

NOAH AND THE FLOOD: THE APOCRYPHAL TRADITIONS

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Noah and the Flood are mentioned in many apocryphal books and traditions; and in this article some of the statements are collected. It is not maintained, of course, that apocryphal works are inspired, as Scripture is. But they may well contain valid traditions. For instance, the tradition, mentioned here, that it was very cold in the Ark, may provide a clue to the connection, so much debated by Creationists, between the Flood and the ice age. At the least, these excerpts may be of interest in showing what devout men were thinking about these matters a long time ago.

The centuries before the flood were known for their extreme wickedness and perversion so that God felt compelled to remove the population from off the face of the earth. That way the billions who were still to come had a fair chance to choose between good and evil rather than being exposed solely to the continual vice and iniquity of the antediluvian society.

Idolatry was the order of the day and the people worshipped their own gods of wood and stone.¹ Men and women alike painted their faces, wore flimsy clothing, danced wild dances to ravishing music with a strong beat and consumed wine to excess.² It became a common occurrence to kill for fun and for material gain.³ Wife swapping was their pastime activity and many people seem to have been walking about naked and to have conducted their orgies unashamedly in public.⁴ To prevent unwanted pregnancies the women of those times consumed drinks made from herbs which rendered them infertile; thereby, they could continue in their sexual practices without losing their appealing figures and shapes.⁵ Their sexual perversions even included the animals, and it became fashionable to marry and commit transgressions with them. Actual wedding ceremonies were performed, and it became legal to have a cow, a dog or a horse for a spouse.⁶ Consequently, the world of the animals and birds became also corrupted and began to mate outside their species.⁷

People robbed and plundered one another's property and abducted the poor and the helpless for their own pleasure or as slaves.⁸ There also developed a craze for astronomy and astrology; and man used the insights gained thus to predict and alter the course of the future.⁹ With zealous fervor they indulged in magic and all manner of witchcraft.¹⁰

To warn and scare the people, God repeatedly sent some plagues in the form of droughts and floods throughout the regions of the earth.¹¹ But these calamities had little or no effect on the behavior of the inhabitants. Therefore, God finally decided to annihilate life on the planet. He had the choice of permitting the continuance of evil and perversion or destroying his creations. Either alternative was a sad and heartbreaking decision but it had to be made. For the sake of future generations who need a fair chance, God decided to make a clean sweep and remove mankind and animals from the land and start afresh once more.¹²

Yet, in his mercy the Lord still gave mankind an advance warning of the oncoming calamity. He had selected Noah and his family to preach repentance to the people and to survive the flood because they were among the few who had not indulged in the wickedness

of their age or had adopted an unrighteous way of life.¹³ It is said that in this world of ungratefulness, he was one who took care of his parents and grandparents.¹⁴ Noah was also known as an inventor who had first manufactured the hoe and the plough and other tools for working the ground which made agriculture easier for the farmers.¹⁵

Thus, when the call went out to Noah to preach, God gave his creation a reprieve of 120 years before the great destruction would take place.¹⁶ Together with his grandfather, Methuselah, the newly named prophet went out and called the population of the earth to repentance.¹⁷ However, their warnings seem to have gone largely unheeded. The bulk of the people either ignored their preaching or thought of them as madmen.¹⁸ Because of the longevity of the antediluvians, they saw no need to rush into changing their ways. People who anticipated to live several more centuries thought of themselves as virtually immortal.¹⁹ Because of their refusal to repent over a period of 120 years, the Lord eventually shortened the life-span of men to 120 years to remind them always of their neglect.²⁰

Besides declaring penitence to his contemporaries, Noah also used the time in preparation for the flood. He planted trees for the construction of the ark and large plantations for the food supplies needed in the enterprise.²¹ The building of the ark is variously given as having taken either five, fifty-two, or one hundred years.²² According to the ancient texts, Noah worked very slowly, for he wanted to allow the people more time to repent, and hoped to avert the whole destruction after all.²³ Apparently he did employ workers to help him with the construction of this rather large vessel. Another interesting facet is added with the assertion that the ark was built twice. It seems that Noah's wife did not like to see it finished at all and burned the construction to the ground so that a second ark had hurriedly to be launched.²⁴ These 120 years of preparation for the calamity were periods full of anxieties and activities for the aging patriarch, and not a leisure time waiting for the miracle to happen. The preaching, the gardening and construction, and the knowledge of the impending destruction wore heavily on Noah and caused him to loose much sleep and peace of mind.

