

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter II: Noah (Gen. 6:9–11:32)

Essay 4. Corruption and violence

A. Was there a valid defense for their corruption?

פְּסוּקִים "וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים" וכו', יש לדקדק בפסוקים אלו שמתחלה אמר "וַתִּשְׁחַת" דהיינו זנות וגם "וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס" דהיינו גזל. ואחר כך, לא הנפיר עוד הגזל, רק אמר "וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ" וכו' "כִּי-הִשְׁחִית" וכו' דמשמע שנה קשה לפני הקב"ה יותר מהגזל. ואחר כך "וַיִּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַח לְךָ לְבַשָּׁר בָּא לִפְנֵי כִי-מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס" דמשמע להיפך שאדרבא עיקר עונשם היה מפני החמס, ואחר כך "וַיְהִי מִשְׁחִיתָם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ" שנהו עונש על הזנות בשביל "וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ".

Regarding the three verses beginning: **“The earth became corrupt before G-d” etc. (Gen. 6:11), we should scrutinize these verses, for at the beginning it says “it became corrupt,” which is sexual immorality, and also, “the earth was filled with violence,” which is robbery. Afterward, in the second verse, [Scripture] doesn’t mention the robbery anymore; it only says, “When G-d saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth” (Gen. 6:12), with the meaning that this sexual immorality was more difficult for the Holy One, Blessed be He, than the robbery. Afterward, in the third verse, it says, “G-d said to Noah, ‘An end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them’ ” (Gen. 6:13), with the opposite meaning, that to the contrary, the principle reason for their punishment was because of the violence rather than the sexual immorality, and afterward it says, “ ‘I will destroy them with the earth,’ ” which is the punishment for sexual immorality, because “the earth became corrupt.”**

ועוד קשה על דברי רז"ל שאמרו כל מקום שאמה מוצא זנות אנדרולומוסיא באה לעולם והורגת טובים ורעים. ואם פן מדין הזנות בלבד היו חייבים פלייה. ועוד אמרו לא נחמם גזר דינם אלא על הגזל, שלכאורה הם סותרים זה את זה. ואף על פי שהבעל יפה תואר על פסוק "כי טבת הנה" פתב שאי אפשר ליישב אלו שתי אגדות שבנדאי תלוקות הן, מפל מקום היכא דמציינו למדרש דרשינו, ומפל שכן שרש"י בפירושו החומש הביא שתיקה, ועוד דבלאו אלו אגדות נמי קשו קראי אהדדי.

Another question is on the words of the rabbi, of blessed memory, Rashi, who said, “Wherever you find sexual immorality and idolatry, punishment of an indiscriminate

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character comes upon the world killing good and bad alike.”¹ If so, from the law of sexual immorality only they were deserving of destruction. However, they also say, their fate was sealed only on account of their sin of robbery,² so that apparently they contradict one another. Even though the author of the Yafeh To’ar³ commentary on Gen. Rabbah wrote on the verse, “how beautiful the daughters of man were” (Gen. 6:2), that it was impossible to reconcile these two *Aggadot* that are surely different, in any case, where we are able to expound a midrash, we should expound it. That’s even more the case since Rashi in his commentary on the Torah brought both *Aggadot*, even though these *Aggadot* are mutually contradictory.

ויתורץ הפל במאי דאמרין בפרק ה' דברכות מאי "נדי זקב" אמרי דבי רבי ינאי: כן אמר משה לפני הקב"ה, רבוננו של עולם, בשביל כסף וזקב שהשפעת להם לישראל, עד שאמרו "די"—הוא גרם שייעשו העגל. אין ארי נוהם מתוך קופה של תבן אלא מתוך קופה של בשר. אמר ר' יוחנן: משל לאדם אחד שהיה לו בן. הרחיצו וסכו, והאכילו והשקהו, ותלה לו פיס של זקב בצוארו, והושיבו על פתח זונות. מה יעשה אותו הבן שלא יחטא וכו'? אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר ר' ינאי: מנין שחזר הקב"ה והודה לו למשה, שנאמר: "וכסף הרביתי לה וזקב עשו לבעל".

