A New Heaven and a New Earth:
How the Bible Cultivates Hope for the Future

Part of the Fall Learning Series, Back to the Future: Jewish Perspectives on What Comes Next

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Presented by **Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky,** Dean, List College and Kekst Graduate School; Blanche and Romie Shapiro Professor, Bible, JTS

Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky, Blanche and Romie Shapiro Professor of Bible, is dean of Albert A. List College of Jewish Studies, JTS's undergraduate school, and dean of the Gershon Kekst Graduate School. As professor of Bible, she teaches courses on biblical literature, religion, and feminist interpretation of the Bible. In her writing and teaching, Dr. Kalmanofsky combines contemporary ideas and critical methods with traditional text study, teaching students to be careful, creative interpreters of Torah.

Dr. Kalmanofsky's first book, Terror All Around: The Rhetoric of Horror in the Book of Jeremiah (T&T Clark, 2008) uses horror theory to argue that the biblical prophets constructed monsters and crafted language that worked to terrify their audience. Her book The Dangerous Sisters of the Hebrew Bible (Fortress Press, 2014) explores the biblical portrayal of sisters and sisterhoods and argues that both play a vital role in the Bible's narrative. Her book Gender-Play in the Hebrew Bible (Routledge, 2017) examines the ways in which the Bible defies and challenges its gender norms. Her book The Power of Equivocation: Complex Readers and Readings of the Hebrew Bible (Fortress, 2022) addresses the Bible's inherent complexity, as well as the complexity of those who seek to read the Bible critically, generously, and honestly.

Gen 15:1-6

אַחַר ׀ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם בַּמַּחֲזֶה לֵאמֹר אַל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם אָנֹכִי מָגֵן לָךְ שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד׃

Some time later, the word of GOD came to Abram in a vision:
“Fear not, Abram,
I am a shield to you;
Your reward shall be very great.”

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֲדֹנָי יֱהוִה מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי וְאָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא דַּמֶּשֶׂק אֱלִיעֶזֶר׃

But Abram said, “O my Sovereign GOD, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my household is Dammesek Eliezer!”

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נָתַתָּה זָרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן־בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי׃

Abram said further, “Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir.”

וְהִנֵּה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ זֶה כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ הוּא יִירָשֶׁךָ׃

The word of GOD came to him in reply, “That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir.”

וַיּוֹצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַבֶּט־נָא הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־תּוּכַל לִסְפֹּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ׃

[Then in the vision, God] took him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them”—continuing, “So shall your offspring be.”

וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה׃

And he put his trust in GOD, who reckoned it to his merit.

Gen 16:7-13

וַיִּמְצָאָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה עַל־עֵין הַמַּיִם בַּמִּדְבָּר עַל־הָעַיִן בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר׃

An angel of GOD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur,

וַיֹּאמַר הָגָר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרַי אֵי־מִזֶּה בָאת וְאָנָה תֵלֵכִי וַתֹּאמֶר מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְּבִרְתִּי אָנֹכִי בֹרַחַת׃

and said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” And she said, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.”

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה שׁוּבִי אֶל־גְּבִרְתֵּךְ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יָדֶיהָ׃

And the angel of GOD said to her, “Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment.”

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה הַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֵךְ וְלֹא יִסָּפֵר מֵרֹב׃

And the angel of GOD said to her,
“I will greatly increase your offspring,
And they shall be too many to count.”

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה הִנָּךְ הָרָה וְיֹלַדְתְּ בֵּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה אֶל־עָנְיֵךְ׃

The angel of GOD said to her further,
“Behold, you are pregnant
And shall bear a son;
You shall call him Ishmael,
For GOD has paid heed to your suffering.

וְהוּא יִהְיֶה פֶּרֶא אָדָם יָדוֹ בַכֹּל וְיַד כֹּל בּוֹ וְעַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו יִשְׁכֹּן׃

He shall be a wild ass of a person;
His hand against everyone,
And everyone’s hand against him;
He shall dwell alongside all his kin.”

וַתִּקְרָא שֵׁם־יְהוָה הַדֹּבֵר אֵלֶיהָ אַתָּה אֵל רֳאִי כִּי אָמְרָה הֲגַם הֲלֹם רָאִיתִי אַחֲרֵי רֹאִי׃

And she called GOD who spoke to her, “You Are El-roi,” by which she meant, “Have I not gone on seeing after my being seen!”

