מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 9:7

Why refusing to have children diminishes God's image

Bereshit Rabbah 34:14

The Sages derive from Genesis 9:6-7 several halachic and ethical principles: the Noahide laws of capital punishment for murder are expounded from the verse's wording (conviction by a single witness or judge, without forewarning, for killing via an agent, for killing a fetus, or by strangulation), and a murderer who escapes justice will ultimately be punished in the Messianic era. Rabbi Akiva teaches that one who sheds blood thereby diminishes the tzelem Elokim (image of God) in which man was created; building on this, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya and Ben Azai teach that one who refrains from procreation likewise diminishes the Divine image, since the command "be fruitful and multiply" follows immediately from the statement of man's creation in God's image. The passage closes with Ben Azai's candid admission that although he himself remained unmarried in order to devote himself to Torah study, he recognizes that the world's continuity depends on others fulfilling this mitzvah (commandment). AI SUMMARY

"One who sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed, as He made man in the image of God" (Genesis 9:6). "One who sheds the blood of man, by man [baadam] his blood shall be shed" – Rabbi Ḥanina said: All of these words are in accordance with the laws of the descendants of Noah, [who are executed for murder] by the word of one witness, by one judge, without [two] witnesses, without forewarning, [for killing] through an agent, for [killing] fetuses. With one witness and one judge – "one who sheds the blood of man, by man" – one [man] – "his blood shall be shed." Without witnesses and without forewarning – "one who sheds the blood of man...his blood shall be shed." [One who kills] through an agent –"one who sheds the blood of man, [by man]," by means of [sending] another man – "his blood shall be shed." For [killing] fetuses –"One who sheds the blood of man, by man [baadam], his blood shall be shed." Rabbi Yehuda ben Rabbi Simon said: Also one who strangles a person – "One who sheds the blood of man by man [baadam]."

Rabbi Levi said: If a person murdered someone and was not killed [as punishment], when will he be killed? It will be when "the man" [the Messiah] will come – "one who sheds the blood of man, by the man [baadam] his blood shall be shed."

Rabbi Akiva expounded: Anyone who sheds blood, it is considered for him as though he has diminished God's image. What is the source? "One who sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed." Why? "As He made man in the image of God."

"And you, be fruitful, and multiply; teem on the earth, and multiply upon it" (Genesis 9:7). Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya expounded: If someone refrains from procreation, the verse considers him as though he has diminished God's image. What is the source? "As He made man in the image of God," and it is written thereafter: "And you, be fruitful, and multiply; teem on the earth, and multiply."

Ben Azai expounded: If someone refrains from procreation, the verse considers him as though he has spilt blood and diminished the divine image.

What is the source? “One who sheds the blood of man…” Why? “As [He made man] in the image of God.” What is written thereafter? “And you, be fruitful and multiply.”

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said to him: It is appropriate when thoughts are expressed by those who carry them out. Ben Azai expounds appropriately but does not act appropriately. He said to him: ‘I [refrain] because my soul yearns for Torah [study], but the world can be sustained by others [who do procreate].’