This will be solved by what it says in the fifth chapter of tractate Berachot:

What is [the meaning of] “and Di-Zahav” (Deut. 1:1)? The Sages of the school of Rabbi Yannai said that Moses said the following before the Holy One, Blessed be He [to atone for Israel after the sin of the Golden Calf]: **Master of the Universe, because of the gold and silver that you lavished upon Israel [during the Exodus from Egypt] until they said enough [dai]; [it was this wealth] that caused [Israel] to make the [Golden] Calf. [Establishing a general moral principle, the Sages] of the school of Rabbi Yannai said: A lion does not roar [standing] over a basket of straw [from which he derives no pleasure], but [he roars standing] over a basket of meat [as he only roars when satiated]. . . .**

[The Gemara offers another analogy]: Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba said that **Rabbi Yochanan said: [This is] comparable to a person who had a son; he bathed him and anointed him [with oil], fed him and gave him drink, and hung a golden purse around his neck. [Then, he] brought [his son] to the entrance of a brothel. What could the son do to avoid sinning?**

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said [that] Rabbi Yonatan said: From where [is it derived that] the Holy One, Blessed be He, ultimately conceded to Moses [that the reason for the sin of the Golden Calf was indeed the riches lavished upon Israel]? As it is stated: “And I gave them an abundance of silver and gold, which they used for the Ba’al” (Hosea 2:10).

- Berachot 32a

¹ Rashi on Gen. 6:13, based on Gen. Rabbah 26:5.

² Rashi on Gen. 6:13, based on Sanhedrin 108a.

³ Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac Ashkenazi Jaffe (d. late 16th century), rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople. Yafeh To’ar was his commentary to the Midrash Rabbah: Genesis (Venice, 1597–1606); Exodus (Venice, 1597); and Leviticus (Constantinople, 1648).

ואף כּאן בדור המבול, על הזנות היו יכולים להשיב וּשְׁחָטְאוּ בַשְּׁבִיל רוב טובה שֶׁהִשְׁפִיעַ לָהֶם הַקַּב"ה, כּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ בְּפֶרֶק חֵלֶק דּוֹר הַמַּבּוּל לֹא נִתְגָּאוּ אֲלָא וְכוּ' דוֹר הַמַּבּוּל הִטְעִימָן הַקַּב"ה מֵעֵין הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא דְכַתִּיב "בְּתִיבָהּ שְׁלוֹם מִפְּחָד" וְכוּ'. וְאִינָם חֲטִיבִים כָּל כָּךְ אִם הִלְכוּ אַחַר יִצְרָחֵם שֶׁהָרִי קָרָא כְּתִיב "כְּמַרְעִיתָם וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ" וְכוּ', וְכַתִּיב "נְנוּת וַיִּזְוּ וַתִּירוּשׁ יִשְׁחָלְבוּ". וּבִפְרָט בְּדוֹר הַהוּא שֶׁהָיוּ לָהֶם נְשִׁים יְפוֹת עַד מְאֹד וּמָה יַעֲשׂוּ שְׂלֵא יִשְׁחָטְאוּ אִם הָעֵין רוֹאֶה וְהַלֵּב חוֹמֵד וְכוּ', וּמִכָּל שֶׁכֵּן כִּי אָפִילוּ "בְּגִי־הָאֱלֹהִים" דִּהְיוּנָו שְׁתֵּי הַמַּלְאָכִים שֶׁנִּפְלוּ לָאָרֶץ חֲטָאוּ אִף הֵם.

So too, here in the generation of the Flood, regarding sexual immorality, they could have responded that they sinned because they of the great goodness by which the Holy One, Blessed be He, influenced them. This is as it says in chapter Chelek [“portion”] of tractate Sanhedrin,⁴ “The sages taught [in a *Baraita*]:⁵ The generation of the Flood became haughty [and sinned] due only to the goodness that the Holy One, Blessed be He, bestowed upon them.”⁶ The generation of the Flood “was given a foretaste of the World-to-Come,”⁷ as it says, “Their homes are secure from fear.”⁸ They are not so guilty if they go after their evil inclinations, for it is written in Scripture, “When they grazed, they were sated; when they were sated, they grew haughty; and so they forgot Me” (Hosea 13:6), and it is written, “Sexual immorality, wine, and new wine take away the heart” (Hosea 4:11). That’s especially true in that generation, for they had exceedingly beautiful women, and what could they do so as not to sin, if “the eye saw and the heart lusted”⁹ etc.? That’s especially true, because even “the sons of G-d”¹⁰—who were two angels who fell to the earth—even they sinned on account of the beautiful women.¹¹

אָמְנָם בְּזֹאת הִטְעֵנָה שֶׁמִּצִּילִים עֲצָמָם מִחֲטָא הַזֵּנוּת מְעוֹרְרָת עֲלֵיהֶם דִּינֵי דִינֵי עוֹשִׂים עַל שֶׁפָּשְׁטוּ יְדֵיהֶם בְּגִזְלוֹ, שְׂאֵם הִטְעִימָן מֵעֵין הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא וְנִתְגָּאוּ בַשְּׁבִיל רוב הטובה מה צורף הנה להם לגזול? אלא נדאי שהיו עושים להכעיס ועל כן נתחמתם גזר דינם על הגזל, אבל עיקר ענשם הנה מפני הזנות, ולכן אמר הכתוב "ונתשחת הארץ לפני האלהים" וזה לא הנה כדאי לחיבתם, אבל מפני שנתמלאה הארץ חמס "וירא אלהים את-הארץ והנה נשחטה" וכו'. ועיין עוד לקמן פרשת וינרא על "ואנשי סדם רעים וחטאים."

