

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter IV: Vaveira (Gen. 18:1–22:24)

### Essay 14. The people of Sodom were like the generation of the Flood

**עוד** איתא התם "וְאֵנְשֵׁי סֹדֶם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים" רב יהודה אָמר רָעִים בְּגוֹפֵם וְחַטָּאִים בְּמִמּוֹנָם, בְּמִתְנִיתָא תָנָא רָעִים בְּמִמּוֹנָם וְחַטָּאִים בְּגוֹפֵם. וְרַש"י עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם בְּחוּמָשׁ פִּירֵשׁ כְּסִבְרַת רַב יְהוּדָה, וְאַנְקְלוֹס תַּרְגְּמוּ כְּסִבְרַת הַמִּתְנִיתָא, וְהִקְשׁוּ עָלָיו לָמָּה הֵנִיחַ פִּירוּשׁ הַתַּרְגוּם, וְעוֹד לָמָּה לֹא נִקַּט כְּסִבְרַת הַמִּתְנִיתָא דְעַדִּיפָא מְסִבְרַת רַב יְהוּדָה. וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לְתַמוּהַ אִיךָ רַב יְהוּדָה יִחְלֹק עַל מִתְנִיתָא.

**It's also found there (Sanhedrin page 109a), “The people of Sodom were wicked and incurred guilt’ (Gen. 13:13), Rav Yehuda said, ‘[They were] wicked with their bodies and incurred guilt with their money,’ and in a Baraita it was taught, “[They were] wicked with their money and incurred guilt with their bodies.’ ”**

**Rashi, may he rest in peace, in his commentary on the Pentateuch interpreted [the verse] Gen. 13:13 according to the explanation of Rav Yehuda, but Onkelos translated it as the explanation of the Baraita. [People] questioned why [Rashi] abandoned the explanation of the translation of Onkelos. Also, why didn't [Rashi] take the opinion of the Baraita, which is preferable to the opinion of Rav Yehuda? Also, one can be surprised that Rav Yehuda disagreed with the Baraita.**

וְיֵשׁ לִזְמַר שְׁלֵקְאוֹרְהָ קִשְׁיָה עַל הַכְּתוּב שְׁאָמַר "רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים", דְּאִפְכָּא הֵנִי לִיה לְמִימַר חַטָּאִים וְרָעִים, דְּחַטָּא מִשְׁמַע חַטָּא קַל כְּמוֹ שׁוֹגֵג, וּמִתְחַלְהָ אֲדָם חוּטָא בְּחַטָּא קַל וְאַחַר כֵּן בָּא לִידֵי מִזִּיד.

**It can be said that it's apparently difficult that Scripture said “wicked and incurred guilt [חַטָּאִים] [*chata'im*],” for it should have said the opposite, “incurred guilt and wicked,” for the meaning of “incurred guilt” [חַטָּא] [*chet*] is a minor transgression, similar to an unintentional act. For in the beginning, a man incurs guilt with a minor transgression, and afterward comes to the hands of an intentional act. Thus, perhaps Scripture should have first listed the minor transgression, the *chet*, and then afterward said they were wicked.**

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וְצָרִיךְ לומר דְּלִשׁוֹן חֲטָא שְׂפִיר לְפַעֲמִים בְּלִשׁוֹן פְּשַׁע וְעוֹן חֲמוּר, כְּדַכְתִּיב "וְאִיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה" וְכוּ' "וְחֲטָאתִי לְאֱלֹהִים", וְתַרְגָּם אֲנִקְלוֹס "וְאִיחֻב", כְּמוֹ שְׁתַּרְגָּם "פְּשַׁע אֶחָיךְ וְחֲטָאתָם" "לְחֻבֵי אֶחָיךְ וְלְחֲטָאֵהוֹן". וְכוּ' "מִה־פְּשָׁעֵי מִה חֲטָאתִי" "מִה חֻבֵי וּמִה סוּרְחָנִי", וְתַרְגָּם נְמִי "אֶל־תְּחַטָּאוּ בְּיָדְךָ" "לֹא תְחֻבּוּן", וְהִכָּא נְמִי תַרְגָּם "רְעִים וְחֲטָאִים" "בִּישִׁין . . . וְחִיבִין" שְׁהוּא לִשׁוֹן פְּשַׁע.

