

Accurate Torah explanations
are not “possibilities”, but ideas
demanded by the text.

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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: NOACH	1-3
GOD'S WORDS	1,4
PARSHA: THE FLOOD	5,6

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Weekly Parsha

Noach

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Worst Sin of the Generation of the Deluge

The L-rd said to Noach: The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the Earth is full of violence on account of them. I am prepared to destroy them with the Earth. (Beresheit 6:13)

(continued on next page)

Thought

GOD'S WORDS

VS. MAN'S NOTIONS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Many attempt to teach Torah ideals. And although backed by good intent, many notions taught throughout time are false. Human intention must not obscure or replace what God in fact truly means.

The most fundamental of fundamentals in Torah study is to separate human notion from what is undeniably God's Torah. Machlokes – dispute – between Rabbis or Jews, is the result of ignorance. At one point in time, there was no machlokes. God's words were not subject to debate, as Jews received accurate transmission of God's Written and Oral Laws. And even today, facts and theories of an obvious character have never been disputed, such as the identity of our leaders Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon. Included in this category of obvious content, are the Torah's words. It is therefore vital that when we study Torah, we accept only those explanations that perfectly fit the verses.

It was disappointing to have recently heard a learned individual attribute feelings, specifically "fear" to God. He read the verse in Genesis "lest man reach out his hand and eat of the tree of life and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). He interpreted the word "lest" as God possessing fear, of man. He also said God "feared" man building the tower in Babel, and that when the Torah says "God was grieved in His heart" (Gen. 6:6) it referred to a real vexation on God's part. The individual did not realize his own projections. Based on his personal and subjective outlook, he attributed human characteristics to God, an act of heresy. I explained that God created man and all his faculties including fear, therefore God is not subject to His very creations: God possesses no fear or vexation.

(continued on page 4)

(Noach cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Rashi explains that the generation of the Flood was guilty of three crimes. The people had adopted idol worship. They had abandoned all parameters of proper sexual conduct and even incestuous relationships were common. Finally, theft accomplished by force and violence was common.[1] Rashi further notes that the judgment of the generation was sealed because of the crime of violent theft. It is this crime that is referred to as "violence" in the above passage.[2]

Why is the crime of violent theft more serious than idol worship and unrestricted and incestuous sexual behavior? Certainly, the duty to recognize and serve the Creator is primary to humanity's mission. Idol worship is an abandonment of this objective. Similarly, it is difficult to comprehend the value of a society lacking any restraint of sexual desires. Restraint and self-control differentiate the human being from the beast.

Nachmanides responds that the significance of violent theft is that the impropriety of the behavior is known, and easily demonstrated.[3] However, he does not explain why this characteristic of the sin sealed the judgment against the generation.

Perhaps, Nachmanides' point is not that the severity of this sin decided the generation's fate. He acknowledges that the other sins in which the generation engaged were at least as serious as violent theft. However, the significance of this sin was that it demonstrated that humanity had degenerated to an extent that virtually precluded its rehabilitation. In other words, although humanity was engaged in a variety of other depraved behaviors, these activities allowed for the possibility that humanity might realize its failings and reform itself. Why did humanity's involvement in violent theft indicate that repentance was not longer likely?

Repentance often depends upon a person's ability to pursue enlightened self-interest. In turn, this pursuit requires two steps. First, one must recognize that sinful practices are detrimental. Second, the person must have adequate self-control to act on this recognition and make a change in his behavior. If a person cannot exercise this self-control even when he is aware that his sinful behavior is self-destructive, then the person will not be able to alter his behavior and repent.

Nachmanides' premise is that although the generation of the Deluge engaged in many very serious sins, their fate was only decided when it became clear that the people were incapable of

repentance and change. This level of degeneration became evident from the people's engagement in behaviors that were clearly self-destructive and yet, the people could not restrain themselves. Violent theft is a self-destructive behavior of this type. It is obvious that this behavior is self-destructive. Once society becomes lawless and its members forcibly seize other's property, everyone's livelihood, security, and happiness is compromised. No one can insulate him or herself from harm in a pervasively violent society. Those who contribute to creating an environment of violence will, eventually, become a victim of other's violence. In other words, an individual's relationship with the Creator and personal sexual behavior may be subject to theological debate, but controlling violent tendencies and working towards an orderly society involves only an appreciation of the practical necessities of society and the

exercise of self-control. Therefore, Nachmanides explains that violent theft sealed humanity's fate.

