

Bereishit 6:11-13

(יא) וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס:

(יב) וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי-שָׁחַת כָּל-בְּשָׂר אֶת-דַּרְכּוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קֵץ כָּל-בְּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי-מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מִשְׁחִיתֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ:

¹¹And the land was corrupted before Gd, and the land was filled with *chamas*.

¹²And Gd saw that the land was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its path upon the land.

¹³And Gd declared to Noach: The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the land is filled with *chamas* due to them. Behold, I will destroy them with the land.

How our midrashim read these words

¹¹⁻¹²The land was corrupted (31:3, 31:6)

- The population worshipped idols
- The population engaged in idolatry and sexual immorality

¹¹The land was filled with *chamas* (31:5b-6)

- The population subverted the entire justice system
- The population engaged in idolatry, sexual immorality and murder, as well as violent theft

¹³The end of all flesh has come before Me (31:5a)

- The punishment of desolation has risen before Me, demanding execution

¹³The land is filled with *chamas* (31:1-4)

- All of them are bad, even Noach
- The land itself has become an agent of *chamas*, cheating its farmers
- They do not accept rebuke
- Everyone is guilty, whether of financial *chamas* or verbal *chamas*

Points of Methodology

- What is bothering my midrash?
 - An unusual or extra word/letter in a verse
 - 31:1 – The ו in ונה in Bereishit 6:8
 - 31:4 – The word רבים-רב in Iyov 35:9
 - 31:5a – How does קץ [end] "come before Me" in Bereishit 6:13
 - A story problem
 - 31:1-4 – מלאה – The land was "full" of *chamas*
 - 31:3, 31:6 – The switch between *hashchatah* and *chamas*
 - 31:5b, 31:6 – The harshness of the Divine punishment
- Does the midrash quote a passage from elsewhere in Tanach?
 - It might be addressing a problem elsewhere in Tanach (31:1, 31:2, 31:4)
 - It pays to read the greater context of verses quoted from elsewhere (31:3)
- Does the midrash use an allegory or parable? Look at its structure, and its choice of metaphors (31:7)
- Midrashim/Talmud may augment our midrash, clarifying it (31:3, 31:5b, 31:6, 31:7)

Ethical lessons of our midrashim

- Gd is patient, but when the entire world is wicked, then the wickedness demands punishment (31:1-4)
- Look for signs from Gd in the natural world, such as the land's fertility (31:2, 31:7)
- Failure to accept rebuke is an additional sin (31:3)
- Verbal abuse is also abuse (31:4)
- Punishment is a product of one's own deeds, and it demands execution (31:1, 31:5a)
- Subverting justice is worse than an ordinary crime (31:5b)
- Gd would not bring such total destruction for ordinary sin (31:5b, 31:6)
- No destruction is without purpose, even destruction of the land (31:7)