

# The faithful of old— studied by the young

## Noah: finding grace in a time of wickedness

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**N**OAH ARRIVES on the Bible scene during a time of gross wickedness, when man placed trust in himself rather than in God. The world was totally corrupt. Genesis 4 provides all the necessary (and sorry) details: cities were being established (v. 17), technology and weapons were on the increase (v. 22), and murder was ever prevalent (vv. 23,24). The Scriptures at the same time emphasise the mortality of man: the telling phrase, “and he died”, occurs eight times in chapter 5 of Genesis alone.

The principle of separation, prominent in the Creation account, had been compromised by man, for “the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose” (6:2). Thus the seed of the woman was marrying and intermingling with the seed of the serpent. The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes had taken over, and God’s truth had been corrupted: “And GOD 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. And it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth” (vv. 5-7).

### “Noah found grace”

Evidently a truly sad state of affairs existed. The time for destruction had finally come. A remarkable contrast then appears: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (v. 8). Here was one man who was different from those around him; a man who stood out for the things of God. Here we observe the faithful remnant. Indeed, a close study of Noah is more relevant for this generation than any other that has gone before us, for Christ said, “as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man” (Lk. 17:26).

Therefore, the life of Noah is an exhortation for those living in the last generation, before the judgements of God are poured out upon the sea of

nations. Only those in the boat (that is, the ecclesia) will be saved and lifted up above the waters of destruction. Our firm belief and hope is that we are living in the generation that will witness the coming of the Son of man. It is important, then, that we study the character of Noah, that we may follow his example; for many are called, but only few (eight souls in Noah’s case) are chosen.

But how did Noah please God? Why were he and his house saved and the rest of humanity destroyed?

### Noah and Christ

The first mention of Noah is very telling: “and he [Lamech] called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed” (Gen. 5:29). Noah means ‘rest’ or ‘comfort’, and he came to comfort the people concerning the cursed land, and to offer ‘rest’ to any who would listen to his righteous preaching; see the fulfilment in 8:21, where God says, “I will not again curse the ground”.

In the New Testament, Simeon refers to his desire to see the “consolation of Israel” (Lk. 2:25), the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to comfort those who worked and toiled with their hands, and to offer rest to those who would listen to the gospel of peace. Ultimately Christ removed the curse that was pronounced in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:14-19). Thus the work of Noah was to be similar to that of our Lord.

### Grew in favour with God

As time progressed Noah grew in favour with God, but not with man. Man did not listen to his preaching. But this did not put Noah off, as it shouldn’t us, for God is teaching that He does not focus on numbers; eight souls were enough for God.

The process that Noah went through is also interesting to note: “Noah found grace [favour] in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8); “the LORD said unto

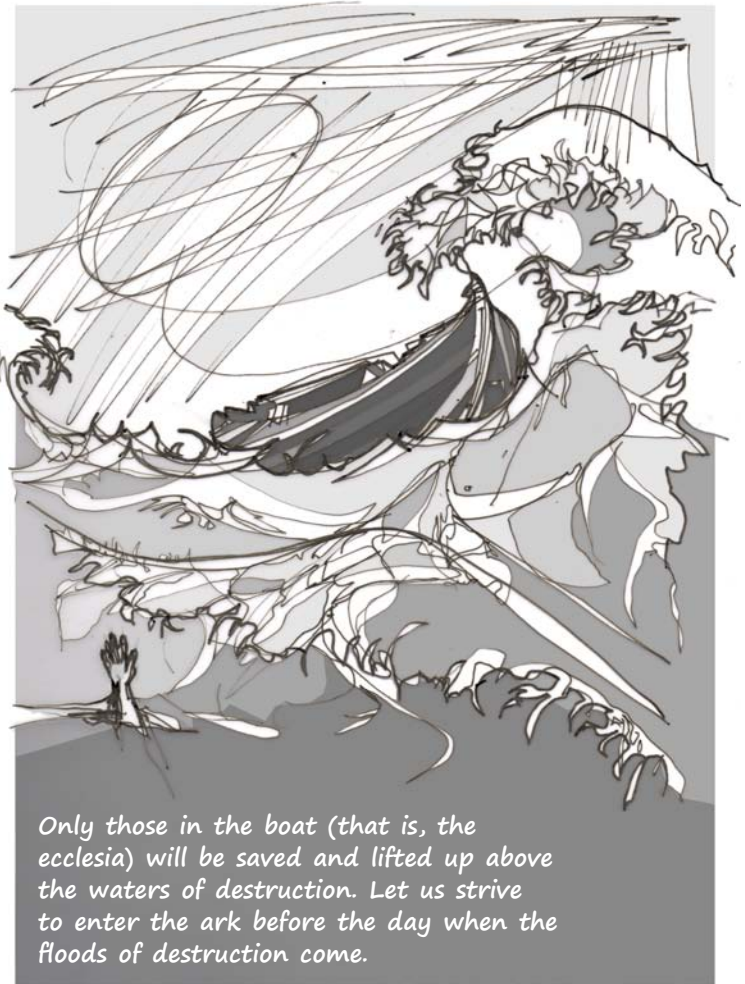
Noah . . ." (7:1); "God remembered Noah" (8:1); "God blessed Noah" (9:1); "I establish My covenant with you" (9:9). Noah found grace/favour in the sight of God and so God spoke to him. God singled this man out of the whole world to be the one that He communed with. God then remembered Noah. As time progressed Noah showed himself worthy of God's attention and time. After God had given Noah rest we read that He blessed Noah, and made a covenant with him. We clearly see Noah growing in favour with God. There is an obvious parallel here; our Lord also grew in favour with God and man (Lk. 2:52).

