one will covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times a year.

<sup>25</sup>You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened; and the sacrifice of the Feast of Passover shall not be left lying until morning.

<sup>26</sup>The choice first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

<sup>27</sup>And the LORD said to Moses: Write down

21 שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
תִּשְׁבֹּת בְּחָרִישׁ וּבִקְצִיר תִּשְׁבֹּת:

22 וְחַג שָׁבֻעַת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ בְּכוּרֵי קִצִּיר  
חֻטִּים וְחַג הָאֶסִּיף תִּקּוּפַת הַשָּׁנָה:

23 שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יִרְאֶה כָּל-זְכוּרְךָ  
אֶת-פְּנֵי הָאֲדֹנָי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

24 כִּי-אוֹרִישׁ גּוֹיִם מִפְּנֶיךָ וְהִרְחַבְתִּי אֶת-  
גְּבוּלְךָ וְלֹא-יִחַמְדּוּ אִישׁ אֶת-אַרְצְךָ  
בְּעֵלְתָּךְ לְרֵאוֹת אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה:

25 לֹא-תִשְׁחַט עַל-חֶמֶץ דִּם-זִבְחִי וְלֹא-  
יִלֵּין לִבְקָר זֶבַח חַג הַפֶּסַח:

26 רֵאשִׁית בְּכוּרֵי אֲדָמְתְּךָ תָּבִיא בֵּית  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

לֹא-תִבְשֹׁל גְּדִי בְּחֵלֶב אִמּוֹ: פ

27 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב-לְךָ אֶת-

שביעי

As Rashi notes, this statement is a separate injunction, unconnected to the law of the first-born. It belongs after verse 23.

**21.** The inclusion of the law of *Shabbat* here, after *Pesah* and the firstborn, presupposes a view that the institution of *Shabbat* is based on the Exodus, as in Deut. 5:15, and not on Creation, as in Exod. 20:11.

**work** The soil.

**even at plowing time and harvest time** The busiest times of the agricultural year must give way to the commandment to observe sacred time. This sacrifice becomes a true test of faith.

**22. Feast of Weeks** See Comment to 23:16.

**23.** See Comment to 23:17. The formulation in the verse here is an expansion of the parallel text.

**24.** Another test of faith. This injunction clearly does not refer to local shrines but assumes the existence of some central or, at least, regional

sanctuary that, for many, will be far from home and will require a pilgrimage.

**covet** See Comment to 20:14.

**when you go up** It is assumed that the central shrine will be situated on an elevation.

**25. sacrifice of the Feast of Passover** See Comment to 12:11.

**26.** See Comment to 23:19.

EPILOGUE: MOSES REACHES THE PINNACLE OF EMINENCE (vv. 27–35)

The narrative returns to the role and the status of Moses. The episode of apostasy began with a disparaging reference to him in verse 32:1; it closes with an account of his glorification. Apparently, Moses is instructed to write down the commandments contained in the foregoing (vv. 11–26), just as, following the original covenant, he wrote down “all the commands of the LORD” (24:4).

**24. no one will covet your land** The verb translated as “covet” is the same one used in the 10th commandment (Exod. 20:14), lead-

ing some scholars to surmise that in both locations it refers to seizing by force rather than simply envy.

to the LORD, <sup>17</sup>and on the fifteenth day of that month a festival. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. <sup>18</sup>The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. <sup>19</sup>You shall present a gift, a burnt offering, to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs—see that they are without blemish. <sup>20</sup>The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in: prepare three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram; <sup>21</sup>and for each of the seven lambs prepare one-tenth of a measure. <sup>22</sup>And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, to make expiation in your behalf. <sup>23</sup>You shall present these in addition to the morning portion of the regular burnt offering. <sup>24</sup>You shall offer the like daily for seven days as food, a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD; they shall be offered, with their libations, in addition to the regular burnt offering. <sup>25</sup>And the seventh day shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall not work at your occupations.

<sup>26</sup>On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the LORD, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. <sup>27</sup>You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs. <sup>28</sup>The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed

לְחֹדֶשׁ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה: <sup>17</sup>וּבַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לְחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה חֹג שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מִצּוֹת יֵאָכֵל: <sup>18</sup>בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ כָּל־מְלֹאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: <sup>19</sup>וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אִשָּׁה עֹלָה לַיהוָה פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנָיִם וְאַיִל אֶחָד וְשִׁבְעָה כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה תְּמִימִם יִהְיוּ לָכֶם: <sup>20</sup>וּמִנְחֹתֶם סֹלֶת בָּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה עֶשְׂרִימָה לְפָר וּשְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרִימָה לְאֵיל תַּעֲשׂוּ: <sup>21</sup>עֶשְׂרוֹן עֶשְׂרוֹן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכַבֵּשׁ הָאֶחָד לְשִׁבְעַת הַכִּבְשִׂים: <sup>22</sup>וְשִׁעִיר חֹטָאת אֶחָד לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם: <sup>23</sup>מִלֶּבֶד עֹלֹת הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר לְעֹלֹת הַתָּמִיד תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־אֹלָה: <sup>24</sup>כָּאֹלָה תַּעֲשׂוּ לַיּוֹם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לֶחֶם אִשָּׁה רֵיח־נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה עַל־עֹלֹת הַתָּמִיד יַעֲשֶׂה וְנִסְפּוֹ: <sup>25</sup>וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלֹאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: ס

<sup>26</sup>וּבַיּוֹם הַבְּכוּרִים בְּהַקְרִיבְכֶם מִנְחָה חֹדֶשָׁה לַיהוָה בְּשִׁבְעַתִּיכֶם מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלֹאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: <sup>27</sup>וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עֹלָה לְרֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנָיִם אֵיל אֶחָד שִׁבְעָה כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה: <sup>28</sup>וּמִנְחֹתֶם סֹלֶת בָּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה עֶשְׂרִימָה

even though it is a private sacrifice (see Exod. 12:1–11) indicates that by this time the two festivals had become fused.

**17. festival** Both the paschal sacrifice and the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread are observed at the sanctuary, precisely as instituted by Deut. 16:1–6.

**18. occupations** Hebrew: *m'lekheth avodah*; literally, “laborious work,” of the sort that is forbidden on the festivals. This is in contrast to “any work” (*kol m'lakhah*), which is forbidden on *Shabbat* and *Yom Kippur* (Num. 29:7; Lev. 23:3,28). The nonlaborious work permitted (by implication) on the festivals is not defined, except for the explicit permission to pre-

pare food on the first and last days of *Pesah* (Exod. 12:16).

#### FEAST OF WEEKS (vv. 26–31)

This festival, which marks the start of the wheat harvest, does not depend on the lunar calendar. It occurs seven weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest (Lev. 23:15–16). In this regard it is like *Shabbat*, which is also independent of the lunar calendar.

**26. day of the first fruits** This day is also called “the Feast of the Harvest” (*Hag ha-Katzir*) in Exod. 23:16, and “the Feast of Weeks” (*Hag [ha-]Shavu-ot*) in Exod. 34:22, Deut. 16:10,16, and 2 Chron. 8:13.