**The Illumination of the Ark's Interior**

And you should make a tzohar for the ark. And the structure should taper upward to a cubit. And you should place a door in its side. Make it with a bottom level, a second level, and a third level. (Bereishit 6:16)

Noach is commanded to build a tevah - ark. Hashem dictates the design of the tevah to Noach. He tells Noach the tevah should include a tzohar. The Sages agree that the tzohar was designed for illumination. However, the specific design is disputed. Some Sages explain that the tzohar was an ordinary window. It provided natural light from the outside. Rebbe Yochanan disagrees. He maintains that the tzohar was a luminous stone.[4] What is the basis of this dispute? Why would Sages disagree over the design of the tzohar?

Torah Temimah explains that the disagreement can be easily understood if we consider another incident. In Parshat VaYerah, the Torah describes the destruction of Sedom and the rescue of Lote and his family. Lote and his party are warned not to look back at Sedom during their flight. The Sages explain the reason for this injunction. Lote and his family were saved as a consequence of Avraham's merit. These individuals did not, by their own merits, deserve to be spared. Therefore, they had no right to look back and observe the destruction of their neighbors. Various questions

(continued on next page)

can be asked regarding this restriction. However, one principle emerges. Those not deserving to be spared have no right to look upon the destruction of others.

Using this principle, Torah Temimah explains the argument over the design of the tzohar. A window provides light. It also affords the opportunity to look upon the outside world. A luminous stone also provides light. However, if the tzohar was a rock, the tevah was completely sealed. Noah and his family could not observe the destruction of humanity. The Sages maintaining that the tzohar was a window, are expressing the opinion that Noah was a righteous person by any standard. He was saved because of his own merits. Accordingly, he was permitted to observe the destruction of the Deluge. Rebbe Yochanan disagrees. He maintains that Noah did not deserve the extraordinary treatment through which he was saved. Instead, he was spared because Hashem wished to reestablish humanity after the Deluge and Noah and his family – although flawed – was the best choice for this purpose. Rebbe Yochanan reasons that Noah and his family were not completely innocent of sin. Like Lote and his family, they had no right to observe the destruction of their fellow human beings.[5]



And the entire earth had one language with uniform words. (Beresheit 11:1)

This pasuk introduces the discussion of the Dispersion. After the Deluge, humankind reestablishes itself. Population increases. Society is very homogenous. All people share common ancestors, language, and customs. It is not surprising that Noah's offspring chose to live together and settle in a valley in Shinaar. Humanity joins together in constructing a magnificent city with a tower reaching into the heavens. They feel that this project will create social cohesion. All members of the community will live together in this impressive city. Families will not establish individual settlements. Hashem objects to this

plan. He brings about the development of a variety of languages among the families. The people no longer share a common language. Without this uniting influence, the various families drift apart and establish individual communities.

Every incident included in the Torah serves a purpose. Some important lesson is taught. What is the message of this episode? Our Sages offer a number of responses. Although some of these explanations are well-known, there are other fascinating responses. Maimonides provides one of the most interesting explanations. Maimonides explains that the Torah asserts that the universe was created by Hashem. The Torah recognizes that an obvious objection can be raised. If we are descendants from a single set of ancestors, how can we account for humanity's cultural diversity? Humanity is composed of radically diverse societies and cultures. How can this be reconciled with the proposition that we all descend from Noah?

Maimonides explains that the episode of the Dispersion is included in the Torah as a response to this question. The Dispersion established the beginnings of human diversity. This incident is included in the Torah to account for this diversity.[6]

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno suggests an alternate explanation of this section's significance. In order to understand his interpretation of this incident, we must begin with a question. Why did Hashem disrupt the work of these advanced social planners? It seems that their objective was admirable. Much of the conflict and hatred throughout history is a result of the perceived differences between nations and people. These early social engineers had the foresight to work towards preventing this tragedy. It seems that the history of humanity would be far more civilized had these builders succeeded!