Indeed, this claim that they are saving themselves from the sin of sexual immorality arouses judgments of judgments upon them, for they extended their hands in robbery. For if they were given a foretaste of the World-to-Come and grew haughty because of the great

⁴ Chapter Chelek is the 11th chapter of tractate Sanhedrin, which begins on page 90a. It is named for the opening words, “All Israel have a portion [*chelek*] in the World-to-Come.”

⁵ Tosefta, Sota 3:10.

⁶ Sanhedrin 108a.

⁷ Sanhedrin 108b.

⁸ Job 21:9, quoted in Sanhedrin 108a.

⁹ Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 445:3; Rashi on Num. 15:39.

¹⁰ Gen. 6:1–2, “When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, *the sons of G-d* saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them.”

¹¹ Yoma 67b: “The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: Azazel atones for the actions of Uzza and Azazel.” Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer 22, “Rabbi said: The angels who fell from their holy place in heaven saw the daughters of the generations of Cain walking about naked, with their eyes painted like harlots, and they went astray after them, and took wives from amongst them.”

goodness, what need did they have to rob? Rather, certainly they acted to anger G-d. That is, as Rashi first said, the sin of sexual immorality alone was enough to warrant their destruction. But perhaps they could say, with some justification, that their sexual immorality was G-d's fault for making the women of their generation so irresistible. If so, then G-d could answer, "I have also given you rich farmlands by which to grow crops and raise animals, so why do you need to resort to theft and robbery?" So either their attempted defense should be discredited, and they should deserve death because of the sexual immorality, or even if the defense were to be accepted, we are told that because of their violent nature, they also deserved destruction. **Therefore, their sentence was sealed by their robbery, but the bulk of their punishment was for sexual immorality. Therefore, Scripture said "The earth became corrupt before G-d," and this was not worth finding them guilty** if they could rely upon the defense that the women of their generation were irresistibly beautiful, **but because the earth was filled with violence, then "G-d saw how corrupt the earth was" etc. See further below, Chapter IV, parshat Vayeira, essay 14, on the verse, "The people of Sodom were wicked and incurred guilt before the L-rd exceedingly" (Gen. 13:13).**

B. Another reason why the Flood was imposed both for corruption and for violence

"ניאמר אלהים לנח קץ כל־בֶּשֶׂר בָּא לִפְנֵי". וקשה מהו לשון זה של "קץ כל־בֶּשֶׂר בָּא לִפְנֵי".

"And G-d said to Noah, 'An end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth' " (Gen. 6:13). **A question is what is this language of, "An end of all flesh has come before Me"?**

ונש לומר דאמרינו בירושלמי דיבמות אמר רבי חנינא אחת לששים או לשבעים שנה הקב"ה מביא דבר בעולם ומקלה ממזרים ונוטל פשרים עמיהם שלא לפרסם החוטאים. ואף שאין דין ממזרים נוהג אלא לאחר מתן תורה, מפל מקום הואיל שהיו כלם פסולים שאפילו בהמה חיה ועוף נזקקו לשאינו מינו, צריך לאבדם ושייך שפיר לומר "קץ כל־בֶּשֶׂר בָּא לִפְנֵי". ועוד דאמרינו במדרש רבה על פסוק "כי לימים עוד שבעה" וכו', הם קלקלו את הצורה שניתנה לארבעים יום לפיכך "ארבעים יום" וכו' ומחיתי את־כל־הַיְקוּם" עכ"ל.

It can be said that it says in the Jerusalem Talmud of Yevamot, "Rabbi Chanina said once every sixty or seventy years, the Holy One, Blessed be He, brings pestilence into the world and consumes *mamzerim*¹² and takes kosher ones [i.e., Jews of unblemished lineage] with them so as not to publicize which were the sinners.¹³ "The sinners" could refer to the parents of the *mamzerim*, who were the ones who brought them into existence through the sin of adultery or incest. Or, alternatively, it could refer to the *mamzerim* themselves, who are not sinners by virtue of their birth, but who may, if their status is known to all, understand that they cannot

¹² A *mamzer* is sometimes mistranslated as "bastard." However, it is not related to a child born out of wedlock, but rather to a child born out of adultery or incest.

