

Noach נח

Noah

“Walking by Faith”

Genesis 6:9-11:32
Isaiah 54:1-55:5 (A); 54:1-10 (S)

Each year when we reconsider this Torah portion, which deals with the account of Noah, we are faced with another five chapters of Scripture that cover a great deal of human history. As you can imagine, there is much that can be and has been said, as people down through the ages have hypothesized about what transpired from the time from Adam and Eve to Noah, and on to Abraham. While most of this speculation is interesting reading, many of the assumptions have a tendency to muddy the waters of what God is trying to communicate to us who are trying to take this material and reasonably apply it to our lives today. Oftentimes, hungry Torah students spend a considerable amount of time munching on various “nuggets”—mostly pure conjecture—and can overlook the serious spiritual questions that arise concerning God’s judgment upon the world via the Flood. One of those serious questions regards the personal character of Noah, who is stated to be a righteous, blameless man who walked with the Lord:

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are *the records of* the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:8-9).

We live in a world that incessantly belittles the record of Genesis chs. 1-11, the Creation account of Adam and Eve and Noah’s Flood. Seeds of doubt can be planted by modern science or “the enlightened,” which can germinate into unbelief or full blown apostasy from belief in God. At the same time, there is also a deliberate ignorance on the part of some Bible readers to never even listen to the critiques of modern science, at least being aware of why liberal Jews and Christians consider this part of the Torah to largely be mythology. Believers in the God of Creation are not to be double-minded people (cf. James 1:6-8), who on the one hand may consider multiple witnesses in terms of establishing facts that directly affect their personal or family lives (i.e., Deuteronomy 19:15), but on the other who keep their ears completely closed to those who attack the Bible. Nowhere are we ever told that we are to have a “blind faith”; the testimony of nature does have to be weighed into what we believe, just as the testimony of Scripture must be considered.

The Fallout from Creation

While pondering *Noach* in conjunction with last week’s Torah portion, *Bereisheet*, you may have found that the lack of details regarding this period of human history can be quite thought provoking. Certainly, no one studying the Torah wants to question the wisdom or immanence of our Creator, but instead we should each want to have an unwavering faith in Him.

In the Creation account, almost like an annual spiritual examination, we have the yearly reminder that God created the Heavens and the Earth out of what is termed in Hebrew *tohu v’bohu* (תהו וְבוהו), “welter and waste” (Genesis 1:2, Alter), perhaps meaning “astonishingly empty” (ATS). We have to consider that when God said, “Let there

be light” (Genesis 1:3), that out of the darkness came illumination. We have to believe that in six *yamim* (יָמִים)—with us not knowing exactly what constituted an actual “day” at this time⁷—that the Almighty prepared the Creation for human habitation. This would include not only the plants, animals, and sealife needed for the human race, but also would involve the formation of mineral deposits, metals, precious stones, and diverse energy sources needed for the advance of civilization.

In terms of people themselves, in reviewing Creation we have to recognize that God not only crafted the first man out of the ground, but that He gave him a unique consciousness or *nishmat chayim* (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים; Genesis 2:7), something which the animals do not possess. When Adam and Eve began their lives together in the Garden of Eden, a serpent deceived the woman into eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.⁸ And Adam, knowing of his wife’s indiscretion, voluntarily chose to disobey the command of God.⁹ From the Fall of humanity, significant fallout ensued as the man and woman were ejected from the Garden.¹⁰ Curses were placed upon the serpent, the man and the woman, and only future Divine intervention will fix the problems.¹¹ *There are a great deal of events, which are subject to various interpretations and applications, found here.*

In *Noach*, the main feature is that a great Flood judged all of humanity except Noah and his family. For a person like me, without faith in God and the veracity of His Word—especially coupled with the confirmations found in the words of Yeshua the Messiah that treat it as an actual event (Matthew 24:37-39)—I can see how it would be difficult for some to believe that a massive ecological disaster destroyed the inhabited world. Skepticism, combined with human logic, has definitely persuaded the unbelieving world to discount the account of Noah as a story at best, an invented fable at worst, or a repackaged version of Ancient Near Eastern works like the Epic of Gilgamesh.¹²