Sforno suggests that the incident must be understood in its context. The Chumash relates this incident immediately prior to the introduction of Avraham. This alludes to some connection between this incident and the development of Avraham. What is this relationship?

These social planners existed at a time in which idolatry was widely practiced. The shared culture of humanity included this universal religious perspective. If the builders had succeeded, they would have created overwhelming religious uniformity. This uniformity would have encouraged absolute conformity. It would have been very difficult for any individual to question the religious perspective of all humanity. In addition, it would very easy to suppress any would-be critic.

The fragmenting of society eliminated this

problem. Religious diversity quickly developed. With the emergence of many conflicting religious outlooks, it was easier for an inquisitive person to question the truth of the various perspectives. In fact, the emergence of a variety of perspective encouraged an open-minded person to consider the truth of the religious system's competing claims. After all, they could not all be correct. Avraham was such a thinker and he questioned the theologies of his era. This process of questioning led Avraham to the development of monotheistic religion.[7]

Gershonides suggests another explanation of the incident. He begins with the assumption that Hashem created a universe governed by natural laws. Hashem does perform miracles. However, these miracles are exceptions to His interaction with the universe. He created a wondrous system of natural laws designed to govern the everyday events of the material universe. He interferes only sparingly with this system.

In such a universe, there is potential for natural disasters. Hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods are all part of the pattern of nature. These disasters can destroy communities and wipe out entire populations. However, humanity has survived these catastrophes. This is because generally, these tragedies are localized. A volcano may erupt destroying an entire island. However, a community five hundred miles away will be relatively unaffected.

It is obvious that the survival of humanity depends upon its dispersion. If all humanity were to concentrate in a specific geographic area, its survival would be endangered. A single catastrophe could destroy all humankind. In order to prevent such a tragedy, Hashem dispersed humanity over the face of the globe. This assured that natural disaster would not jeopardize all of humankind.[8] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 6:11.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 6:13.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban/Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 6:13.

[4] Ibid. 108b.

[5] Rav Baruch HaLeyve Epstein, Torah Temimah on Sefer Beresheit 6:16.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 50.

[7] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 11:6.

[8] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag/Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 98.

But people continue to assume their understandings are representative of reality. However, if one truly studied reality and employed reason, he or she would arrive at the realization that God cannot possess anything that He created. Certainly, it is wrong to attribute to God characteristics never mentioned in Torah. But he then asked, "Doesn't Torah cite God 'smelling a sweet savour' when describing Noah's sacrifices?" (Gen. 8:21) I responded that although his quote was correct, it must nonetheless be a metaphor, since God has no sense perception and therefore cannot "smell". This simply means that man's act of sacrifice "conforms to God's will"...as is a "pleasant aroma" to man. The Rabbis teach that the Torah speaks in the language of man. God wishes the Torah to offer meaning to all levels of humanity. But God also wishes man to excel past infantile stages, and understand truths. Nonetheless, he is inexcusable for attributing fear to God – never attributed by the Torah's words.

I mention all this since it is crucial to our learning that we insist on strict adherence to the words of Torah. Only in this manner can we ensure that we receive the truth, and not error. And since Torah is written in a cryptic fashion, the task is all that more difficult. Only one trained in the methods of the Torah can act as a reliable Torah educator. We must not resort to those lacking the necessary decades of intense Torah training, literary experts, historians, or similar secular approaches when studying God's words. We resort to the Torah authorities. We must then follow only those opinions that perfectly fit the Torah's words.

This is the primary lesson: accurate Torah explanations are not "possibilities", but are ideas demanded by the text.

When about to answer a question in his lectures, one wise Rabbi always asks his students the following: "What MUST you say?" His lesson is this: never suggest explanations that are unwarranted. To be true to God's words, we must only say "what must be said", i.e., what is demanded by the verses. In this manner, we ensure that we are comprehending ideas God intends us to, and not merely offering possibilities, which can be wrong.

Therefore, use this principle when you learn anything, from a teacher, Rabbi, book, sefer, lecture, anything at all. Understand this clearly: man errs, so authoritative positions, large followings, encyclopedic minds, and reputations are of no avail when determining truth. Rather, ask yourself if what you hear or read is "demanded" by the verse, or if it's simply a possibility. Certainly, if an idea doesn't fit the words or

opposes them, disregard it immediately. Do not allow any emotional appeal to take root. Following is an example of what we "must" say.