¹³ Yerushalmi Yevamot 49b.

marry a Jew of unflawed lineage, and go out to live among the nations of the world and end up engaging in idol worship.¹⁴ Or it could refer to *mamzerim* whose status is not known to all, and perhaps not even to themselves, who might marry a Jew of unflawed lineage and create additional *mamzerim*; to prevent this, such *mamzerim* will die at the hands of Heaven.¹⁵ **Although no law against *mamzerim* was practiced until after the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, in any case, they were all invalid, for “even cattle, beasts and fowl did not consort with their own species,”¹⁶ thus it was necessary for them to be destroyed, and quite appropriate for G-d to say, “An end of all flesh has come before Me.” Also, as it says in the Midrash Gen. Rabbah (32:5) on the verse, “For in seven days’ time I will make it rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence that I created” (Gen. 7:4), “Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said, ‘They corrupted the features [of the human embryo] which take shape after forty days [following conception], and therefore “forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence.” ’ ’**

ועוד שהואיל שהקב"ה רצה ליתן להם התורה והם לא רצו למבלה, כדאימא בשמות רבה על פסוק "ואלה המשפטים ועיי"ש, משום הכי נתן להם חומרות ישראל וחומרות בני נח, חומרות ישראל שעושים ממזרים וחומרות בני נח שנהרגים על הגזל. וכן בבראשית רבה דרשו הפסוק של "ימותו ולא בחקמה" על דור המבול, דהיינו ולא בחקמת התורה. ואתי שפיר טובא לענגנו שלא נעשה בהם דין תורה לא כישראל ולא כבן נח אלא כחומרות שניהם.

Moreover, since the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to give [the generation of the Flood] the Torah, but they did not want to receive it, as it is brought in Midrash Ex. Rabbah 30:13 on the verse, “These are the rules that you shall set before them” (Ex. 21:1), because of this, He punished them and imposed upon them the strict rules later [assigned to] Israel and also the strict rules later [assigned to] the sons of Noah.¹⁷ The strict rules of Israel were that they would create *mamzerim* if they engaged in incest or adultery, and the strict rules of the sons of Noah were that they would die as a result of engaging in robbery. Also, in Midrash Gen. Rabbah 31:5, they expounded the verse of “and they die, and not with wisdom” (Job 4:21) as applying to the generation of the Flood, which means not in the wisdom of the Torah. This works out very nicely for our subject, that [G-d] did not treat [the generation of the Flood] as He later treated Israel and that He did not treat them as He later treated the sons of Noah, but rather He treated them with the stringencies of both of those!

¹⁴ See Chapter L, Ki Tavo, Essay 4.

¹⁵ See Chapter XLIX, Ki Teitzei, Essay 6.

¹⁶ Rashi on Gen. 6:12, based upon Midrash Tanchuma, Noach 12:3 and Gen. Rabbah 28:8.

¹⁷ I.e., “sons of Noah” referring to post-Flood mankind other than the Jews.

C. The faulty thinking of the generation of the Flood

עוד דרשו ז"ל על דור המבול פסוקי איוב "ויאמרו לאל סור ממנו" וכו' "מה-שדי כי-נעבדנו". וצריך טעם למה דוקא היו אומרים אלו הלשונות "סור ממנו", ועוד "נדעת דרכיה" וכו'. ואמאי נקטו שם שדי וכו'. והנה כבר אמרנו שהיו חשודים על זנות וגזל, ומצינו במקרא על פסוק "כי-תשטה אשתו", הנואף והנואפת רוצים שלא תתפרסם הטאתם וכן הכתוב אומר "ועין נאף שמרה נפש לאמר לא-תשורגי עין", לא עין של מטה ולא עין של מעלה, אכל הקב"ה "ישב בסתר" משים בו פנים, הדא הוא דכתיב "וסתר פנים ישים".