**It needs to be said that the language of “chet” [חֲטָא] sometimes belongs to the languages of rebellion [פְּשַׁע] [pasha] and iniquity [עוֹן] [avon].** That is, the Torah lists three categories of transgressions that are often equally translated as “sin,” but they are not intended to be synonyms. A *chet* (חֲטָא) is usually meant as an unintentional act. An *avon* (עוֹן) is an intentional act that arises out of person’s inability to control his desires. The most severe is a *pasha* (פְּשַׁע), an intentional rebellious act.<sup>1</sup> But there are a few cases where the word *chet* is used for a sin that is much more serious than an unintentional act, and that would instead be classified as an *avon* or *pasha*. **As it is written**, as Joseph said to his master’s wife who was trying to seduce him, **“How then could I do this most wicked thing, and incur guilt [וְחֲטָאתִי] [ve’*chatati*] before G-d?”** (Gen. 39:9), **and Onkelos translates** this application of the word *chet* **as *ve’echov* [וְאִיחֻב]**, meaning “being found guilty and indebted to G-d.” **This is as he translated, “the rebellion [פְּשַׁע] [pasha] and the incurred guilt of your brothers”** (Gen. 50:17), as **“the *chovei* [חֻבֵי] and the incurred guilt of your brothers.”** That is, in Gen. 50:17, Onkelos simply changed *chet* from its Hebrew form to its Aramaic form, but he translated the Hebrew word *pasha*, an intentional rebellious act, into the word *chovei*, being found guilty and indebted to G-d. The fact that he translated both *pasha* of Gen. 50:17 and *chet* of Gen. 39:9 into *chov* tells us that the *chet* of Gen. 39:9 was much more serious than the usual meaning of an unintentional act. In fact, we know that Gen. 39:9 was referring to adultery with a married woman, which we know is a very serious transgression. **Similarly**, Jacob asked Laban, **“What is my rebellion [*pishi*], what is my incurred guilt** that you should pursue me?” (Gen. 31:36), and Onkelos translated **“what is my *chov*, what is my disgrace?”** again translating *pasha* into *chov*. **He also translated** Reuben’s recollection of his warning to the brothers regarding their plot against Joseph, **“Do no incurred guilt [תְּחַטָּאוּ] [*techte’u*] to the boy,”** (Gen. 42:22), **as *la techovun* [לֹא תְחֻבּוּן]**, again translating the *chet* of that verse not as its usual unintentional act but as a *chov*, “being found guilty and indebted to G-d.” **Here too**, at Gen. 13:13, **he translated “wicked and incurred guilt [חֲטָאִים] [*chata’im*],” as “wicked with their money and guilty and indebted [*chayavin*] with their bodies,”** again translating the *chet* not as its usual unintentional act but as a *chov*, “being found guilty and indebted to G-d,” **which is the language of *pasha***, an intentional rebellious act.

<sup>1</sup> The rabbis derive this in Yoma 36b, based upon the following verses. Lev. 4:2: “Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a person unwittingly incurs guilt (*chet*) in regard to any of the L-rd’s commandments about things not to be done, and does one of them.” Num. 15:31: “Because he has spurned the word of the L-rd and violated His commandment, that soul shall be cut off—he bears his iniquity (*avon*).” II Kings 3:7: “The king of Moab has rebelled (*pasha*) against me.”

והיינו דתנו אנשי סדום אין להם חלק לעולם הבא דכתיב "רעים וחסאים" רעים בעולם הזה וחסאים לעולם הבא. ופירוש מהרש"א, שלא יזכו לעולם הבא שגם שם ישארו סידיים עכ"ל, דמוכח מכאן שחסאים הוא יותר תמור מרעים. ומשום הכי אמר הפתוב תחלה רעים ואחר כך חסאים, ובין רב יהודה ובין המתניחא באו לפרש מהו רעים ומהו חסאים.

**This is taught** in a Mishna (Sanhedrin 109a), **“The people of Sodom have no share in the World-to-Come, as it is written: ‘The people of Sodom were wicked and incurred guilt before the L-rd exceedingly’ (Gen. 13:13). ‘Wicked’ indicates in this world; ‘and incurred guilt indicates for the World-to-Come.’ The Maharsha<sup>2</sup> interprets, that they will not merit the World-to-Come, for also there they will remain guilty and indebted. This proves from here that at least in Gen. 13:13, “incurred guilt” is more serious than “wicked.” Because of this, Scripture first said “wicked” and afterward “incurred guilt,” and Rav Yehuda and the Baraita came to interpret what was “wicked” and what was the “incurred guilt.”**

והואיל שמצינו שבין דור המבול ובין אנשי סדום לא נתגאו אלא בשביל רוב הטובה שהשפיע להם הקב"ה כדאיתא התם, משום הכי קאמר רב יהודה רעים בגופם וחסאים בממונם, דהיינו שעל חטא גופם שהיא הזנות יכולים להתנצל שרוב הטובה שהשפיע להם גרם להם לחטוא, כדאמרינו בעלמא משל [לאדם]<sup>3</sup> וכי ותלה כיס של זהב בצנארו וכי מה יעשה הבן שלא יחטא. אבל זה התנצלות אינו מועיל להם, דאם פן אמאי היו גוזלים וחומסים זה את זה וכי ולא היו נותנים צדקה, ולכן נתחמתם גזר דינם.

