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## פרשת נח

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פרק ו פסוק יג

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-לֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַץ כָּל-בְּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי-מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מְשַׁחֲתָם  
אֶת-הָאָרֶץ:

רש"י ומושג

לא נחתם גזר דינם אלא על הגזל:

### **Translation:**

Their final judgment was only sealed because of theft.

### **Explanation:**

The generation of the flood sinned by worshiping idols, behaving immorally and by stealing. While the first two are much more severe than the third, their fate was sealed only because of the theft. Even given the severity of idol worship, Hashem waits for man to repent. However, once they constantly stole from each other, losing any sense of unity and exhibiting a loss of the most basic human morality, Hashem realized they would no longer repent and brought the flood.

### **Looking in the Pasuk:**

The Pesukim immediately preceding our Pasuk, when read together with our Pasuk, seem to be contradictory. For at first the Pasuk tells us that the people sinned by worshipping idols, acting immorally, and by stealing. The next Pasuk tells us that Hashem saw the idolatry and immorality. And, finally, our Pasuk tells us that Hashem brought the flood because they stole from each other. Additionally, the words קץ כל בשר seem superfluous. Our Musag explains that while they were punished for the idolatry and the immorality, it was the sin of theft that convinced G-d that they had reached the point of no return, sealing their fate.

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## NOTES

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The source for Rashi's commentary is the (סנהדרין קח.) which teaches:

אמר רבי יוחנן: בא וראה כמה גדול כחה של חמס, שהרי דור המבול עברו על הכל ולא נחתם עליהם גזר דינם עד שפשטו ידיהם בגזל, שנאמר כי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והנני משחיתם את הארץ.

It is clear, however, that this was not the only sin committed by the generation of the flood. On the Pasuk (פסוק יא) teaches<sup>1</sup>:

ותנא דבי רבי ישמעאל: בכל מקום שנאמר השחתה אינו אלא דבר ערוה ועבודה זרה. דבר ערוה שנאמר (בראשית ו') כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו (גלוי עריות, דכתיב (משלי ל') דרך גבר בעלמה, ודור המבול על העריות נענשו כדכתיב (בראשית ו') ויראו בני האלהים את בנות האדם כי טובות הנה – רש"י), עבודה זרה - דכתיב, (דברים ד') פן תשחתון ועשיתם וגו'.

In addition, according to the (כלי יקר), the following Pasuk seems to focus only on these two sins:

"וירא אלקים את הארץ והנה נשחתה", זה עבודה זרה שאין רואה בלתי ה' לבדו כי הכפירה עיקרה בלב, ומטעם זה נאמר בעבודה זרה (יחזקאל יד) למען תפוס את בית ישראל בלבם. כי עיקר האמונה בלב. "כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו" זה גילוי עריות שנקרא דרכו כדרך גבר בעלמה.

There are, therefore, two basic questions asked by many of the commentators:

1. Why would the sin of stealing be considered so terrible that it should be the one sin that brought the flood and caused the destruction of the world?
2. It is clear to us that the sins of idol worship and immoral behavior are more severe than stealing. Not only are they capital offenses, whereas stealing is only a *לא תעשה*, they are two of the instances where one is required to die rather than transgress. How can it be that it is the sin of stealing, rather than those two cardinal sins, which brings the flood<sup>2</sup>?

The answer is found in a more careful reading of our Musag. The Musag does not say that they were only punished for the sin of theft. But, rather, that the sin of theft 'sealed' their fate, *נחתם גזר דינם*. That is to say that while the sins of idolatry and immorality were the reasons they were punished, as *פסוק יב* teaches, it was the sin of theft that convinced G-d that the punishment must be carried out.

However, we must still explain why this would be so. Why should the sin of *חמס* be the seal on the judgment? We might answer that there is a fundamental difference between idolatry or immorality and theft. The first two are spiritual laws not self-evident or necessarily logical. However, theft is a social law; it is immediately evident to any human being that stealing is wrong. While spiritual laws seek to refine and elevate our moral fiber, social laws speak to our basic sense of human morality. Therefore, even though they were deserving of punishment for corrupting their spiritual selves, as long as their basic moral compass was not compromised, Hashem could hope for change and repentance. However, once theft became commonplace – *כי מלאה הארץ חמס* – it became apparent that they had lost their sense of humanity and that repentance for their spiritual transgression would not be possible, effectively sealing their fate. This is what Hashem is conveying when He says *קץ* *הנני*. Hashem is telling Noah that even though He would usually give mankind time to repent, they have reached the end of the line, a point of no return, *קץ כל בשר*, and therefore *הנני משחיתם*.

Even though I believe the above is correct, I would like to add a slightly different explanation that lends itself perfectly to a novel reading of the Pasuk. There is another stark difference between

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<sup>1</sup> Rashi (פסוק יא ד"ה ותשחת) quotes this גמרא.

<sup>2</sup> This question is actually apparent from the Pesukim themselves. In *פסוק יא*, the sins of idol worship, immorality and theft are mentioned. In *פסוק יב*, however, we are told that Hashem saw only the first two. Then, in *פסוק יג*, we are told that Hashem is destroying the world because of the third!

idolatry, immorality and theft. Both idolatry<sup>3</sup> and immorality are subject to the powerful pull of the יצר הרע as they both provide instant gratification. When one is caught in their clutches, it becomes incredibly difficult to extricate oneself. However, theft in general does not provide instant gratification as the stolen money or object usually will only be of benefit at a later time. Therefore, immorality and idolatry are often momentary lapses, terrible as they might be, leading to deep regret immediately after the sin is committed. However, one who steals and retains the stolen goods, is totally ignoring the fact that he will one day pay dearly for his sin. He usually has ample time to contemplate his lapse in moral judgment but chooses not to correct his sin. One of the most powerful tools for repentance, יזכור לו יום המיתה<sup>4</sup>, does not influence him, making the odds of תשובה slim indeed. Therefore, the fact that they stole simply implied that there would be almost no chance for repentance for either the עבודה זרה or גילוי עריות, thus sealing their judgment.