It is useful for us to examine Genesis chs. 1-11, evaluate how important it is that we treat these events with a high degree of historical reliability, and explore the different perspectives of “origins.” But, these questions are largely those asked by Twentieth and Twenty-First Century people, and were not necessarily asked by the Ancient Israelites. When the Torah was being compiled 3,300 years ago, the main issues at stake were how the people of God were to be instructed by Him in the ways of righteousness and holiness. This is how a Torah portion like *Noach* would have been considered by Yeshua and the Apostles.

The Faith of Noah

In the time between Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden to the figure of Noah, it is recorded that great evil grew on the Earth. Genesis 6:5 relays how bad things became: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every

⁷ Editor’s note: The Hebrew term *yom* (יּוֹם) has a variety of potential uses in the Tanakh Scriptures, primarily meaning a “day of twenty-four hours” (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. [Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001], 1:399), but there are most certainly instances when *yom* means “a period of time” such as a “year” (*ibid.*, 1:400), or simply “division of time” (*BDB*, 398) that may or may not be specified.

⁸ Genesis 3:1-7, 13.

⁹ Genesis 3:6-7, 12, 17.

¹⁰ Genesis 3:23-24.

¹¹ Genesis 3:14-19; cf. 1 Timothy 2:15, Grk.

¹² For a further discussion, consult the article “Encountering Mythology: A Case Study From the Flood Narratives” by J.K. McKee, appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*.

intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Mayhem was rampant in human society, so that the only option was for God to wipe out all people (Genesis 6:6-7). Genesis 6:13 specifies that “the earth is filled with violence.” Of all those on the Earth, though, only Noah and his family were deemed righteous so that they alone would be spared (Genesis 6:8-9) and would be able to repopulate the planet.

If God really was intending to judge human civilization, then Noah and his family would need to make some kind of preparation in anticipation of such judgment. We know the story all too well, as Noah was instructed by God to build a massive ark which would be carrying many animals:

“Then God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every *kind* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every *kind* will come to you to keep *them* alive. As for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather *it* to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them.’ Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did” (Genesis 6:13-22).

It is probably safe to acknowledge that in recognizing that the days of mankind would be one hundred and twenty years (Genesis 6:3), that about a century had to pass between the Lord’s decree that He would blot out the world of humans and for Noah and his sons to build the ark. The Apostle Peter asserts how God “preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5). It is doubtful that Noah was a “preacher” in the sense of actively and forcibly declaring the judgment of God to crowds gathered a kind of “evangelist”; it is more likely that *kēru*x (κηρυξ)¹³ is to be taken in the sense of a “herald” (ESV), who via his actions and experiences in encountering people who witnessed his building of the ark, would tell them what was to come.

The faith Noah would have to exhibit, in building such a massive boat—with only his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth really committed to the project—and with around a hundred years or so *to wait* between the declaration of judgment and the catastrophe arriving, **had to be immense**. When many of us consider natural disasters today like hurricanes or tornadoes, we usually see them on the local news or the Weather Channel, and we know that they are coming in a matter of minutes, hours, or days. *We do not have to exhibit any “faith” that they will come*; we just have to prepare and act accordingly. Noah had to place his trust entirely in the Creator God that His word would come to pass. He had to

¹³ “a herald, pursuivant, marshal, public messenger” (H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 432).

respond to this word with steadfastness, and at least hope that as people witnessed the construction of his vessel they would inquire as to why anyone would see the need for it.

Numerous times throughout the Holy Writ, we see that faith in the Holy One is required for us to please Him. While much of the time, the faith that He requires of us is simply so that we would place our lives entirely in His hands, and that we would have trust knowing that His good intention is better than anything that we could do—the example of Noah’s having to wait for the judgment is something we all need to really consider. Perhaps no better passage summarizes this necessity for faith than the realization that without faith it is impossible to please God, or be rewarded for seeking Him. The author of Hebrews expresses this reality when he couples the necessity of faith with the faith exhibited by Noah:

“And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11:6-7).

