

The Mishkan at Central Synagogue

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1. Genesis 7:18-23 and “The Climate Crisis” (un.org)

וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּרְבוּ מְאֹד עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַתִּלָּךְ הַתֵּבָה עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

7:18 The waters swelled and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark drifted upon the waters.

Billions of tons of carbon dioxide are released into the atmosphere every year as a result of coal, oil, and gas production.

וְהַמַּיִם גָּבְרוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּכְסּוּ כָּל-הַהָרִים הַגְּבוּהִים אֲשֶׁר-תַּחַת כָּל-הַשָּׁמַיִם

7:19 When the waters had swelled much more upon the Earth, all the highest mountains everywhere under the sky were covered.

Sea levels are rising, the Arctic is melting, coral reefs are dying, oceans are acidifying, and forests are burning.

חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר אַמָּה מִלְמַעְלָה גָּבְרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ הַהָרִים

7:20 Fifteen cubits higher did the waters swell, as the mountains were covered.

No continent is left untouched, with heatwaves, droughts, typhoons, and hurricanes causing mass destruction around the world.

וַיִּגָּעוּ כָּל-בְּשָׂר | הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ בְּעוֹף וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבַבְּחַיָּה וּבְכָל-הַשָּׂרֵץ הַשֹּׁרֵץ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְכָל הָאָדָם

7:21 And all flesh that stirred on earth perished—birds, cattle, beasts, and all the things that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind.

Rising temperatures are fueling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism.

כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת-רוּחַ חַיִּים בְּאַפָּיו מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְבָּה מָתוּ

7:22 All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life, all that was on dry land, died.

וַיִּמַח אֶת-כָּל-הַיְקוּם | אֲשֶׁר | עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה עַד-רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּמָּחוּ

מִן-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשָּׂא אֶרֶץ-כַּח וְאֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה

All existence on Earth was blotted out—man, cattle, creeping things, and birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the Earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

> What is your visceral reaction to the juxtaposition of these verses?

2. Zohar Hashmatot, Bereishit 254b

What did G-d answer Noah when he left the Ark and saw the world destroyed? [Noah] began to cry before G-d and he said, "Master of the universe, You are called compassionate. You should have been compassionate for Your creation." G-d responded and said, "You are a foolish shepherd. Now you say this?! Why did you not say this at the time I told you that I saw that you were righteous among your generation, or afterward when I said that I will bring a flood upon the people, or afterward when I said to build an ark? I constantly delayed and I said, 'When is he [Noah] going to ask for compassion for the world?'... And now that the world is destroyed, you open your mouth, to cry in front of me, and to ask for supplication?"

> Why do you think Noah took so long to speak up? How do we relate?

3. Midrash Tanhuma: Noach, Chapter 5

*Make yourself an ark of acacia-wood (Gen. 6:14). R. Huna said in the name of R. Yosé: The Holy One, blessed be the Eternal, forewarned the generation of the flood to repent its misdeeds for one hundred and twenty years.¹¹ *This number is derived from 'And therefore shall his days be one hundred and twenty years' (Gen. 6:3).* When they refused to repent, the Eternal commanded Noah to build an ark of acacia-wood. Then Noah arose, repented his sins, and planted cedar trees. They asked him: "What are these cedars for?" "The Holy One, blessed be the Eternal, intends to bring a flood upon the earth, and the Eternal has ordered me to build an ark so that I and my family might escape," he replied. They laughed at him and ridiculed his words. Nevertheless, he tended the trees till they grew large. Once again they asked him: "What are you doing?" He repeated what he had told them previously, but they continued to mock him. After some time, he cut down the trees and sawed them into lumber. Again they inquired: "What are you doing?" He warned them once again as to what would happen, but they still refused to repent. Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be the Eternal, brought the flood upon them, as it is said: *And they were blotted out from the Earth (Gen. 7:23).**

> What lessons might we draw from this episode as we take on the work to address climate change?

4. Rabbi Yonatan Neril (21st century), Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development.

Genesis 6:11-13

וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס

The earth became corrupt before God; the Earth was filled with **wrongdoing**.

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי-הִשְׁחִית כָּל-בָּשָׂר אֶת-דַּרְכּוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ

When God saw how corrupt the Earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on Earth,

אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קֹץ כָּל-בָּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנָי כִּי-מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מַשְׁחִיתָם

God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to all flesh, for the Earth is filled with lawlessness because of them: I am about to destroy them with the Earth.

What provoked God to carry out the most serious environmental catastrophe in human history and wipe away virtually all living creatures? The Rabbis of the Talmud teach that the judgment was sealed because of the sin of robbery (*chamas*). Rabbi Samson Rafael teaches that "Chamas [wrongdoing] is a wrong that is too petty to be caught by human justice, but if committed continuously can gradually ruin your fellow man." With no one being tried for stealing miniscule amounts, store owners suffer significant losses and may have to shut down. No one desires or intends to cause such an outcome. It simply occurs due to the small-scale misconduct of many individuals put together. Yet in response to this human wickedness, the Master of the World intentionally destroyed almost all terrestrial life by flooding the earth.

Today, perhaps the greatest risk of humans destroying the world comes not from those with the intent to do so but rather from the collective, unintentional actions of billions of people. Seemingly inconsequential actions are having a dramatic effect. Small acts by billions of people aggregate to global changes: turning on the car's ignition, buying the plane ticket, eating the food that comes from far away. We are little by little compromising the ecological balance on which we and future generations will depend for our survival. For the first time in human history, we now have the ability to destroy or radically alter virtually all life on earth.