The same learned individual cited above said that the Jewish nation that exited Egypt was not obligated in Torah "study", but they were simply obligated to follow the mitzvahs in action. I do not know what compelled him to accept this view. Perhaps he erred as do others, that those former slaves were not mentally equipped to delve into abstract knowledge. However, he ignored the facts, for God instructed Moses to deliver His name to the Jews, "I am, that I am". (Exod. 3:14) This is no simple statement, but requires the audience possess insight. This name serves to prove that God in fact spoke with Moses. As a wise Rabbi taught, God was informing Moses of a highly simplified phrase that carried the idea of God's "independent existence". "I am that I am" means "I am the existence that always existed", or "Whose existence is essential" and not an accidental property, like everything in the universe, which God granted existence from absolute nothingness.

God is the only existence that exists by His very nature, and not due to an added property, like all else. This is equally difficult for people today to grasp. The proof that God spoke to Moses is in the fact that man does not derive such a notion from the created world. The knowledge of something

whose existence is part of its nature is derived through prophecy. This would validate Moses' claim that God spoke with him. This also rejects the view that the Jews were incapable of deep thought.

Secondly, God said in the Shema "and you shall teach them to your sons, and you shall speak of them..." This proves that Torah discussion is required, aside from fulfilling the commands. It also teaches that even the sons – not wise elders – were expected to grasp their fathers' teachings.

Finally, this deep Torah system was not given to our generation alone, but to those former slaves. Thus, God expected that first generation to benefit from the Torah, in all its cryptic lessons.

This individual I quote was at fault in a most severe manner. He attributed human qualities to God. He also suggested that the Torah's greatest mitzvah – Torah study – was not expected of that early generation. This is akin to suggesting a circle can be drawn without curved lines. Similarly, he feels Torah can exist among men through mitzvah alone, without men studying Torah as its own purpose. Additionally, he did not base himself on a source. Had he been true to the verses, he would not suggest that Torah study was inapplicable to the first generation of Jews during Moses' time.

This person, I fear, is just one of many regarding whom Jewish education has evaded. If our current Yeshiva system does not commence the teaching of fundamentals, more and more Jews will make these grave errors. And this will make Jewish education worse than obsolete, as it allows Jews to become heretics.

Be very jealous about your Torah. Do not sacrifice the truth due to any fear of personalities. Demand all that you are taught fits God's words perfectly. God created the faculty of vigilance: it is to be used most in our pursuit of truth.

If you are in Jewish education or a concerned parent, please note the special JewishTimes 10/30/09 issue #350. My goal is to ensure that the Torah's vital lessons from Moses through Maimonides are made available. The theme of "Judaism's Fundamentals" will not only include fundamental mitzvahs and principles concerning our understanding of God, but also, a set of rules of thought and rejections of false notions.

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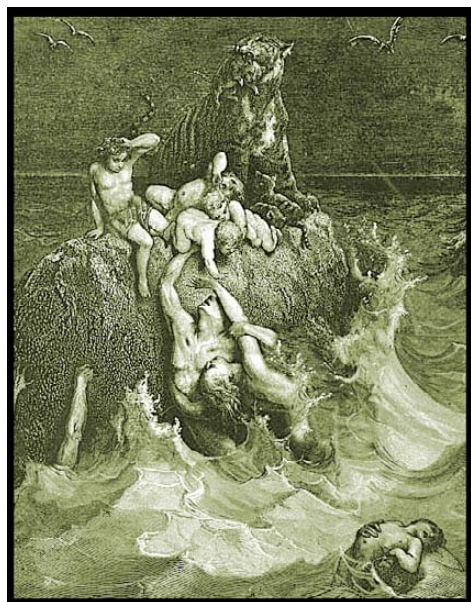
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Noach

and the

GENERATION

of the

Flood

Rabbi Israel Chait

Transcribed by student

In order to appreciate the milieu of the generation of the flood and the events that led to the destruction of civilization, we must analyze the verses in the Torah. Genesis 6:11 states "And the Earth was corrupted before G-d and the Earth was filled with violence." Rashi defines corruption as sexual immorality and idolatry. He defines violence as robbery. This verse is the prelude to G-d's determination that civilization must be destroyed because of the perpetuation of "chamas" (violence) throughout mankind. Thus chamas, robbery, sealed man's fate.