2 Sam 7:8-16

וְעַתָּה כֹּה־תֹאמַר לְעַבְדִּי לְדָוִד כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲנִי לְקַחְתִּיךָ מִן־הַנָּוֶה מֵאַחַר הַצֹּאן לִהְיוֹת נָגִיד עַל־עַמִּי עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

“Further, say thus to My servant David: Thus said GOD of Hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be ruler of My people Israel,

וָאֶהְיֶה עִמְּךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר הָלַכְתָּ וָאַכְרֶתָה אֶת־כָּל־אֹיְבֶיךָ מִפָּנֶיךָ וְעָשִׂתִי־לְךָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל כְּשֵׁם הַגְּדֹלִים אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ׃

and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut down all your enemies before you. Moreover, I will give you great renown like that of the greatest men on earth.

וְשַׂמְתִּי מָקוֹם לְעַמִּי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּנְטַעְתִּיו וְשָׁכַן תַּחְתָּיו וְלֹא יִרְגַּז עוֹד וְלֹא־יֹסִיפוּ בְנֵי־עַוְלָה לְעַנּוֹתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר בָּרִאשׁוֹנָה׃

I will establish a home for My people Israel and will plant them firm, so that they shall dwell secure and shall tremble no more. Iniquitous people shall not oppress them anymore as in the past,

וּלְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי שֹׁפְטִים עַל־עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַהֲנִיחֹתִי לְךָ מִכָּל־אֹיְבֶיךָ וְהִגִּיד לְךָ יְהוָה כִּי־בַיִת יַעֲשֶׂה־לְּךָ יְהוָה׃

ever since I appointed chieftains over My people Israel. I will give you safety from all your enemies.
“GOD declares to you: GOD will establish a house for you—

כִּי ׀ יִמְלְאוּ יָמֶיךָ וְשָׁכַבְתָּ אֶת־אֲבֹתֶיךָ וַהֲקִימֹתִי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ וַהֲכִינֹתִי אֶת־מַמְלַכְתּוֹ׃

When your days are done and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own issue, and I will establish his kingship.

הוּא יִבְנֶה־בַּיִת לִשְׁמִי וְכֹנַנְתִּי אֶת־כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ עַד־עוֹלָם׃

He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish his royal throne forever.

אֲנִי֙ אֶֽהְיֶה־לּ֣וֹ לְאָ֔ב וְה֥וּא יִֽהְיֶה־לִּ֖י לְבֵ֑ן אֲשֶׁר֙ בְּהַעֲוֹתֹ֔ו וְהֹכַחְתִּיו֙ בְּשֵׁ֣בֶט אֲנָשִׁ֔ים וּבִנְגְעֵ֖י בְּנֵ֥י אָדָֽם׃

I will be a father to him,
And he shall be a son to Me.
When he does wrong,
I will chastise him
With the rod of mortals
And the blows of humankind.

וְחַסְדִּ֣י לֹא־יָס֣וּר מִמֶּ֔נּוּ כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר הֲסִרֹ֖תִי מֵעִ֣ם שָׁא֑וּל אֲשֶׁ֥ר הֲסִרֹ֖תִי מִלְּפָנֶֽיךָ׃

“But I will never withdraw My favor from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed to make room for you.

וְנֶאְמַ֤ן בֵּיתְךָ֙ וּמַמְלַכְתְּךָ֔ עַד־עוֹלָ֖ם לְפָנֶ֑יךָ כִּסְאֲךָ֖ יִֽהְיֶ֥ה נָכ֖וֹן עַד־עוֹלָֽם׃

Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before you; your throne shall be established forever.”

Jer 31:15-20

כֹּ֣ה ׀ אָמַ֣ר יְהוָ֗ה קֹ֚ול בָּרָמָ֣ה נִשְׁמָ֔ע נְהִ֖י בְּכִ֣י תַמְרוּרִ֑ים רָחֵ֗ל מְבַכָּ֙ה עַל־בָּנֶ֔יהָ מֵאֲנָ֥ה לְהִנָּחֵ֖ם עַל־בָּנֶ֑יהָ כִּ֥י אֵינֶֽנּוּ׃ {ס}

Thus said GOD:
A cry is heard in Ramah—
Wailing, bitter weeping—
Rachel weeping for her children.
She refuses to be comforted
For her children, who are gone.