It required a great amount of wisdom, knowledge, and instruction to build a structure such as the ark.²⁵ It is therefore not surprising to find in the ancient texts that God Himself was very much involved while the vessel was erected. He consulted often with Noah and even drew the different plans with His own finger.²⁶ Other legends assert that different angels were assigned by God either to aid in the construction with advice and information, or else they delivered a book to Noah in

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which all the knowledge necessary for the building of an ark had been recorded.²⁷

Most writings mention that the ark contained three floors, but they differ as to the number of rooms or compartments on each level. The figures provided range from 360 to 366 and 606 up to 900.²⁸ In some sources, the first level was assigned to animals, the second to the birds and reptiles, and the third for Noah and his family.²⁹ But other records designate the bottom floor for the garbage and refuse, while the middle floor was to harbor the family and the clean animals, and the top level housed the unclean creatures.³⁰ There were chutes along the walls through which the waste could be thrown down to the first level from the other stories.³¹ Receptacles for water and pipes to carry it to the different rooms were provided, as well as some twenty rooms for food storage on each level.³² To provide light on the ark Noah received some precious stones, or in some texts a pearl, which would shine and illuminate the otherwise dark interior.³³

Finally it was time for the animals to board the vessel. In some apocryphal versions they assembled on their own by instinct while in other sources Noah blew a trumpet to gather the various species around the ark.³⁴ Apparently the prophet also received instructions as to which of the many beasts were to be admitted into the shelter. If an animal crouched before the patriarch when it approached the door; it was to be selected; if it remained standing in the presence of Noah, he was to reject it.³⁵ Likewise, if a male chased a female, they could enter the vessel; but if a female ran after a male, they were to be excluded.³⁶ In all, some thirty-two species of birds and 365 species of reptiles found refuge in the ark.³⁷ Males and females were to be kept strictly separate during the voyage in order that they could not mate and bear offspring.³⁸ Interesting is the legend that the preserved body of Adam was also taken aboard, as Adam himself had requested before he died.³⁹

During the years preceding the great catastrophe the small number of righteous people on the earth besides Noah's family were taken by God so that they did not have to experience the agonies of witnessing the earth devastated.⁴⁰ The last one to die before the commencement of the flood was Noah's grandfather, Methuselah. Following his death there was a seven day mourning period which was also a time of last reprieve for the population to repent.⁴¹ There was no reaction from the people; and, after the wickedness and idolatry had been endured for so long the flood finally began on Noah's six hundredth birthday in the year 1656 of the mortal period.⁴² (I.e., from the creation of Adam.)

The water started to pour down and sweep over the land. Accompanying the rains were severe lightning and thunder. The sun and the moon gave no light so that the earth was covered with darkness.⁴³ Earthquakes shook the land as the foundations of the world raged and the planet moved about violently.⁴⁴ Some 700,000 people surrounded the ark and demanded to enter. They shouted that they were ready to repent and wanted to receive safety. However, it was too late; and when they began to tear at the ark and tried to topple it, God sent wild beasts which diverted their attention by

attacking the scared masses.⁴⁵ According to some stories, the water which poured down from the skies and also the waters from the deep was extremely hot and burned the flesh from off the bodies of the wicked.⁴⁶ It was like fire coming from heaven, and it dissolved the land.⁴⁷ Thus, millions of humans died as well as the animals and birds.⁴⁸

While the commotions continued, the ark was lifted up from its resting-place and tossed to and fro in the turbulent waters. The animals began to howl and roar with terrifying noises; and also Noah and his family were terrified. They stood embracing and clinging to one another and wept out of fear as the ark shook heavily and bounced from side to side. In answer to their fervent prayers the Lord quieted the waters and the violent movements subsided and the inhabitants of the vessel slowly gained their composure.⁴⁹