However, this final adjudication by G-d of man's fate was actually preceded by two earlier observations and warnings. Chapter six verse two states, "That the sons of G-d saw the daughters of man that they were fair, and they took for themselves wives, whomsoever they chose." Man was promiscuous and sought all types of sexual gratification without any moral restrictions. G-d thereby gave man his first warning. Man was given 120 years to repent from his sexual corruption or G-d would destroy mankind.

In chapter six verse five, G-d makes his second observation, "And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This observation of the quantitative increase in man's nefarious conduct led G-d to the conclusion that he will obliterate mankind from upon the face of the earth.

An analysis of these observations and warnings from G-d indicates a logical progression and sequence from man's initial corruption, until his ultimate degradation, to total depravity unworthy of salvation.

The first breakdown of the morality of man was his sexual promiscuity. Man's detachment from sexual illicit relationships is the source of man's sanctity.

Kedusha - sanctity - emanates from sexual abstinence. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in the laws of Kedusha has two categories: the laws of forbidden sexual relationships and the laws of forbidden foods. Thus we see that the sanctity of man stems from his ability to subordinate his instinctual desires. Kedusha is the supremacy of the "Tzelem Elokim", (man's intellect) over the "nefesh ha-behami", (man's instinctual desires),

the appetitive and the sexual. Thus the first corruption of man was in allowing his emotions to rule his intellect.

The second step was the 'quantitative' increase in man's degradation. As man's libido and energies became attached to the instinctual pleasures, they obviously became a greater source of satisfaction for man. Thus, man's corruption became prevalent throughout society. The emotions of man totally dominated all aspects of his conduct. Hence, G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great.

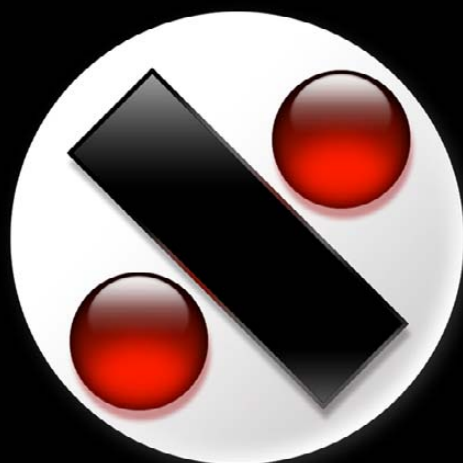
However, the final corruption, which sealed man's fate, was when his depravity progressed to robbery. Nachmanides states that man's fate was sealed with the sin of robbery because it is a violation of a "mitzvah sichli" - a command arrived at through reason (without the need for G-d's command, i.e., something obvious). The prohibition against stealing logically makes sense. As Nachmanides says, it's a commandment, which does not require a prophet to warn us against its evils. However, Nachmanides' message must be understood. Simply because a commandment does not necessitate a prophet to warn us against its violation, does not reflect upon the severity of the prohibition. It would seem that there are greater evils, which result from violating a mitzva, which is not sichli (reasonably obvious) and requires a prophet's warning. On the contrary, if our conduct warrants the rebuke of a prophet it must certainly be extremely grievous behavior. However, an analysis of Nachmanides interpretation leads us to a better understanding of the corruption of thievery and the reason it sealed man's destruction.

Man is different than an animal. An animal's existence is purely instinctual. His reality is subservient to his instinctual desires. An animal's existence is totally contained within the realm of the physical. An animal does not contemplate how long it is going to live.

Man however, is a complex creature. Man's nature is perennially the source of conflict. The instinctual desires of man are constantly in conflict with the intellectual.

Instinctually, man desires to live forever, but reality tells him that he is limited by the constraints

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of time. As a result there are essentially only two creations that are not in a constant state of conflict; the animal, because it is totally dominated and guided by the instinctual, and harmonious man, whose entire energies are directed towards wisdom. However an ordinary individual's instinctual desires are in conflict with, and tempered by his intellectual faculties.