כֹּ֣ה ׀ אָמַ֣ר יְהוָ֗ה מִנְעִ֤י קֹולֵךְ֙ מִבֶּ֔כִי וְעֵינַ֖יִךְ מִדִּמְעָ֑ה כִּ֤י יֵשׁ֙ שָׂכָ֣ר לִפְעֻלָּתֵ֔ךְ נְאֻם־יְהוָ֖ה וְשָׁ֥בוּ מֵאֶ֖רֶץ אוֹיֵֽב׃

Thus said GOD:
Restrain your voice from weeping,
Your eyes from shedding tears;
For there is a reward for your labor
—declares GOD:
They shall return from the enemy's land.

וְיֵשׁ־תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרִיתֵךְ נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לִגְבוּלָם׃

And there is hope for your future
—declares GOD:
Your children shall return to their country.

שָׁמוֹעַ שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶפְרַיִם מִתְנוֹדֵד יִסַּרְתַּנִי וָאִוָּסֵר כְּעֵגֶל לֹא לֻמָּד הֲשִׁיבֵנִי וְאָשׁוּבָה כִּי אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהָי׃

I can hear Ephraim lamenting:
"You have chastised me, and I am chastised
Like a calf that has not been broken.
Receive me back, let me return,
For You, O ETERNAL One, are my God.

כִּי־אַחֲרֵי שׁוּבִי נִחַמְתִּי וְאַחֲרֵי הִוָּדְעִי סָפַקְתִּי עַל־יָרֵךְ בֹּשְׁתִּי וְגַם־נִכְלַמְתִּי כִּי נָשָׂאתִי חֶרְפַּת נְעוּרָי׃

Now that I have turned back, I am filled with remorse;
Now that I am made aware, I strike my thigh.
I am ashamed and humiliated,
For I bear the disgrace of my youth."

הֲבֵן יַקִּיר לִי אֶפְרַיִם אִם יֶלֶד שַׁעֲשֻׁעִים כִּי־מִדֵּי דַבְּרִי בּוֹ זָכֹר אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד עַל־כֵּן הָמְו֥ מֵעַי לּוֹ רַחֵם אֲרַחֲמֶנּוּ נְאֻם־יְהוָה׃ {ס}

Truly, Ephraim is a dear son to Me,
A child that is dandled!
Whenever I have turned against him,
My thoughts would dwell on him still.
That is why My heart yearns for him;

I will receive him back in love
—declares GOD.

Isa 54:1-10

רָנִּי עֲקָרָה לֹא יָלָדָה פִּצְחִי רִנָּה וְצַהֲלִי לֹא־חָלָה כִּי־רַבִּים בְּנֵי־שׁוֹמֵמָה מִבְּנֵי בְעוּלָה אָמַר יְהוָה׃

Shout, O infertile one,
You who bore no child!
Shout aloud for joy,
You who did not travail!
For the children of the wife forlorn
Shall outnumber those of the espoused
—said GOD.

הַרְחִיבִי ׀ מְקוֹם אָהֳלֵךְ וִירִיעוֹת מִשְׁכְּנוֹתַיִךְ יַטִּוּ אַל־תַּחְשֹׂכִי הַאֲרִיכִי מֵיתָרַיִךְ וִיתֵדֹתַיִךְ תַּזְקִיקִי׃

Enlarge the site of your tent,
Extend the size of your dwelling,
Do not stint!
Lengthen the ropes, and drive the pegs firm.

כִּי־יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאול תִּפְרֹצִי וְזַרְעֵךְ גּוֹיִם יִירָשׁ וְעָרִים נְשַׁמּוֹת יוֹשִׁיבוּ׃

For you shall spread out to the right and the left;
Your offspring shall dispossess nations
And shall people the desolate towns.

אַל־תִּירְאִי כִּי־לֹא תֵבוֹשִׁי וְאַל־תִּכָּלְמִי כִּי לֹא תַחְפִּירִי כִּי בֹשֶׁת עֲלוּמַיִךְ תִּשְׁכָּחִי וְחֶרְפַּת אַלְמְנוּתַיִךְ לֹא תִזְכְּרִי־עוֹד׃

Fear not, you shall not be shamed;
Do not cringe, you shall not be disgraced.
For you shall forget
The reproach of your youth,

And remember no more
The shame of your widowhood.

כִּ֣י בֹעֲלַ֔יִךְ עֹשַׂ֖יִךְ יְהוָ֣ה צְבָאֹ֑ות שְׁמֹ֔ו וְגֹאֲלֵךְ֙ קְדֹ֣וש יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל אֱלֹהֵ֥י כָל־הָאָ֖רֶץ יִקָּרֵֽא׃

For the One who made you—whose name is “GOD of Hosts”—
Will espouse you.
The Holy One of Israel—who is called “God of all the Earth”—
Will redeem you.

