

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

(Hebrews 11:7)

It is undoubtedly one of the best known stories in the Bible

- I did it in Sunday School, I did it in the first year of junior school when I was 7 years old
- I did it in the second year of secondary school when I was 12 years old
- The picture of the boat, with the house on top, the bearded man, perhaps with a bird with an olive leaf
- And the neck and head of a giraffe poking out of the window of the ark, all encompassed by a rainbow
- Is one of the most recognisable pictures of an Old Testament story
- The writer to the Hebrews thinks that it is a great story too – but what is it all about?
- The story that we call ‘Noah’s Ark’ would be better entitled ‘The Great Flood’ (Genesis 6-11)
- In actual fact, it forms part of the gloomy genealogy that is running from Adam to Abraham
- The genealogy, that begins (Genesis 5:1) with Adam, gives substantial background to the life of Noah
- As part of the genealogy, it ends, ‘Altogether, Noah lived 950 years, and then he died’ (Genesis 9:29)

It is not possible to consider every problem associated with the story here

- Was the flood worldwide or was it just a flood in Mesopotamia (civilization as Noah knew it)?
- The Bible says that it was a worldwide flood and for many readers that is plain enough (2 Peter 3:6-7)
- What is the relationship between the Genesis account and the Babylonian or Gilgamesh Epic?
- This is not an easy question and it is complicated by the existence of other flood stories (including Hindu)
- An even more challenging question is should we think of this as history at all or just a myth?
- The gospels record the Lord Jesus believed in the universal flood (Matt. 24:37-39; Lk. 17:26-27)

One of the challenges of the Genesis account of Noah and the Great Flood is its length – here's a summary

- God saw how great wickedness had become and decided to wipe humanity from the face of the earth
- However, one righteous man, found favour with God – Noah
- God gave Noah very specific instruction of how to build a vessel for him and his family
- In preparation for a catastrophic flood that would destroy every living thing on earth
- A pair of all 'unclean' living creatures and seven pairs of all 'clean' living creatures were to be taken
- Along with enough food – in this, Noah obeyed everything God commanded him to do
- After they entered the ark, rain fell on the earth for a period of forty days and nights
- The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days, wiping out every living thing
- As the waters receded, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat
- Noah and his family continued to wait for almost eight more months while the surface of the earth dried
- After a year, God invited Noah to come out of the ark – Noah built an altar and worshipped God
- God established a covenant with Noah not to flood the earth again, and gave the rainbow as a sign

There are no two ways about it, this is a tough message – hardly suitable for younger children

- To all such passages in the Bible people easily complain that it is unfair, that God is unjust
- The plain teaching is that God judges sin; by invading army, by fire and brimstone, or by flood
- The flood was just because God commanded it (and God is just, Psalm 92:15, Psalm 89:14)
- The world at the time seems to have been plagued by rampant violence (Gen. 6:11), occult sexuality, so
- 'the Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled'
- (Gen. 6:6), but God's judgment what accompanied by grace, people were given time
- 'None are punished by the justice of God, but those who hate to be reformed by the grace of God' (Henry)
- Jesus says the coming of the Son of Man will be like this (Matt. 24:37); God will judge by fire (2 Pet. 3:7)
- But as we consider God's grace at the time of the flood we consider also Noah's faith by which:

I HE BUILT AN ARK

‘Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family’

- The subject of God’s warning is said to be ‘things not yet seen’ which suggests the great flood
- The flood itself being the exercise of divine judgment – by faith Noah responded in a particular way
- Making Noah a perfect example of a believer as defined in the opening verses of the chapter
- He accepted God’s word and recognising God’s power was eager to hear and ready to do what God said

At the time of the warning, there was no sign of the flood or related events – nor were they imminent

- But Noah, not acting on just a hunch or human advice, believed that God had spoken
- And believed what God had said – unlike today when people seem neither to accept that God speaks at all
- Nor that the way God speaks is primarily through the Bible – even Christians seem to struggle with this
- If people have sensational so-called prophetic messages they might listen - God speaks through the Bible
- But motivated by faith, Noah responded in ‘holy fear’

Whatever the ark looked like, it is unlikely to have looked much like the familiar children’s illustration

- Its proportions (it was about six times as long as it was wide), describe a vessel meant to float like a log
- OT word is used for the chest or ark of the covenant and of the basket used for Moses (Ex. 2:2-3)
- Noah’s purpose in building the ark was ‘to save his family’ (lit. ‘for the salvation of his house’)
- while building, Noah saw the unbelievers going ahead, safe and secure, with their life of pleasure
- It would have been easy to think that the flood was an empty threat to terrify the people
- But Noah believed God, trusted his word and did not look only to the present but to the future as God said
- The faith he had in God’s Word was turned into the obedience – which was shown in his building the ark

II HE CONDEMNED THE WORLD

‘By his faith he condemned the world’ – was this by his faith actions or by his preaching?