The [rabbis] of blessed memory¹⁸ also expounded as applying to the generation of the Flood two additional verses of Job, “They say to G-d, ‘Turn aside from us; the knowledge of Your ways, we don’t desire. What is Shaddai that we should serve Him? What will we gain by praying to Him?’ ” (Job 21:14–15). We need a sense why particularly they said these terms, “Turn aside from us,” and also, “the knowledge of Your ways.” Also, why did they use the name Shaddai? Here, we have already said that they were suspected of sexual immorality and robbery, and we found in the Midrash Num. Rabbah 9:9 on the verse, “If any man’s wife has gone astray and broken faith with him” (Num. 5:12), the adulterer and the adulteress don’t want their sin to be publicized and thus Scripture says, “The eyes of the adulterer watch for twilight, thinking, ‘No one will glimpse me then’ ” (Job 24:15), thinking that no eye below will see him, and no eye above will see him, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, “sits in a hiding place,”¹⁹ recognizing his face,²⁰ thus it is written at the end of Job 24:15, “[G-d] will hide His face,”²¹ i.e., so as to secretly observe whether a person will sin or not.²²

ולכן דור המבול אמרו "לאל סור ממנו". אין אנו רוצים שתשים בנו פנים. "נדעת דרכיה" וכו' דאמרינו בפרק ג' דסופה "פי אגני ה' אהב משפט" וכו' משל למלך בשר ודם שהיה עובר וכו' אמר תנו מכס למוכסים, אף הקב"ה פה אמר ממני ילמדו בני ויבריחו עצמם מן הגזל. ואלו שהיו גזלנים אמרו "נדעת דרכיה לא תפגענו".

That is why the generation of the Flood said “to G-d, ‘Turn aside from us.’ ” We don’t want you to give us faces, i.e., to recognize us. “And the knowledge of Your ways” etc., as it says in the third chapter of tractate Sukkah:

¹⁸ Ex. Rabbah 30:13.

¹⁹ Ps. 91:1.

²⁰ Literally, “He puts a face on him,” the way we would say, “He puts a name to the face,” i.e., G-d recognizes the adulterer, even though he is striving not to be seen by anyone.

²¹ Literally, “He will put His face in hiding.”

²² The Zera Shimshon has brilliantly interpreted parts of Job 24:15 and Ps. 91:1 to refer to G-d, even though the verses are typically interpreted as referring to man. Thus, Ps. 91:1 is typically translated as, “[One who] sits in the shelter [ישב בסתר] of the Most High, he will dwell in the protection of Shaddai [the Almighty],” but here the Zera Shimshon uses the words ישב בסתר as meaning that “[G-d] sits in a [hidden] shelter.” Similarly, the conclusion of Job 24:15 is typically interpreted as “[the adulterer] hides his face,” but here the Zera Shimshon uses the words to mean that “[G-d] hides His face.” In both cases, the change implies that G-d hides Himself so as to give man free will as to whether he will sin or not.

The Zera Shimshon also uses a play on words between the end of Job 24:15, *veseter panim yasim* [וסתר פנים ישים], “[G-d] will hide His face,” which allows him to “*masim bo panim*” [משים בו פנים], “put a face on [the adulterer],” i.e. from His hiding place, He recognizes the adulterer.

And Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: What is [the meaning of] that which is written: **“For I, the L-rd, love justice, I hate robbery in a burnt-offering”** (Isaiah 61:8)? [The Gemara cites] **a parable of a flesh-and-blood king who was passing by a customs house. He said to his servants: Pay the levy to the taxmen.** They said to him: Doesn't all the tax in its entirety belong to you? He said to them: From me, all travelers will learn and will not evade the tax. **So too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: “I, the L-rd . . . hate robbery in a burnt-offering.” From Me, My children will learn and distance themselves from robbery.**

- Sukkah 30a

But those who are robbers said, “and the knowledge of Your ways, we don't desire.”

וכלפי מה שאמרו המפרשים שכל עצמם היו סוברים כי עזב ה' את הארץ ולא היו סוברים שהטובה שלהם היתה מפני שהקב"ה תולה על חטאתם, משום הכי אמרו "מה שדי פינעבדנו", דאמרינו במדרש פרשת שמות כשאני תולה על חטאיו של אדם, אני נקרא שדי. ועל זה, היו מבזים מה תלית חטא יש כאן, עולם כמנהגו נוהג, ואף אם יבואו ימי הרעה מה נועיל כי נתפלל אליו.

According to what the commentators said, [the generation of the Flood] were all thinking that G-d had left the earth, and they were not thinking that the goodness they had was because the Holy One, Blessed be He, was suspending [punishment for] their sins. Because of this they said, “What is Shaddai that we should serve Him?” As it says in the Midrash, “When I suspend [punishment for a] man's sins I am called ‘El Shaddai’ [Almighty G-d].”²³ For this reason, they were despising whatever suspension of the punishment of sin there was in the world, and they were thinking that life went on as usual, and that even if bad days would come, how would it be useful for them to pray to Him?

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²³ Ex. Rabbah 3:6; Midrash Tanchuma , Shemot 20:2.