**We noted that both the generation of the Flood and the people of Sodom only became haughty because of the excessive goodness that the Holy One, Blessed be He, bestowed upon them, as is written there in Sanhedrin 109a with regard to Sodom.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, as it is said, Rav Yehuda said, regarding Sodom, “[They were] wicked with their bodies and incurred guilt with their money.” That is, for the sin committed with their bodies, which is sexual immorality, they would be able to excuse themselves, that the excessive goodness bestowed upon them caused them to sin, as we discussed in Chapter II, parshat Noach, essay 4, that G-d made the women of the generation of the Flood so beautiful that they were irresistible. As it says elsewhere, “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?” (Berachot page 32a).<sup>5</sup>**

**But this excuse will not avail them, for if so, why were they robbing and engaging in violence against each other, etc., and why weren't they giving charity, and therefore the decree of their judgment is sealed.** That is, as discussed in Chapter II, parshat Noach, essay 4, if the generation of the Flood tried to excuse themselves that their sexual immorality was G-d's fault for making the women of their generation so irresistible, then G-d could answer, “I have also given

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, Chiddushei Halachot and Chiddushei Agadot.

<sup>3</sup> The first edition read למלך [“to a king”], which refers to a different parable on Berachot 32a.

<sup>4</sup> The generation of the Flood was discussed by the author in Chapter II, parshat Noach, essay 4.

<sup>5</sup> This parable is also presented by the author in Chapter II, parshat Noach, essay 4.

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. The people of Sodom had the same character as the generation of the Flood, and were worthy of the same fate.

וכי היכי דלא תקשי דאף על ותטאים בממונם אפשר שישי להם התנצלות, משום "מיים־גנובים ומתקו" ואינו כל כך פשע. משום הכי הש"ס מביא המתניחא תנא וכו', דהיינו בשלמא אם לא היו גוברים וגו'לים אלא מידי דבר אכילה ושתייה, ניקח ההתנצלות של "מיים־גנובים ומתקו". אבל הם היו גו'לים כל הממון של חביריהם, ומפל שכן של האורחים, והואיל שהשפיע להם רוב טובה לא היו צריכים לכה. ובמעו'ת וכדומה אין סברא של "מיים־גנובים" למי שפבר יש לו נכסים מרובים, ולא הנה להם לגזול זה את זה, ונהו רעים בממונם.

**Perhaps there is not a contradiction, for even with regard to incurring guilt with their money, it might be possible that they would have an excuse, because “Stolen waters are sweet” (Prov. 9:17), and it’s not such a *pesha*, an intentional rebellious act. Because of this, to understand this isn’t the case, the Talmud<sup>6</sup> brings the Baraita that teaches etc., which is that, granted, if they were only stealing and robbing only sufficient material for eating and drinking, the excuse of “stolen waters are sweet” would be fine. But they were robbing all the money of their colleagues, and of course of their guests, and since they were bestowed with excessive goodness from G-d, they had no need for [these funds]. With money and the like there is no understanding of “stolen waters” for one who already has plentiful assets, and it was not proper for them to rob each other, and this is the meaning of the Baraita saying that they were “wicked with their money.”**

ואם תאמר לעולם יש להם התנצלות לומר שאין אדם מת נחצי תאותו בידו, אית ליה מאה בעי מאתו פדאיתא במדרש קהלת, ומשום הכי היו גו'לים זה את זה למלאת תאותם, ולא בכוננתם לחטוא, אם כן לא הנה לכם שמח בטובה שהשפיע להם, ולא שייך בהו למימר משל [לאדם]<sup>7</sup> וכו' מה יעשה הבן וכו', ולמה היו חוטאים בזנות, אלא ודאי שאין להם שום התנצלות.

**If you’ll say that they can always excuse themselves by saying that “a person dies without even half his desires fulfilled, because if he has one hundred, he wants two hundred,” as it is brought in Midrash Kohelet Rabbah (1:13). Because of this, they were robbing each other to fulfil their desires, and it was not their intent to sin. If so, their heart was not happy with the goodness that He bestowed upon them, and it’s not appropriate for them to say the parable of the man who hung a golden purse around his son’s neck and led him to a brothel, and what could the son do to avoid sinning? Thus, why did they sin with sexual immorality, rather that certainly they had no excuse.**

<sup>6</sup> Literally, “the Shas,” an acronym for *Shisha Sedarim* [ששה סדרים], the “six orders” of the Mishna and Talmud.

