

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter II: Noach (Gen. 6:9–11:32)

Essay 5. Why G-d wanted to destroy the earth

עוד בדרך אחר יבואר הפסוק "קץ פל־בֶּשֶׁר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס" וכו', דקשה מהו "קץ פל־בֶּשֶׁר", ומהו "בָּא לְפָנַי", ומהו לְשׁוֹן "כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס", הֲיָה לוֹ לומר כִּי גוֹזְלִים וְחוֹמְסִים, וּמִפְּנֵי מַה רוֹצֵה לְהַשְׁחִית אֶת הָאָרֶץ?

Also, in another way, we'll clarify the verse "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). For there is a question, what is this "an end of all flesh," and what is this "has come before Me," and what is this language, "for the earth is filled with violence"? He could have said, "because of robbers and marauders." Also, why is this desire to even destroy the earth?

ואיך בפרק הגזל, גנלן אימתי מותר ליהנות ממנו? רב אמר עד שיהא רוב משלו, ושמואל אמר אפילו מיעוט משלו. והרמב"ם ז"ל בפרק ו' מהלכות גניבה פסק פרב, ובפרק ה' מהלכות גזילה כתב אסור ליהנות מן הגנלן וכן אם רוב אותו הדבר הוא גנוב אסור ליקח אותו עכ"ל. ובמדרש רבה על פסוק "נעשה אדם", רב הונא בשם ר' איבו אמר בדעת בראו, שברא צרכי מזונותיו ואחר כך בראו. אמרו מלאכי השרת וכו' אמר לו "צנה ואלפים כלם" למה נבראו וכו' עכ"ל.

We find in the chapter entitled "One who robs," which is chapter 10 of tractate Bava Batra, it is written: "[Regarding] a robber, from when is it permitted to benefit [i.e., purchase items] from him? Rav says: As long as the majority [of his possessions are] from his [own property, i.e., property that he obtained legally]. Shmuel says: Even [if only] a minority [of his possessions are from] his [own property]." The Rambam of blessed memory, in the sixth chapter of the Laws of Theft (halacha 1), ruled according to Rav,¹ and in the fifth chapter of the Laws of Robbery (halacha 8), wrote, "It's forbidden to benefit from the robber, and if the majority of his possessions are stolen, it's forbidden to take [anything]."² In Midrash Rabbah on the verse, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26), it's written:

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¹ Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Theft, 6:1, "Whenever the prevailing assumption is that an article is stolen, one is forbidden to purchase it. Similarly, if the majority of a particular substance is stolen, one is forbidden to purchase it."

² Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Robbery, 5:8, "It is forbidden to benefit from a robber's property. If even a minor portion of his property was legitimately his, one is allowed to benefit from his property, unless one is certain that the article from which one is benefiting was obtained by robbery."

R. Huna said in R. Aibu's name: He created him with due deliberation: He first created his food requirements, and only then did He create him. Said the ministering angels to the L-rd: “ ‘Master of the Universe! What is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You think of him?’ (Ps. 8:5). This trouble, for what has it been created?” “If so, He said to them, ‘Sheep and oxen, all of them**’ (Ps. 8:8), **why were they created**; why were ‘the birds of the air and the fish of the sea’ (Ps. 8:9) created? If there is a tower full of good things, but no guests, what pleasure has its owner in having filled it? They said to Him: “Master of the Universe! ‘O L-rd, our L-rd, how glorious is Your name in all the earth’ (Ps. 8:10). Do what pleases You!”**

- Gen. Rabbah 8:6

ומעתה בדור הזה שִׁהיוּ פֶלֶם גְּזֻלָּיִים וְכָל מְמוֹנָם בְּחֻזְקַת גְּזוּל, וְזֶהוּ "כִּי־מִלְאָה . . . תִּמְס", אֵין עוֹד מַחְיָה לְכָל בְּשָׂר אֵין עוֹד מְזוֹנוֹת אֵין עוֹד "צֹנֶה וְאֵלֶפִים" וְכוּ'. וְלִזְהָ אָמַר הַכְּתוּב "קִץ כָּל־בְּשָׂר בָּא" וְכוּ', וְדַאי שְׂיֵשׁ לָהֶם לְמוֹת עַל כִּי אֵין עוֹד לָהֶם דְּבַר הַנֶּתֶר לְאָכּוֹל, שְׂאָסוּר לְקַנּוֹת אוֹ לִיהְנֹת שׁוּם דְּבַר מִהַגְזֹל אוֹ מִהַגְזוּל.

From now, in this generation that is entirely composed of robbers and for which all of their money is by the power of plunder—and this is the meaning of, “for the earth is filled with violence”—there will be no more sustenance for all flesh, no more food, no more “sheep and oxen.” For this reason, Scripture said, “An end of all flesh has come,” and it’s enough of a reason that they have to die because there’s no food remaining for them to eat, as it’s forbidden to purchase or to benefit from anything coming from the robber or that is plunder.

