

## Noah - Faith in the Face of the Incomprehensible

In the Biblical stories of the beginning of the world - stories which explain the reason for clothes, languages, weeds, and the like - there is a story about the reason for rainbows. It's a story of dreadful evil and a miraculous rescue. It's a story about water.

Water ought to be something to be enjoyed, either as a drink or as recreation. Water should look like a lake ready for swimming or fishing. Water should be a fun experience, refreshment on a hot day. But we also know that water can be dangerous - a fast flowing river, a deep well, a storm over the ocean.

When Noah's story was first written down, people looked at water differently. Deep water, like the ocean, was a threatening presence. Before God even created human beings we read, "When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the Lord God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land" (Genesis 2 4-6). We don't know when rain started, but people started growing crops and raising sheep as early as Cain and Abel.

People were different in Noah's time as well.. They lived longer, for one thing. Noah was born after Adam died. Noah's dad and granddad had all been able to visit with super-great-granddad Adam, and hear about his experiences with God. Adam's grandson Enosh was still around to tell stories to Noah, but they had lost that first voice.

Noah lost his father, Lamech, just before God spoke to him about building a boat. Noah's grandfather, Methuselah, died the year Noah completed the boat, following God's instructions. But that's getting ahead of myself.

Now the ancient serpent who led Adam and Eve astray in the Garden hadn't stopped working - spreading hatred, violence, and disrespect among all of Adam's offspring. In fact, some of them seemed to completely lose their way. The result being a world filled with abuse, violence and hatred; the powerful

terrorizing all those they could bully and everyone taking advantage of those weaker than they were.

The fact that life had become the opposite of what he designed didn't go unnoticed by God. Eventually he looked for at least one person or family he might retrieve from this violence and brokenness. He found Noah.

That's the story I want to share today - Noah's encounter with God and his response to God's word.

(in character)

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was unformed and empty and darkness covered the face of the deep waters. The breath of God hovered over the surface of the waters."

The beginning of the earth, covered with water. My neighbours thought they were seeing the end of the earth when the waters came again to cover everything. But they were wrong.

When I was growing up we used to go to grandpa's place and he'd tell us stories of the old days. My favourite was the story of great grandpa who lived so close to the heart of God that God simply scooped him up, out of this world. The way granddad told it, "My father, Enoch, walked with God, and one day, when they had walked far and wide, God said, 'It's too far to go back to your house today, how about you come and stay with me.'"

I always liked that line.

But I haven't seen anyone recently who even thinks the way great-grand-dad thought. Everyone's trying to beat everyone else, literally and figuratively. I've kept my distance here on the farm, but even I have to do some trading with the neighbours. Honesty isn't rare, it's nonexistent. It started with people forgetting to thank God for all He gives, then putting God completely out of their mind, then finding people or things to replace God, and finally walking around thinking they were gods themselves.

Then one day God's voice filled my heart and mind, "I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!"

I was terrified! Too stunned to speak!

Then he said, "Build a large boat from cypress wood and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. <sup>15</sup> Make the boat 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. <sup>16</sup> Leave an 1 cubit opening below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper."

I said, "Lord, you know I'm a farmer, not a carpenter. I'm happy to try to pull this off, but could you send me a schematic diagram or something?"

He replied, "Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. <sup>18</sup> But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives. <sup>19</sup> Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. <sup>20</sup> Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive. [Oh yes,]<sup>21</sup> And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals."

"There were a lot of details left hanging, but I figured if He really wanted to rescue me and my family from this catastrophe, he'd fill in the blanks along the way. And, after a while, he did."

Imagine you're a small grain farmer, and doing fairly well. Imagine getting a contract to build a house with just these directions.

Make me a house out of wood.

I want it three stories, about 45 feet high, 450 feet long and 75 feet wide.

*That's a main floor of 33,750 square feet.*

I want one door and only one window for ventilation around the top of the building.

So I go home and tell Eva (that's my wife) about the plan. She's not impressed!

“But it’s the only way to survive a global catastrophe,” I tell her.

She asks about how long we’re going to live in this floating menagerie. That’s a good question. I’ll have to ask about that.

“Wouldn’t you need to know that to know how much food to put in it?” she says. My Eva, always the one with good questions.

“And how are you going to keep the place clean?”

Another good question. How do you keep a place of that size clean, especially when you have animals jam-packed into every floor, and food and drink for all. I better start making a list!

Telling the boys went a little better, but there were many more questions from them and their wives. My list got longer.

The boys and I started felling timber for the keel and the ribs of the boat. How thick a keel would we need for a 300 cubit long boat (that’s 450 feet in your measuring system). Making timbers and planking was something we done for each of our houses, it felt a bit familiar. We had to go further afield for the tar and other supplies.

As soon as word of our project got out, everyone in the neighbourhood, and later it seemed like people from everywhere, came by to poke fun, say some rude remark, or just try to get on our nerves. We had to deal with a few attempts at vandalism, but I know we definitely had some unseen help in the protection area, because it could have been a LOT worse.

I tried to tell people what God told me - that impending doom was immanent. But I got about as much recognition as an old guy wearing a signboard warning about the final judgement would get in your society.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity of blisters and splinters and scrubbing ourselves clean of tar, we were done. The animals started showing up in pairs. We gathered the food we thought we’d need and tried to stuff it on board in and around the animal pens. Then we rolled in all the casks for fresh water. God had said we’d have all the running water we could handle at the beginning of the trip, but we better collect enough for the rest of the time.

Shortly the day came when God called “All Aboard” and we all went in and the big door closed.

Then, even before the animals even had a chance to quiet down, there was a crack of thunder and the rain started pouring down. The noise level in the boat went from 1,000 to 0. We scrambled for a look out the vent and saw a huge wave roll in from the sea. The river started backing up. Water seemed to be coming out of the ground itself. Another crack and we instinctively dove for safety as the boat began to move.

We heard the rain pound for over a month, night and day - forty days (though it was hard to keep track of time in there).

Then it eased up and we were floating quietly on the waves. Not that we any time to enjoy it what with feeding and cleaning stalls and all. Don't even ask me about the smell and getting rid of the waste. We tried to have at least one game of stones in the evening before the light faded. Stones? that's a game kind of like your Knipsbrat or Crokinole. We might have been able to play about half the days.

Five months from the day the rain started we all jerked awake and realized we'd run aground. It was a long wait till I felt we could open up the roof to get some sun and fresh air. We did it on my birthday and what a wonderful Six hundred and first birthday present it was. It was still almost another two months before it was dry enough that God could open the door and let us out. We had been in that boat for 370 days.

I built an altar to the Lord and burned some of the sacrificial animals on it - those we had taken seven of instead of two. God was pleased with this act of worship because he said,

‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,  
summer and winter, day and night,  
shall not cease.'

Here's the sign to remind me and you of my promise - the rainbow. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'

After all the animals had gone their way and we had re-established ourselves on some land I went back to farming. So did my sons. And I began to have grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

One time Gomer and Magog, Japheth's oldest boys, came for a visit and they asked for a story about the big flood. They asked how I knew what to do. The truth is, I really didn't know what I was doing. God gave enough direction for the day at hand and the next day I had to wait for new instructions. God's guidance wasn't always obvious, but it was always there.

I just really believed that God loved me like he did great-grand-dad Enoch, and that if I tried walking close to Him things would work out. Not that it was happily ever after, I had a falling out with my son Ham. Not my best day that one.

But I still believe in God's love and in walking as close as I can to Him.

And to this day, when it rains, that rainbow reminds me how patient God is - seeing all the ways humanity is destroying itself and the world he gave us, but sticking to His promise and loving us all the same.