

## 2. Preaching in the Old Testament

# Noah: a preacher of righteousness

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*Noah not only preached to the people in words. He also witnessed to God in the things which he did, not least in the building of the Ark. As the "eighth person" he represented a new beginning in the purpose of God.*

**W**HAT WAS LIFE LIKE in the ecclesia in the days of Noah? There is not very much information (the first five chapters of Genesis cover the first 1,500 years of history!), but it is surprising what can be gleaned from these chapters and some other references later in the Scriptures. The first thing to notice is that there were some very old brothers in the ecclesia! Noah, as he grew up, could have conversed with six men who had known Adam, some of them for hundreds of years. One of the effects of these long lives was that the truth was preserved and passed on from generation to generation through the line of the seed.

The next detail is that there is evidence of early written records: "This is *the book* (Heb. *cepher*) of the generations of Adam (Gen. 5:1). The word *cepher* is the normal Hebrew word for *book*, and Adam could have recorded every word of the section of Scripture before this verse. There were also prophets in the ecclesia. Jude verses 14,15 records the prophecy of Enoch against the ungodly and their speeches (notice the "hard speech" of Lamech in Gen. 4:23,24!). Enoch and the other Lamech (Gen. 5:21,29) named their sons prophetically in the light of their understanding of the purpose of God.

### The man Noah

The testimony of Scripture concerning Noah is that he was "perfect" or upright (Gen. 6:9), and that by his righteousness he saved others (Ezek.

14:14). In 2 Peter 2:5 he is called "a preacher of righteousness". This preaching was far more than just words. Noah "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). Like Daniel many years later, men could see that there was no

error or fault in his life. Hence he had a basis to preach righteousness to others. The world is very good at identifying hypocrisy, a characteristic that would not have been discernible in Noah. Can it be seen in us?

### The world to which Noah preached

Concerning the generation who lived immediately before the Flood, Scripture says: "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and . . . every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Jesus spoke of them "eating and drinking" and "marrying and giving in marriage" (Mt. 24:38). Peter describes those times as "the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet 2:5) and the people as being "disobedient" (1 Pet. 3:18-21). It could not have been easy preaching to such people on such an unpopular subject as righteousness. Compare the preaching of the same topic by Paul to Felix (Acts 24:24,25). Noah was probably told, "go thy way", in no uncertain terms by the wicked antediluvians, but he persevered with his preaching.

### Words and deeds

Noah's preaching was not just by word of mouth. Hebrews 11:7 records: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith". The building of the Ark—150 metres

long, twenty-five metres wide, fifteen metres high and a volume of over 55,000 cubic metres—was an immense task, even if spread over 120 years. In constructing this vessel, Noah witnessed to his faith in God and God's purpose. The Ark would soon become visible to those to whom Noah preached. It was a witness to the sincerity of the man and his message which could not be gainsaid. But even this did not move to repentance the evil generation in which he lived. However, Noah's building of the Ark was not just to witness to and thereby condemn the people of his day; he also laboured in this work to save his family (and anyone else who would enter the Ark) from the coming judgement. So in our day, ecclesial preaching is both a witness to the world and a witness and a warning to the ecclesia itself: "save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40).

That generation, says Peter "were disobedient" (1 Pet. 3:20), although the longsuffering of God was "holding forth a welcome" (Rotherham) via the open door of the ark. The language of Peter's reference to preaching to the spirits in prison links back to Isaiah 61:1,2. Noah, as a type of Christ, was preaching to those disobedient spirits the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of God's vengeance. So should we, for "as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Mt. 24:37).

### **A new beginning**

The Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 2:5 describes Noah as "the eighth person". What did he mean by this?

Jeremiah had the Word of God in his heart "as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay". The first lesson concerns our individual preaching: how is it most effective? Do we feel inadequate like Jeremiah, but do we on the other hand charge ourselves daily from God's Word? Think for a moment of your conscious hours—how many of them each week are actually spent in speaking of the gospel to anyone? And do not let us forget the milkman and the postman. Our most effective preaching is by the routine day-to-day pattern of our lives. Is Jeremiah just someone we know about? Or is he someone we know as a person on whose experiences we can call to help us? Some of the things he did might strike us as strange, but if nothing we do strikes our neighbours as strange or different then we are being "conformed" and not "transformed". Do you all too easily damp the fire of God's Word within yourself? or do you keep it ablaze with plenty of fuel? . . .

The Lord Jesus experienced such contradiction of sinners against himself. He knew that Peter would deny him, but he did not condemn him. Let us think of Jesus and of the example of Jeremiah, and pray that we may have the courage to let that Word in our hearts be spoken with conviction, so that those with whom we have to do may see in us something of the Lord Jesus, our Saviour.

T. Pritchard, "The Example of Jeremiah", *Testimony*, Nov. 1975, p. 436

Some modern translations attempt to get round the difficulty by rendering the sentence as "preserved Noah with seven others" (ASV), but this is clearly not the meaning of the Greek word, as a glance at Luke 1:59; Acts 7:8; Revelation 17:11 and 21:20 (all the other occurrences) will show. Jude correctly records that Enoch was "the seventh from Adam" and in that mode of reckoning Noah is the tenth and not the eighth!

What is the spiritual significance of the number eight? It was on the eighth day that the flesh was cut off in the rite of circumcision, on the eighth day that the leper was pronounced clean and on the eighth day of their consecration that the Levitical priests began their work. On the first day of the week (which is also the eighth) Jesus was raised to newness of life. It is therefore reasonable to say that eight represents a new beginning. Seth was also a new beginning in the purpose of God, "For God, said [Eve], hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew" (Gen. 4:25). Of those who descended from Seth, Noah was the eighth. With him God made another new beginning: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation" (7:1).

Thus this preacher of righteousness passed through the destroying Flood, and when he emerged from the Ark he immediately witnessed to his faith by being the first to offer burnt offerings unto his God. Having been saved by the baptism which the flood prefigured, are we witnessing to our faith by presenting our bodies as living sacrifices unto God (Rom. 12:1,2)?