וְעַל כֵּן "וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ", שְׂאָף עַל פִּי שְׁהַשְׁרַקַע אֵינָה נִגְזָלָת, מִכָּל מְקוֹם נַעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ אִיסוּר. כְּמוֹ שְׂאָמְרוּ בַּמִּדְרָשׁ שְׁהָיוּ הוֹלְכִים בְּשָׂדוֹת חֲבִירֵיהֶם, וְהִרְמַב"ם שֵׁם פֶּסֶק שֶׁהַגְזוּל שָׂדֵה אִסוּר לְעִבּוֹר בְּתוֹכָהּ, וְעַל כֵּן "וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתֶם" וְכוּ'. וּמִטַּעַם זֶה הַשְׁחִית כָּל הַשְּׂלֵשָׁה טְפָחִים שֶׁל עוֹמֵק הַמַּחְרִישָׁה כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יִהְיוּ עוֹד מֵהֶם. אֲבָל אַתָּה, "עֲשֵׂה לָּךְ", כְּלוּמַר מִשְׁלָדָּה, שְׁתַּהַיְהֶה וְדַאי שְׂאֵינּוּ מְמוֹן גְּזוּל.

Therefore, for the same reason, “I will destroy them with the earth,” for even though the ground is not robbed, i.e., it is not stolen away by force, as one cannot carry away real estate in the manner that one could take a movable object, nevertheless they have done something forbidden on it. How so? As it’s written in the Midrash, “They would trespass into the fields of their friends,” and the Rambam there rules, in the Laws of Robbery, chapter 5, halacha 3, “When one [acquires] a field by robbery, it is forbidden to pass through it.”³ Thus, if a house or field is “acquired” by robbery, i.e., someone has entered it by force and established dominion over it, it becomes forbidden for all to benefit from it, such as entering the house or passing through the property. For this reason, by bringing the Flood, He destroyed to the depth of a furrow of

³ Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Robbery, 5:3, “When a person obtains a house or a field by robbery, it is forbidden to pass through it or enter it.”

three handbreadths,⁴ i.e., including all of the topsoil and part of the subsoil, in order that [Noah and his descendants who survived the Flood] would not benefit further from [the topsoil]. But you, Noah, “make for yourself an ark of gopher wood” (Gen. 6:14), as if to say, “from your own [property],” that you will be certain that it’s not plundered wealth.

וַעֲבִיין קָשָׁה מֵהוּ לְשׁוֹן "בְּשָׂר", וְעוֹד קָשָׁה עַל רִשְׁי ע"ה שְׁפִירֵשׁ "קָץ פְּלִבְשָׂר", כֹּל מְקוֹם שְׂאֵתָהּ מוֹצֵא זְנוּת אֲנִדְרוֹלוֹמוֹסִיָּאָה בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם וְכוּ', דְּשָׁמַע מִינָהּ שְׁעַל עוֹן זְנוּת הִנֵּה בָּא קָצֵם, וְאַחֲרֵי זֶה פִּירֵשׁ עַל "פִּי־מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חֲמָס", לֹא נִחְתָּם גְּזֵר דִּינָם אֱלָא עַל הַגְּזֵל. וּמִלְבַּד מַה שְׁתַּרְצֵנוּ לְעֵיל, יֵשׁ לִזְמַר דְּאֵיתָא בְּפִילְקוּט אִיּוֹב עַל פְּסוּק "עָרוֹם הֵלְכוּ בְּלִי לְבוּשׁ", כִּיּוֹן שְׁהִיוּ רוּאִים שְׁבָנֵי אֲדָם גּוֹזְלִים בְּגִדֵיהֶם הָיוּ הוֹלְכִים עָרוּמִים בְּשׁוּק עַכ"ל.

There is still a question on the language of “flesh,” and also a question on Rashi, may he rest in peace, who explains, “An end of all flesh has come before Me” (Gen. 6:13): “Wherever you find sexual immorality and idolatry, punishment of an indiscriminate character comes upon the world killing good and bad alike.” For we hear from this that it was because of the sin of sexual immorality that their end came, but after this, [Rashi] explained the words “for the earth is filled with violence,” as “their fate was sealed only on account of their sin of robbery.”⁵ Apart from what we solved above, in essay 4,⁶ it can be said that it’s brought in Yalkut Shimoni on Job, remez 909, on the verse, “Naked they walked around, without clothing” (Job 24:10), that since they saw that people were robbing their clothing, they walked around naked in the marketplace.