- While there is reference to his preaching elsewhere, the present writer is really interested in Noah’s faith
- This quality of this faith is a challenge to the discouraged and apathetic members of the congregation
- The trust that Noah placed in the promise of God was in contrast to the disregard of the world around him

Construction of the ark began far away from any water capable of coping with such a vessel

- When we think about it we have to realise that this was a huge task for Noah
- And one that inevitably would have attracted ridicule from the people around him
- But Noah’s faith only served to challenge his contemporaries and confirm them in unbelief
- It was this unbelief and disobedience that brought condemnation upon them

We live in a generation that cannot accept the judgment of God at all – in fact we live in such a church

- But the severe judgment of God on human corruption is the counterpart of God’s mercy and grace
- The salvation of Noah and his household and the judgment of the world happened at the same time
- They came to pass by the same means – salvation and judgment are simultaneous events

The world signifies humanity in the time of Noah that did not obey God

- The world today seems to have concluded that a good and just God will never act in any kind of judgment
- Or if he does, it will only be judgment against the kind or scale of sin that we feel that we do not commit
- So it might be acceptable to believe that God would judge mass-murderers or Nazi war-criminals
- But what if God punishes unbelief, the opposite of faith? Then by faith, believers condemn the world

III HE BECAME AN HEIR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

By his faith, Noah 'became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith'

- Noah is the first man in the Bible to be called 'righteous' (Gen. 6:9) – not sinless but righteous
- The writer to the Hebrews has spoken of an 'heir', referring to the Son (1:2) and of the promise (6:17)
- By his obedient response of faith to the solemn warning concerning the future not yet seen
- Noah became an heir of the righteousness according to faith

In the New Testament, 'righteousness by faith' is a doctrine we might readily association with the Apostle Paul

- But here we find the doctrine in the anonymous letter to the Hebrews
- If only we could convince church-goers and the general public alike – that it is not a matter of good works
- It is a matter of faith – only in the previous chapter (10:38), the writer has quoted Habbakuk (2:4)
- 'but the righteous will by his faith' – an heir means that someone is in a relationship with the donor
- Who confers some benefit upon the heir – the donor is God who blesses the righteous with salvation

No wonder then that Genesis stories in general and the account of Noah in particular

- Have been so widely attacked by unbelievers and even by liberal Christians
- It is to do with the three things that were the result of Noah believing God's word
- He built an ark
- He condemned the world
- He became an heir of righteousness
- The writer to the Hebrews says that all of this came about by faith

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family

- The idea of impending judgment is not welcome in the present age – perhaps any age
- Interestingly Hebrews uses the word ‘save’
- In the same way that New Testament writers speak of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ
- people are generally okay with ‘Saviour’ but not lost-ness – in other words a Saviour from nothing
- In the face of the destruction of the world by flooding, God called out to Noah to come into the ark
- In the face of the destruction of the world by fire, God’s calls out to us to come to saving faith in Jesus

Noah, by his faith he condemned the world

- The world is not, in general, agitated by what Christian believers do – but by what Christians believe
- It is alright to conclude that Jesus was a good teacher, provided you do so alongside other good teachers
- Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tse, Zoroaster, Mohammed; Guru Nanak are all revered as good teachers
- Jesus was a good teacher, a good teacher where faith concludes that he is uniquely the Son of God
- Recently, the Jehovah’s witnesses came to my door – I followed my usual rule with them
- The first is to talk more than they do; the second is to tell them what you believe about Jesus
- The third is to encourage them to keep reading the Bible – the ordinary Bible and not their translation
- John’s gospel expresses it like this: ‘These are written that you may believe, that Jesus is the Christ
- The Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20:31)

Noah became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

- Because he believed God’s word and acted accordingly. The person of faith follows the same way
- The word that we believe is God’s final word – he has spoken through his Son
- We should, in holy fear believe – in contrast with the world, becoming heirs of righteousness