The ויאמר ה' לנח קץ beautifully weaves this idea into the text of our Pasuk. The Pasuk tells us קץ ויאמר ה' לנח מלאה הארץ חמס כי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והנני משחיתם וכו' קץ ויאמר ה' לנח מלאה הארץ חמס. The words at the beginning of the Pasuk קץ ויאמר ה' לנח מלאה הארץ חמס seem extra as the Pasuk reads perfectly without them: קץ ויאמר ה' לנח מלאה הארץ חמס. The text itself also seems a bit strange as the words קץ ויאמר ה' לנח מלאה הארץ חמס seem to have no significance. The ויאמר ה' לנח מלאה הארץ חמס explains that the term קץ refers to that which is the literally the end of all flesh, the day of death. He reads the Pasuk to be telling us that Hashem told נח that the 'day of death' – קץ כל בשר – came before me – בא לפני – to complain that the people paid him no heed. Therefore, as explained above, Hashem tells נח, I am compelled to destroy the world as Hashem was now convinced they would not repent. The ויאמר ה' לנח מלאה הארץ חמס continues and comments that this explains why Hashem waited for the seven days of mourning for מתושלח to end before bringing the flood.<sup>5</sup> Hashem had hoped the people might realize when contemplating the passing of מתושלח that even a great צדיק will also one day face judgment, and perhaps this would stir them to pay attention to the יום המיתה.

A third approach would be to highlight the difference between this generation and the generation of נח. Why here were the people destroyed whereas there they were simply dispersed? Rashi (פרק יא פסוק ט ד"ה ומשם הפיצם) quotes the Midrash which asks this question and teaches: <sup>6</sup> מדרש רבה לַמִּדְּרָשׁ שֶׁאֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְכִי אֵין זֶה קֶשֶׁה, שֶׁל דוֹר הַמַּבּוּל אוֹ שֶׁל דוֹר הַפְּלִגָּה, אֵלּוּ לֹא פָּשְׁטוּ יָד בְּעֵקֶר וְאֵלּוּ פָּשְׁטוּ יָד בְּעֵקֶר לְהַלְחִים בּוֹ, וְאֵלּוּ נִשְׁטְפוּ וְאֵלּוּ לֹא נִאֲבְדוּ מִן הָעוֹלָם, אֲלֵא שֶׁדוֹר הַמַּבּוּל הָיוּ גִזְלָנִים וְהִיתָה מְרִיבָה בֵּינֵיהֶם, לְכַד וְנִאֲבְדוּ, וְאֵלּוּ הָיוּ נוֹהֲגִים אֶתְּבָה וְרַעוּת בֵּינֵיהֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "שִׁפְהָ אַחַת וּדְבָרִים אַחֲדִים", לְמַדְתָּ שֶׁשְּׁנֵאוּי הַמַּחְלָקֶת וְגִדּוּל הַשְּׁלוֹם:

The Midrash teaches us that the sins of the דור הפלגה were greater than those of the דור המבול, however since they lived in harmony Hashem overlooked their rebellion against Him. On the other

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<sup>3</sup> We do not understand the יצר הרע for idol worship. This is because the drive to worship idols was removed, as the גמרא in (ס:): teaches. In fact, the גמרא in (קב:) relates that רב אשי once disparaged the king מנשה in front of his students. That night מנשה appeared to him in a dream and asked him questions in הלכה that רב אשי could not answer. When רב אשי asked him why he worshiped idols מנשה answered him that if רב אשי had lived at that time he would have lifted the hem of his garment to run and overtake מנשה to worship idols.

<sup>4</sup> See ברכות ה.

<sup>5</sup> See ד"ה כי לימים עוד שבעה Rashi פרק ז פסוק ד.

<sup>6</sup> The מדרש רבה reads:

אותן של דור המבול לא נשתיירה מהן פליטה ואלו של דור הפלגה נשתיירה מהם פליטה, אלא דור המבול על ידי שהיו שטופים בגזל שנא' (שם איוב כד) גבולות ישיגו עדר גזלו וירעו, לפיכך לא נשתייר מהן פליטה אבל אלו על ידי שהיו אוהבים זה את זה שנאמר ויהי כל הארץ שפה אחת לפיכך נשתיירה מהן פליטה, רבי אומר גדול השלום שאפילו ישראל עובדים עבודת כוכבים ושלום ביניהם אמר המקום כביכול איני יכול לשלוט בהן כיון ששלום ביניהם, שנאמר (הושע ד) חבור עצבים אפרים הנח לו, אבל משנחלקו מה הוא אומר (שם הושע ד) חלק לבם עתה יאשמו הא למדת גדול השלום ושנואה המחלוקת,

hand, since the דור המבול stole from each other and lacked unity, Hashem did not overlook their sins of idol worship and immorality and punished them accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

**Questions for Further Thought:**

- a. Do you think people should be more severely punished for spiritual laws or for logical/social laws? What is Judaism's opinion?
- b. Where else do we find unity being central to serving Hashem?

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<sup>7</sup> This idea goes well with our first answer. Once people live in peace and harmony, following basic human morality, Hashem is willing to overlook their sins in the hope that they will soon repent.