וְאַמְרִינוּ בְּפָרָק ו' דִּיבְמוֹת שְׂאִין לָהּ מְשׁוּקָץ וּמְתוּעֵב לְפָנֵי הַמְּקוֹם מִמֵּי שְׁמֵהֶלֶף בְּשׁוּק עָרוֹם. וּבְבִרְיַאת הָעוֹלָם פְּתִיב "יְהִי כְבוֹד" וְכוּ' "יִשְׁמַח ה' בְּמַעֲשָׁיו" כְּדִאֲמַרְיֵנוּ בְּפָרָק ג' דְּחוּלִין. וּמַעֲתָהּ שְׁפָאוּ לְיַדֵּי כָּהֵן לְהִיּוֹת עָרוּמִים שְׁהִנֵּה בְּשָׂרָם נִרְאָה לְכֹל, "קָץ פְּלִבְשָׂר" דְּוָקָא "בָּא לְפָנֵי" שְׂאִינֵי יְכוֹל לְסוּבְלָם. וּמִפְּלֵ שְׁכֹן שְׁהַסִּיבָה הִיָּתָה לְפִי שְׁ"מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חֲמָס" וְכוּ'. וְהִלִּיכְתָּ בְּשׁוּק עָרוּמִים הִיָּתָה מְגִרָה בְּהֶם יֵצֵר הָרַע שֶׁל זְנוּת וְצִדְקוֹ דְּבִרֵי רִשְׁי ז"ל.

It says in the sixth chapter of tractate Yevamot (63b): “It was taught in a *Baraita* that the inhabitants of Barbarya and the inhabitants of Martenai walk naked in the marketplace, and that none is more despised and abominable before the Omnipresent than one who walks naked in the marketplace.” Regarding the Creation of the world, it is written, “May the glory of the L-rd endure forever; may the L-rd rejoice in His works!” (Ps. 104:31), as it says in the third

⁴ Rashi on Gen. 6:13. His source, Gen. Rabbah 31:7, says: “R. Huna and R. Jeremiah in R. Kahana's name said: Even the three handbreadths of the earth’s surface, which the plough turns, was washed away.”

⁵ Rashi on Gen. 6:13, based on Sanhedrin 108a.

⁶ In essay 4, two possibilities were discussed as to why sexual immorality and violence were cited as being individually responsible for the Flood. First, if the generation of the Flood were to offer a defense for their sexual immorality by saying that G-d had created the women of their generation as being irresistible, then G-d could answer that He had also given them plenty of good land with which to support themselves, and yet they had resorted to theft and robbery. Thus, their defense should either be discredited, or they should separately be deemed worthy of destruction by virtue of their violent nature. Second, G-d had offered the Torah to that generation, but they had refused it, and thus G-d imposed upon them the death penalty later given to the Jews for committing incest or adultery leading to the creation of *mamzerim*, as well as the death penalty later given to the offspring of Noah for committing robbery.

chapter of tractate Chullin (60a), which is understood as praise for those who follow the will of G-d even without being explicitly instructed.⁷ In contrast, the generation of the Flood was doing the opposite of G-d's will. Also, it was not just man, but Midrash tells us that even animals started mating with other species!⁸ Now that they came to this point, to be naked such that their flesh is seen by all, Scripture says, "an end of all flesh," meaning that literally, for their flesh is seen by all. Then Scripture says "has come before Me," as if G-d is saying that "I am not able to tolerate them," all the more so, in addition to the sexual immorality, the reason was because "for the earth is filled with violence" etc. Walking in the marketplace naked incited against them the evil inclination for sexual immorality, and [incited against them] His judgment, these are the words of Rashi, of blessed memory.⁹

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⁷ Chullin 60a quotes Ps. 104:31 in the context that G-d commanded trees to grow after their own kind, rather than intermingling and creating new species. The grasses then decided to also follow that instruction. The minister of the world began to speak and said: "May the glory of the L-rd endure forever; let the L-rd rejoice in His works," with the intention of praising the grasses for doing the will of G-d even without being explicitly instructed to do so.

⁸ Midrash Tanchuma, Noach 12:4, "The animals, likewise, mated with species other than their own: the horse with the donkey, the donkey with the horse, and the serpent with the bird, as it is said: "'When G-d saw how corrupt the earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth'" (Gen. 6:12). Notice that Scripture does not say in this verse 'all man' but 'all flesh.' Therefore, 'He blotted out every living substance which was upon the face of the ground, both man and cattle' (Gen. 7:23). No being that had copulated with a species other than its own entered the ark, as it is said: 'From all the pure cattle' (Gen. 7:2)."

⁹ This is probably a reference to Gen. 3:7, when Adam and Eve perceived that they were naked, for which Rashi commented (based upon Gen. Rabbah 19:6), "What then does 'and they knew that they were naked' signify? One charge had been entrusted to them and they now knew they had stripped themselves of it."