כִּֽי־כְאִשָּׁ֥ה עֲזוּבָ֛ה וַעֲצ֥וּבַת רֽוּחַ֖ קְרָאָ֣ךְ יְהוָ֑ה וְאֵ֥שֶׁת נְעוּרִ֖ים כִּ֥י תִמָּאֵ֛ס אָמַ֥ר אֱלֹהָֽיִךְ׃

GOD has called you back
As a wife forlorn and forsaken.
Can one cast off the wife of his youth?
—said your God.

בְּרֶ֥גַע קָטֹ֖ן עֲזַבְתִּ֑יךְ וּבְרַחֲמִ֖ים גְּדֹלִ֥ים אֲקַבְּצֵֽךְ׃

For a little while I forsook you,
But with vast love I will bring you back.

בְּשֶׁ֣צֶף קֶ֔צֶף הִסְתַּ֥רְתִּי פָנַ֖י רֶ֣גַע מִמֵּ֑ךְ וּבְחֶ֣סֶד עֹולָ֔ם רִחַמְתִּ֖יךְ אָמַ֥ר גֹּאֲלֵ֖ךְ יְהוָֽה׃ {ס}

In slight anger, for a moment,
I hid My face from you;
But with kindness everlasting
I will take you back in love
—said GOD your Redeemer.

כִּֽי־מֵ֥י נֹ֛חַ זֹ֖את לִ֑י אֲשֶׁ֣ר נִשְׁבַּ֗עְתִּי מֵעֲבֹ֤ר מֵי־נֹ֙חַ֙ עֹ֔וד עַל־הָאָ֖רֶץ כֵּ֣ן נִשְׁבַּ֔עְתִּי מִקְּצֹ֥ף עָלַ֖יִךְ וּמִגְּעָר־בָּֽךְ׃

For this to Me is like the waters of Noah:
As I swore that the waters of Noah
Nevermore would flood the earth,
So I swear that I will not
Be angry with you or rebuke you.

כִּ֤י הֶהָרִים֙ יָמ֣וּשׁוּ וְהַגְּבָע֔וֹת תְּמוֹטֶ֖ינָה וְחַסְדִּ֣י מֵאִתְּךָ֣ לֹא־יָמ֑וּשׁ וּבְרִ֥ית שְׁלוֹמִ֖י לֹ֣א תָמ֑וּט אָמַ֖ר
מְרַחֲמֶ֥ךָ יְהוָֽה׃ {o}

For the mountains may move
And the hills be shaken,
But my loyalty shall never move from you,
Nor My covenant of friendship be shaken
—said GOD, who takes you back in love.

Deut 34:1-4

וַיַּ֣עַל מֹשֶׁ֗ה מֵֽעַרְבֹ֙ת מוֹאָ֔ב אֶל־הַ֖ר נְבֹ֑ו רֹ֚אשׁ הַפִּסְגָּ֔ה אֲשֶׁ֖ר עַל־פְּנֵ֣י יְרֵח֑וֹ וַיַּרְאֵ֤הוּ יְהוָה֙ אֶת־כָּל־
הָאָ֔רֶץ אֶת־הַגִּלְעָ֖ד עַד־דָּֽן׃

Moses went up from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho, and GOD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan;

וְאֵת֙ כָּל־נַפְתָּ֔לִי וְאֶת־אֶ֥רֶץ אֶפְרַ֖יִם וּמְנַשֶּׁ֑ה וְאֵת֙ כָּל־אֶ֣רֶץ יְהוּדָ֔ה עַד֙ הַיָּ֣ם הָאַחֲרֽוֹן׃

all Naphtali; the land of Ephraim and Manasseh; the whole land of Judah as far as the Western Sea;

וְאֶת־הַנֶּ֖גֶב וְאֶת־הַכִּכָּ֑ר בִּקְעַ֤ת יְרֵחוֹ֙ עִ֣יר הַתְּמָרִ֔ים עַד־צֹֽעַר׃

the Negeb; and the Plain—the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar.

וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יְהוָה֙ אֵלָ֔יו זֹ֚את הָאָ֔רֶץ אֲשֶׁ֣ר נִשְׁבַּ֔עְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָ֥ם לְיִצְחָ֖ק וּלְיַעֲקֹ֣ב לֵאמֹ֑ר לְזַרְעֲךָ֖ אֶתְּנֶ֣נָּה
הֶרְאִיתִ֔יךָ בְּעֵינֶ֖יךָ וְשָׁמָ֥ה לֹ֖א תַּעֲבֹֽר׃

And GOD said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, ‘I will assign it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross there.”