What of you and me? Do we do the same? Do we make spiritual progress as we journey through our wilderness of life? Like Noah, God has, and does, speak to us through His Word, every day if we choose. Noah responded to God's Word and obediently acted upon it. Herein lies the exhortation from the life of Noah for those who will be saved from destruction. Noah's life is a parable of the Master's life, from suffering to covenant glory.

### A doer of the Word

James exhorts us in 1:25 to be "not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, [and] this man shall be blessed in his deed". There is hardly any record of words spoken by Noah—in fact not until Genesis 9:25, regarding the time he became drunk and his son saw his nakedness.

What can be made of this? Noah was a doer of the Word. Constantly we read in Genesis 6–9 phrases such as, "And God said . . .", "And the LORD said . . ."; for example, 6:13; 7:1; 8:15; 9:1,8,12,17. Noah responded, fully accepting God's instruction, and became a doer of the Word: "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (6:22); "And Noah did according



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unto all that the LORD commanded him" (7:5); "as God had commanded Noah" (v. 9); "And Noah builded" (8:20). The process that is presented is simple but profound: God speaks and gives His commands; Noah carries them out without question. Here is a man, like Christ, whose life reflected the attitude of "not my will, but Thine, be done" (Lk. 22:42). The pattern is as set out in the table below. "Faith without works is dead", but "I will shew thee my faith by my works" (Jas. 2:20,18). Noah showed his faith by his works.

Noah did one thing that God did not specifically command him: "And Noah builded an altar

God commands	Noah acts
6:13-21 – "And God said unto Noah"	6:22 – "Thus did Noah"
7:1-4 – "And the LORD said unto Noah"	7:5 – "Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him"
8:15-17 – "Go forth"	8:18 – "Noah went forth"

*The wicked generation of Noah's day were building cities and establishing power for themselves; Noah built an ark to God. Each individual must ask, What am I building?*



unto the LORD" (Gen. 8:20). Noah worshipped God voluntarily. He did all that God commanded him and then went the extra mile, and with extra effort set up an altar that he might worship the God Who had saved him, thus establishing the principle that our worship must be of our own free will. It was after this offering that God said He would not again curse the ground for man's sake.

The key to the question, Why was Noah saved and his generation destroyed? has therefore been found. The members of the wicked generation of his days were satisfying the flesh, building cities and establishing power for themselves; Noah built an ark to God, Noah built an altar whereby he could worship God, Noah built a spiritual family who were saved with him. The difference is in what was being built. Each individual must ask, What am I building? Am I building God's house? Am I building my spiritual family? Am I building spiritual altars in which to worship my God? Or

am I building fleshly edifices such as my career and fleshly enjoyment? Let a man examine himself. Noah was separate from the world, and had his priorities right in life.

The generation of the sons of God had mingled with the daughters of men; separation no longer existed and they were destroyed for it. This is a warning. God's children must separate from the ways of the world as Noah did. Let us heed the warnings before it is too late, before the door into the ark is shut: "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all" (Lk. 17:27). The day for us is still future, and yet it is so close. Let us strive to enter the ark before the day when the floods of destruction come.

### **A man of faith**

What characteristics are picked up in Hebrews 11 concerning Noah's faith? One verse is dedicated to this giant of faith and works: "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" (v. 7).

Noah was a man of action, as noted earlier. Noah feared, or revered, God. Noah "prepared an ark to the saving of his house". Each believer must do this by strengthening and building the ecclesia, so that the household may be saved in the day of judgement.

As an aside, it is remarkable to find that Noah probably did not have a family when he began to build the ark. This is the most likely explanation of the words, "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark to the saving of his house". The ark was built for the purpose of saving his family, but Noah did not have a family when God commanded him to build! This was an act of faith on the part of Noah, faith that God would provide him a family.

### **The parable of the ten virgins**

The parable in Matthew 25:1-13 of the ten virgins appears to be based on the story of Noah. It is

a parable of the Kingdom: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins" (v. 1). Some virgins had prepared for the wedding, some had not. The day arrived; at midnight the cry was made: "and they that were ready went in with him [the bridegroom] to the marriage: and *the door was shut*". Noah and his family had prepared themselves and were ready for the day of judgement, and the time of the wedding. The prepared ones entered into the wedding ark, "and the LORD *shut [them] in*" (Gen. 7:16). In picture we have the wedding feast taking place in the ark while the judgements were taking place outside, and the time of rest was about to be ushered in and the covenant established.

There is also a warning: "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Mt. 25:11,12). Some of the

household will be rejected for lack of preparation. It will be too late, the door will be shut. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (v. 13).

### **Summary**

Our generation, surely, is the generation Christ referred to, the generation that is like Noah's generation. With relief we read, "And the ark rested" (Gen. 8:4). The ecclesial ark is soon to rest in the Land of Promise: "For we which have believed do enter into rest". "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest", because "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Heb. 4:3,11,9). All flesh died, but Noah was saved with his household. Let us follow the example of this giant of faith, that the inheritance in the Promised Land may be ours, and we may rest with him in the future Sabbath.