The original pratfall for man was sexual turpitude. The sexual instinct was overpowering, yet, man had not abandoned the intellectual. In fact, man utilized his wisdom in the pursuit of his desires.

However, man was doomed to extinction when violence prevailed. Robbery is reflective of a society that totally abandons the rules of common sense. Man was no longer functioning in the world of reality. He was no longer using his mind in the pursuit of his physical pleasures. He was involved in violent, self-destructive behavior. This is what Nachmanides meant when he said that violence sealed man's fate because it was a violation of an obviously, reasonable law. Man was entirely in the grasp of

his instinctual desires - to the extent - that his intellectual faculties were no longer functioning. Therefore, the warning of a prophet would not be heeded since man is functioning solely in the realm of the physical world. His self-destructive behavior manifests the abandonment of the intellectual, even as a means for the pursuit of physical pleasures. Violence epitomizes the state of the domination of the instincts. Thus, G-d determined that man's existence was equal to his non-existence and civilization was destined to be obliterated.

It is significant to note that violence flourished and was fostered by man's initial domination by his sexual desires. It is when man abandons the intellectual repression of sexual promiscuity, that his instinctual appetites be cultivated and ultimately dominates him. Merely because the violations of the sexual mores are victimless infractions, does not diminish the severity of the offense. It is the breeding ground whereby a corrupt individual's instinctual desires gain strength and overpower the intellectual, and thus, subjugate the tzelem Elokim - the intellect - to the whims of the physical. Chamas -

violence - is a natural outgrowth of such a behavioral progression and condemns mankind to a worthless existence.

Noach however, did not fall prey to the corruption of the society. Although he was considered righteous, the Rabbis castigate him for not attempting to influence other people. Noach never tried to influence his fellow man to behave in a just fashion. This is bothersome, considering the fact that the Torah refers to Noach as a tzadik, a righteous and pure individual. Certainly, justice would dictate that he help the plight of his fellow man. Thus, we must appreciate the appellation tzadik as utilized in respect to Noach.

There are two types of righteous individuals: Abraham typifies the higher level. This is the just individual who lives in a corrupt society and functions therein. In terms of his personal ideals (of monotheism) they were foreign to the values of that society. He was a foreigner in this respect. However, he was a citizen of the world. He functioned externally as a productive member of society. In fact, he attempted to influence other members of society to adopt his values and ideals.

The other type of righteous individual cannot tolerate the influences of a corrupt society. He retreats and lives the life of seclusion always insulating himself from external pressures. Noach was this type of personality. The Rabbis teach us that Noach was a ma-amin, he was a believer, but yet he did not believe. He possessed the intellectual conviction to reject society's values. However, he was cognizant of the temptations of the world around him and thus lived a sheltered life. Noach appreciated that he was in conflict and could not risk the dangerous exposure of facing the outside world. He lived an existence whereby he realized he was in conflict, but resolved the conflict in favor of the intellect. Therefore God did not blame him for not attempting to influence others. His state of perfection prevented him from helping others. Thus, Noach was righteous and pure, but yet, the Torah adds "b-dorosav", "in his generation" (was he perfect). His actions were not inherently corrupt and thus he was not deserving of extinction. However, his righteousness was commensurate to the times he lived in. He was indirectly culpable because his state of perfection prevented him from venturing into the outside world and aiding others. However, he still was righteous, for one cannot be held responsible for not helping others live the proper life if it would risk his own perfection. Thus Noach was a tzadik in his generation. ■



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- 19" High Resolution Flat Panel Monitor
- Point & Click to Watch In Single or Split-Screen Views
- Real-Time Live View at 30 Frames Per Second Per Camera
- Record Up To 30 Frames Per Second Per Camera
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- Audio Ready on Each Channel
- Remote View Software & Internet Browser Capability
- Choice of High Resolution Color Cameras:
PTZ, Bullet, Dome, Box, Infrared, ID and License Plate Cams
- Spot Monitors and POS / Register Interfaces Available
- Technical Support w/ Remote Virtual Assist
- One Year Warranty Includes Parts and Labor

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