<sup>7</sup> The first edition read למלך [“to a king”], which refers to a different parable on Berachot 32a.

ומעתה רב יהודה ומתניתא לא פליגי קלל, והמוכן הראשון הם דברי רב יהודה, ומשום הכי רש"י עליו השלום תפס סברא זו מפני שהיא יותר קרובה לפשוט. ועוד דמשמעו מלת "רעים" היינו בזנות, כדכתיב "ויהי ער בכור יהודה רע" וכו', מה שאין כן סברת המתניתא שהיא בנויה על סברת "מים-גנובים ימתקו", ואנקלוס תרגם כסברת המתניתא לפי שאין עליה תשובה קלל.

Now we see that **Rav Yehuda and the Baraita do not disagree**, for we see that the people of Sodom committed serious sins both with regard to money and with regard to sexual immorality.

**The first understanding**, that “[They were] wicked with their bodies and incurred guilt with their money,” is per the words of Rav Yehuda, and because of this, Rashi, may he rest in peace, chose this explanation because it was closer to the plain meaning. Furthermore, the meaning of the word “wicked” is with sexual immorality, as it is written, “But Er, Judah’s first-born, was wicked in the eyes of the L-rd, and the L-rd took his life” (Gen. 38:7).<sup>8</sup>

That’s not the case according to the opinion of the Baraita, which is built on the opinion that “stolen waters are sweet,” and Onkelos translated according to the opinion of the Baraita, because there’s no repentance at all for the people of Sodom, and thus no place for them in the World-to-Come.

ולפי דרך זו תורצו הסתירות שיש לנו בדברי רז"ל בענין דור המבול, שבמקום אחד אמרו שלא נתחם גור דינם אלא על הגזל, ובמקום אחר אמרו שהיה בעון הזנות. והיפה תואר תירץ שם שאגדות חלוקות הן. ומלבד מה שתירצנו לעיל במקומו על פסוק "נתשחת הארץ" וכו', עוד יש לתרץ לפי דרך זו שהרי בין דור המבול ובין אנשי סדום נתגאו בשביל רב הטובה, וכן איתא במדרש על פסוק "ועקת סדם וצמרה פי-רבה" רבה רבה לגזירה שנה, שנידונו שניהם באש ומים ודו"ק.

According to this way of thinking, the contradictions that we have in the words of the rabbis of blessed memory regarding the generation of the Flood will be excused, for in one place they said that the decree of their judgment was only sealed on account of the robbery,<sup>9</sup> and in another place they said that it was because of the iniquity of sexual immorality.<sup>10</sup> The Yafeh To’ar<sup>11</sup> commentary on Gen. Rabbah explained there that the *Aggadot* are different, and despite what we explained above in its place, in Chapter II, parshat Noach, essay 4, on the verse “The earth became corrupt” (Gen. 6:11), there is more to be solved in this way, that both the generation of the Flood and the people of Sodom were haughty because of the excessive goodness that G-d bestowed upon them. Similarly, it is brought in a midrash (Gen. Rabbah 49:5) on the verse, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great [רבה] [*rabba*]” (Gen. 18:20), that a verbal analogy can be made based on the word “*rabba*” in Gen. 18:20, as the word “*rabba*”

<sup>8</sup> Rashi comments that Er’s sin was that he spilled his seed, rather than get his wife pregnant, because he did not want to impair her beauty. [His brother, Onan, then married Er’s widow in a Levirate marriage, but also spilled his seed, not wanting to father a child who would be named for Er.]

<sup>9</sup> Sanhedrin 108a.

<sup>10</sup> Rashi on Gen. 6:13, based on Gen. Rabbah 26:5.

<sup>11</sup> 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).

also appears in Gen. 6:5 regarding the generation of the Flood, “The L-rd saw how great [*rabba*] was man’s wickedness on earth,” **that both of them were judged with fire and water.**<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gen. Rabbah 49:5, “ ‘The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great [רַבָּה] [*rabba*]’ (Gen. 18:20). Rabbi Chanina interpreted: It grew even greater. Rabbi Berechya said in Rabbi Yochanan’s name: We know that the generation of the Flood was punished by water, and the Sodomites by fire. How do we know to apply what is stated here to the case above, and vice versa [i.e., that the generation of the Flood was also punished by fire, and the people of Sodom were also punished by water]? Because ‘*rabba*’ is mentioned in both places, offering a verbal analogy.”