Walking by Faith

As you have been reading *Noach*, this week’s Torah portion, I am sure that you have been considering many important questions. The account of Noah is one of the most well known in the Scriptures, as it affected early human history and the surety of God’s judgment on sin and evil. The Flood and the reasons for it affected later generations of God’s people, and Yeshua the Messiah specifically makes reference of it in terms of the future judgment to be dispersed at His Second Coming (Matthew 24:27-39; Luke 17:26-27).

There are many potential applications of the need to endure in one’s faith, just like Noah had to do in anticipation of the expected Flood. Perhaps you have been given the impression, in your own life, of various things that all you have to do is wait for. *You will not have to wait a century like Noah did for the floodwaters to arrive.* But still, it can be difficult—especially in our very fast paced, industrialized Western society—to really wait on the Lord. Given the motif of judgment seen in the account of Noah, one of the areas where it is quite impossible for many people to trust in God, is in the area of retribution. When many of us have been wronged by other people, especially those whom we may have had a close relationship with at one point, it is imperative that we not try to enact any kind of revenge. **Repayment for evil done to us is something that only the Lord is allowed to enact.** The Apostle Paul’s direction needs to be heeded by all of us:

“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY’ [Leviticus 19:18], says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

While some of us need to exercise faith in the Lord, to have confidence that our bills or financial debts can be paid, so we can have a good steady job, or simply that we would know that our lives serve a greater purpose—placing those who have wronged us *entirely* in His hands can be downright impossible sometimes. Have you been cheated in business? Have you been through a divorce or an ugly breakup with a good friend? Have you had significant disagreements over doctrine or theology with anyone? *You may have been murdered in someone else’s heart before, or have had negative words and lies unleashed about you.* But if

someone is to one day be consumed by God's wrath; it is God's job to exercise it—**not ours!** While it may be difficult to serve one's enemies and demonstrate kindness to them (cf. Proverbs 25:22; Romans 12:20), it is most imperative for born again Believers to be tempered by the Holy Spirit, and completely turn one's enemies over to the will of the Lord.

Ideally, we should strive as best as we can to be at peace with all (Romans 12:18), but sometimes this peace may only be an armistice, where we are not active in fighting an adversary, opponent, or competitor. Do you have the strength and confidence in the Lord, and in what Messiah Yeshua has accomplished, to really give all of your foes over to Him? Or, are you still insecure in Him so that you need to actively go and fight your enemies? **Walk by faith, and seek the path of peace.** Just like Noah, persevere and place your trust in our Heavenly Father's words to you. Be concerned about accomplishing His purposes for your life, and avoid unnecessary fights and conflicts!

Lekh-Lekha לך-לך

Get yourself out “Go Forth and Receive Blessings”

Genesis 12:1-17:27

Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Perhaps one of the most often quoted and well known Torah passages, about the unique relationship between the Eternal Creator and Abraham—often considered to be the “father of faith” (cf. Romans 4:11-16)—is found in the opening passage of the *parashah* we are considering this week:

“Now the LORD said to Abram, **‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.’** So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran” (Genesis 12:1-4).

Here in the command to “Go forth,” Abram is called out of the relative luxury of Ur, as he is one who was firmly embedded in the local culture with his extended family. We get the impression that he was a well-to-do businessman, living in a city adjacent to the lower Euphrates River (modern-day Iraq) as it flowed into the Persian Gulf.

Without any apparent or recorded hesitation, Abram was commanded by the Holy One to leave his home and relocate to a more remote location, at the age of seventy-five **and** without a physical heir to his estate. When we encounter God's request as Bible readers, we think that this must have been met with some skepticism, or at least curiosity. Yet, Abraham responded obediently, and for the next century from the Torah's record (cf. Genesis 25:7), it is abundantly clear that Abram/Abraham was a unique man whose impact