

Part One—The Patriarchs: Noah

Noah is the first of the patriarchs we should examine. Righteous Abel and Enoch lived before his time, but we have little information about them. Noah was the tenth in line from Adam, having descended from the line of Seth. He was the son of Lamech, as well as the grandson of Methuselah. The Bible says nothing about Noah until he is introduced at about 500 years of age.

In Noah's day, the world was very similar to the way it is today.

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; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. (Gen. 6: 5-7, 11-12)

In Noah's day, the world was full of violence and bloodshed. Sin was rampant. There was evil everywhere, and the weak had little chance of personal security. It was a fearful place in which to live. This condition made it very difficult to practice any semblance of godliness.

But, Noah was the exception. The Bible records: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:8-9). How many people lived on the earth at this time? Estimates vary widely from a limited number to millions. Whatever the number, Noah was the only one who was obedient to God. He was a righteous man. "And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation" (Gen. 7:1). Righteousness in the Bible is defined as the Law of God (Ps. 119:172).

Sometime before God brought the Flood upon the earth, we find Noah was a servant of God—a man who preached and practiced obedience to God's commandments. Peter tells us that God ". . . spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5). Noah was given the task of warning the world of impending doom. He was commissioned to try to save humanity from itself. God gave him 120 years to preach this warning, and at the same time to build an ark for his deliverance and that of his family.

The world refused to believe and heed this warning, but Noah knew destruction was coming. He believed God. He was a man of faith. "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" (Heb. 11:7).

What is faith?

Paul tells us: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11: 1, 6). The two requisites for faith are: (1) One must believe that God exists, and (2) one must believe that He will do what He has promised. Faith is having complete confidence in God and in His Word. Those who seek God diligently are the recipients of God's

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promises. Diligence is not a half-hearted effort; it is total devotion to and whole-heartedness in achieving that goal. God is not pleased with quitters (Luke 9:62). Noah had complete confidence that God would do what He had promised. He had no doubts, and was moved with fear.

“The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him” (Nahum 1:7). “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25). Who does not have days of trouble? Who has not been snared by fear of others? When it comes to obedience to God, having an overly concern for what others think is indeed a stumblingblock. Most people today do not really fear God, and view those who do so as oddballs. This is not conducive to obedience to God and to living a godly life. But those who put their trust in God are the ones who exercise faith, regardless of what others think. Consider Noah. Did the people respond to his preaching? Not at all! Only Noah and his family believed God and obeyed His commandments. Noah did not cease preaching or building the Ark because of this. He had no fear of men; his real fear was in God. It is better to place our safety and salvation into the hands of God, not into the hands of men.

Jesus commented often about faith. He told His disciples: “. . . Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this [which is done] to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matt. 21:21). Mark 9:23 tells us: “. . . If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” But on the other hand, we must have an idea what is God’s will in our lives. Paul wrote: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). And James adds: “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (Jas. 4:13-15). Noah was saved and blessed because of his obedience to God. Thus, in 1 John 3:22 we read: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”

Noah was a man of faith. He walked with God and was moved to build the Ark. He believed what God had promised, and did as he had been instructed. “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb. 10:38). Noah proved he was a man of faith by his works. He did something about his belief. Faith, then led to works. “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (Jas. 2:20). “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” (Heb. 11:7). What is the reward of the righteous? Of Noah and all the righteous saints we read: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth . . . and these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11: 13, 16, 39-40).

Noah was a preacher of righteousness. As previously noted, righteousness is defined as obedience to the Law of God (Ps. 119:172). It does little good to profess God, while at the same time disobeying Him. What would have happened to the human race had not Noah obeyed? Noah’s belief and faith in God compelled him to obey. But had he not been a man of faith, he would have refused to undertake such a huge project. Faith leads to obedience. Noah’s task was gigantic. It was one of the greatest achievements of mankind. Up until modern times, the Ark was the largest ship ever built. Many thousands of hours and labor and manpower went into this project. Yet, it was all accomplished because of faith. Those who scoffed and refused to heed the warning perished (Gen. 7:21-22). The key to active faith is obedience to God and His Law. The reverence and respect Noah had for God motivated him. We owe him much.

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In Noah's day, like today, men have decided for themselves right from wrong. God tells us: "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us" (Deut. 6:25). The fact is: God has never given men the prerogative of deciding right and wrong. God has already decided that. Man's right, as a free-moral agent, is to decide whether or not to obey. Of that antediluvian world we read: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:11-12). Jesus said it would be the same in our day—near the time of His return. "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:37-39).

Like the men in Noah's day, our choice is whether we will follow God's Law or the dictates of society. What will the fate be of those who refuse to accept God's authority over their lives? Let the Bible answer: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. 22:14-15). "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:7-8).

"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov.10:2). Noah's righteousness delivered him and his family from certain death. He is spoken of as one of the three most righteous men of the Bible (Ezek.14:14). "The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness" (Prov.11:6). "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death" (Prov.12:28). The righteous will be kept safely. "Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner" (Prov. 13:6). Paul tells us: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1, 4).

Today, we live in a very dangerous world. God created the earth in six days, but now man has the capacity to destroy it in one hour. The awesome power of hydrogen and neutron bombs is incredible. Already there have been a number of close calls. Fingers have almost pushed the buttons, but cautious officers have been able to prevent it. The moral climate of the earth today may be as corrupt as it was in the days of Noah. If not, it is fast approaching that point. How long will it be before God intervenes? Jesus warns us: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34). Financial worries, economic threats, and health problems all enter the picture. Those too involved with these distractions will not likely recognize the time period in which they are living. The conditions of the world were a snare in Noah's day, just as they are today.

God spared Noah and his family because of his righteousness and faith. Are we aware of the time period today? Are we going to exercise the kind of faith and works required for deliverance? Noah's example can give us all hope. He truly was a great man of the Old Testament.