

Kriyat HaTorah Companion 2.0

Questions Raised in Each Aliya

Bereishit

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Aliya 1 | 1:1 - 2:3

Why didn't the Torah begin with commanding Mitzvot? Why does the Torah begin with the narrative of creation?

Rashi famously suggests that the Torah begins with the creation of the world, to teach the Nations of the World that God can take the Land of Israel and give it to the Jewish people because He created everything. The Da'at Zkenim suggests that everything recorded before chapter 12 of Shemot is to bolster the Jewish claim to the land of Israel.

Why is it necessary to record 1.5 books dedicated to bolstering this claim?

The Gur Aryeh (Maharal) suggests that the idea of 'commandedness' begins with existing as a nation, tied to a land. Until Chapter 12 of Shemot, the Torah tells us the creation of both the nation and the land.

Aliya 2 | 2:4 - 19

Examine verse 2:4.

What are the 'Toldot'? How would you translate this verse?

Rashi suggests that this verse teaches us that everything the world contains was created on the first day.

What does it mean that everything was created on the first day?

The Gur Aryeh (Maharal) points out that Rashi is really discussing whether the word 'behibaram' is attached to the first half of the verse (toldot) or the second (eret vshomayim).

Read the verse both possible ways and see how it changes the meaning of its description.

Aliya 3 | 2:20 - 3:21

Examine verses 2:20-22 in which Adam gives all the animals names/identities.

What is the point of recording the naming process of the animals? What is its connection to the context of the verses?

Rashi suggests that Adam witnessed all the animals in partnerships between male and female species. Perhaps, before the creation of Chava, it was necessary for Adam to feel his aloneness in the world. Only at that point would he appreciate his partner.

Is there significance in Adam giving the animals name, while these verses continue to refer to this first man with the name Adam?

The Ibn Ezra suggests that in naming the animal, Adam is forced to do something unprecedented - consider his purpose.

Aliya 4 | 3:22 - 4:18

Examine verse 3:22.

What does it mean when the Torah says Adam became "like one of us"?

Rashi suggests that Adam became unique through his new found knowledge of good and evil. This distinguished him from all the other animals, just as God is distinguished from everything.

Why then does the Torah connect this knew knowledge to ensuring humanities mortality (see the end of the verse)?

The Vilna Gaon suggests that one cannot know of evil and live forever. The memory of evil would be too much and therefore the mortality of humanity was a blessing in the end.

Aliya 5 | 4:19-22

Examine verses 4:19-22.

What are these verses discussing? Why are they important for the Torah to include and for us to know?

Rashi suggests that these verses are a precursor to the retribution promised against Kayin (see verse 23). The Radak suggests that Tuval Kayin is named in memory of the now deceased Kayin. He adds that the professions noted in these verse, were unprecedented in human history at the time. This shows that work is not something that is automatically designed into nature but it created the talent and skill of the individual.

How are these verses a precursor to Noah?

See the Kli Yakar for more.

Aliya 6 | 4:23 - 5:24

Examine verses 5:1-2.

What "book" is being discussed here?

The Sforno suggests that the word 'sefer' can also be read 'sippur' meaning the story of humanity. The Ramban suggests that this is a reference to the Torah itself, placing it as central in recording and shaping the story of humanity. The Vilna Gaon suggests that this book is a reference just to Sefer Bereishit in which we heavily interact with individuals. Beginning with Sefer Shemot we experience nationhood and move from Adam to Israel as the defining personality of humanity. The Malbim understands that up until this point in the Torah, we were discussing the Toldot of Heaven, from here on in we are heavily focused on our earthly experience.

See Rashbam on 5:2 for more on the opportunity for humanity to conquer the world.

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Shabbat Shalom

Aliya 7 | 5:25 - 6:8

In these verses we are first introduced to Noah, and the world in which he lives.

Examine verse 5:28.

Why does it say that Lamech 'had a son', as opposed to the precedent in the Torah that would have made it appropriate to say 'and Lamech had Noah'?

Rashi suggests that the word 'Ben' is related to the hebrew word 'boneh' showing that it was Noah who would ultimately rebuild the world. Both the Da'at Zkenim and the Chizkuni suggest that Noah's grandfather, Metushelach, had suggested waiting to name the boy so that he wouldn't be used for some idolatrous purpose.

How did Lamech know his son was destined for greatness?

See the Medrash Tanchuma Bereishit 11:5