



Wembley Synagogue



Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Noach

נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורו - *Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generation (6:9)*

Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin notes that the Torah introduces Noach as a totally righteous man, but later, his description changes. When the Torah later describes the destruction of everything on the face of the earth other than the ark and its occupants, it says "And Noach alone remained." There Noach is not given any titles attesting to his greatness. Rabbi Shapiro explains that according to the Midrash, Noach was held responsible for not properly influencing the sinners of his generation. Hashem instructed him to spend 120 years building the ark, so that he might inspire his generation to change their ways during this time. Although Noach was rewarded for his loyalty to G-d, the Torah tells us that he was not successful in this particular mission. (Source: Something to Say)

ותמלא הארץ חמס - and the earth had become filled with *robbery* - Rashi's translation of chamas)(Onkelos translates it as חטופין - "people who grab")

The Baal Haturim explains that the gematria (numerical value) of chamas is 108 and is equal to the word מי נח - the waters of Noach (Isaiah 54:9). Thus the people were punished measure for measure. Chamas is also equal in gematria to the word גיהנום - Gehinom (Hell). This teaches us that the people were punished with boiling waters. (According to the Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:3, Hashem boiled each and every drop of the Flood's waters in the fires of Gehinom. The Baal Haturim finds an allusion to both the waters of the flood and the fires of Gehinom) (Source: Baal Haturim)

עשה לך תבת עצי גפר - You should make an ark of Gopher wood (6:14). Rashi says that G-d has many ways at His disposal with which to bring relief and salvation. Why did he trouble Noach with the construction of an ark?

In order that the people of the generation of the Flood should see him busy with the construction for 120 years and ask him "why do you need this?" He would say to them, "G-d is going to bring a flood upon the world," and maybe they would repent.

Maskil LeDavid says that Rashi was troubled by the apparent illogical sequence of verses here: First the Torah states: "The end of all flesh has come before Me....I am going to destroy them from the earth" but we are not told how. Then Noach is told to build an ark and only afterwards in verse 17 are we told about the flood. Surely G-d should have told Noach about the flood before instructing him to build the ark.

To explain this, Rashi writes that the ark was not merely method of salvation from the flood but an attempt to inspire the generation to repentance. (Source: Gutnick Chumash)

Why did Noach build the ark for so long?

Rashi tells us he took 120 years which begs the question: why did he take so long when surely a mitzvah from G-d should be done with great enthusiasm and speed?

It could be argued that this was indeed a shortcoming on Noach's part. We find that in various areas, Noach was lacking in righteousness, to the extent that some sages argued that had Noah lived in the generation of Abraham, he would not have been considered righteous at all (Rashi to verse 9). Perhaps Noach's lengthy delay in building the ark was a further indication of his spiritual shortcomings.

This solution however contradicts an explicit verse in the Torah that "Noach made (the ark). He did everything that G-d had commanded him" (v.22). So while Noah may have been guilty of some spiritual shortcomings, he did not err at all in the construction of the ark. If it took him 120 years this must have been G-d's intention, since "he did everything that G-d had commanded him."

The explanation is that if the mitzvah had been to produce the result, (a built ark), then Noach could have delegated the work to others. The only obligation on Noach was to get the ark built regardless of the method. But since the mitzvah here was not the result (a built ark), but the action of building an ark, Noach could not delegate the mitzvah to someone else. The requirement was that Noach himself should be busy with building the ark.

For one man to build such a structure, inevitably took 120 years. If we consider the dimensions 300 x 50 x 30 cubits, with three storeys, it is astonishing that Noach managed this on his own so fast!!

(Source: Gutnick Chumash)

צהר תעשה לתבה - You should make a light for the ark (v. 16)

What kind of light did Noach make for the ark? The commentators offer differing opinions. *Rashi* offers two possibilities it was a window or a precious stone which shone providing light. *Mizrachi* says that according to *Rashi* 8:22 the heavenly bodies did not shine throughout the period of the flood and the difference between day and night was not recognizable. So what was the point in having a window in the ark if there was no light? *Chizkuni* says that the word **צהר** (a light) could also be understood as "oil" derived from the word **צוד** meaning then that Noach lit the ark with oil lamps. (Source: Gutnick Chumash)

ומן הבהמה אשר איננה טהרה - And from the animals which were not clean (Kosher) 7:8

The Gemara in Pesachim 3a asks why the Torah uses the longer expression **אשר איננה טהרה** - *asher eynena tehorah* "which were not clean" which is three words and thirteen letters in Hebrew instead of the word **הטמאה** - *hatme'ah* "unclean" which is only one word and five letters. The Gemara answers that the Torah uses eight additional letters to teach us that we should always try to express ourselves in decent language, even if it means using extra letters. (Source: Ma'ayna Shel Torah)

שנים שנים באו אל נח - "Two by two they came to Noach" (7:9)

There is a Midrash on this verse which says **אילן יומין דמשלימין בהון הלל** - These are the days in the year when we say full Hallel. What does this Midrash mean?

As we know there are certain times in the year when we say full Hallel and at other times parts of the Hallel are omitted. We can remember when full Hallel is said by the mnemonic **בבטח** - *b'vetach* - the letters of which (when using the numerical value of the Hebrew letters) makes

- (2) **ב** these are the first 2 days of Pesach
- (2) **ב** these are the two days of Shavuot
- (9) **ט** the nine days of Sukkot (including Simchat Torah)
- (8) **ח** the eight days of Chanukah

Our Pasuk is hinting to the above: *Shenayim* – two- days of Pesach, *Shenayim* – two days of Shavuot. *Ba'u* – has the numerical value of 9 alluding to the nine days of Sukkot and *El Noach has the numerical value of 89 which is the same value as the Hebrew word for Chanukah*. On these days, says the Midrash we say full Hallel. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

נח וישאר רק נח - And only Noach survived (7:23)

Why is Noach described here as "only Noach"? What happened to the previous titles the Torah (6:9) gives him – "righteous" "perfect?"

The Zohar says that Noach sinned by not praying that his generation be saved. Unlike Abraham who prayed for the Sodomites (18:23-32) and Moshe (Shemot 32:11-12, 31-32) who was ready to give up his own life if Hashem would not forgive His people. Noach was concerned that only his own family be saved.

Since Noach did not ultimately act as a truly righteous man by concerning himself with others, he was considered "only Noach" – just a simple person removed of all titles and praises. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

To praise or not to praise – that is the question!

When Hashem spoke about Noach, He called him a "*tzadik tamim*" – a complete tzadik. When Hashem spoke directly to Noach, He called him "*tzadik*." *Why didn't Hashem call him "tzadik tamim"?* From here we learn that when speaking to a person directly we should say only part of their praises (*Rashi* 7:1). If we said all their praises a person might become very arrogant. We also learn from this that it is good to praise a person – this is what Hashem did to Noach.

ויאמרו הבה נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים - And they said "Let us build for ourselves a city and tower with its top in the heavens"

Rashi explains that they planned to "wage war against Hashem." How though, did they think they could reach the heavens? *Rabbi Yehonasan Eibeschutz* (1640-1764), *Rabbi of Prague and Hamburg* answers that they were aware of the laws of gravity. Their plan was to build a tower so high that its top would be beyond the earth's gravitational pull. They could then ascend to the top of the tower where they would become weightless, enabling them to fly up into the heavens from where they imagined they could confront Hashem! (Source: Vedibarta Bam)