Gradually life adjusted to a normal routine as everyone became accustomed to the conditions. Noah was in charge of the wild animals; Shem cared for the domestic ones; Ham for the birds; and Japheth tended the reptiles.⁵⁰ It appears that most all the animals were rather tame during the voyage as everyone was able to walk even among the snakes and scorpions without having to be afraid.⁵¹ The foremost problem facing the family concerned the feeding of the animals since there were so many of them and each required a different type of food at different times of the day and even at night.⁵² The eight humans did not receive much rest for the next year as they ran about day and night to provide care for their charges.⁵³ Once Noah was injured by an upset lion which had been angered by waiting for his food for a long time. Another version mentions that an elephant hurt Noah when he accidentally sat down on Noah's leg one night.⁵⁴

A further problem facing the animals and humans was the bitter cold on the ark. Many suffered greatly and Noah himself coughed blood because of the freezing temperatures.⁵⁵ It was also a time of mourning and everyone remembered daily the death of so many people because of their stubbornness. For this reason, sexual relationships were apparently forbidden while in the ark.⁵⁶ Light was provided by the stones or the pearl. When it was light outside they would shine dimly and brighten up when it was night-time. Thus, the days and nights were indicated and the inhabitants of the ark knew how much time had passed and could also feed the animals at the proper times.⁵⁷

Finally, after one year and eleven days, the flood ended when strong winds scattered the waters and they slowly receded and disappeared.⁵⁸ The deluge had been universal and the ark seems to have floated far away from Noah's native country and to have landed in a new and strange place on the other side of the earth.⁵⁹ The destruction which greeted the survivors upon disembarkation was total. They were horrified and wept bitterly when they saw the results of the flood.⁶⁰ The Lord had to console them and promised with an oath that there would never be another deluge. As a sign of his covenant, the rainbow was set in the sky which was to be seen only in times of wickedness to remind mankind of the flood and the oath.⁶¹ After offering a

sacrifice on an altar, Noah blessed his children and they proceeded to once more populate the earth and find a new home. In later times, Noah was hailed as the "preserver of the race,"^{61a} "the founder of the new universe,"^{61b} and even "the last and the first."⁶²

As the descendants of Noah multiplied and grew, they populated the land and then spread out into "the four quarters of the earth."⁶³ When the earth was "divided" at the time of Peleg (Genesis 10:25), an apocryphal writing maintains that it did not refer to a physical separation of the land masses but rather that Noah assigned each of his sons and their children a part of the earth in order to avoid future strifes and quarrels for the land.⁶⁴ By the time the old patriarch died, 350 years after the flood, it is said that his descendants numbered already in the millions.⁶⁵

Within a few generations, however, Noah saw that a great number of his posterity were apostatizing and sliding back into corruption and wickedness. The stories about the tower of Babel speak for themselves; and his greatgrandson, Nimrod, introduced idolatry again and ruled the world by force.⁶⁶ The aging patriarch therefore undertook to write a book about his experiences before and after the flood; a voice of warning for his descendants so that they could learn from the tribulations and the accumulative wisdom of their progenitors.⁶⁷ Yet, very little heed was given to the instructions and admonitions contained therein. Included also was Noah's insight and knowledge about medicine and cures for the prevailing illnesses of the times. Angels had told him the healing secrets of the many herbs and plants which were to be used as remedies for injuries and sickness among the children of the patriarch.⁶⁸

Noah's memory remained alive not only in the scriptures of Jews and Christians but also in the legends of the ancient East. He was immortalized in Mesopotamia as *Utnapishtim*, in Palestine as *Leviathan* and finally in Greece as the great *Deucalion*.⁶⁹ Thus remains the legacy of one of the pillars among men in the course of human history at the time of the greatest wickedness and the most destructive catastrophe on this planet.

References

- ¹Jasher 2:4-5; *Book of Adam and Eve*, II, ch. 13, 17; *Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 23.
²*Book of Adam and Eve*, II, ch. 20ff.
³*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith* 34:14.
⁴Ben Gurion, *Sagen der Juden*, 191-193; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, 22; *Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 31:6; 2. Enoch 34.
⁵Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, I, 158; *Jasher* 2:20-22.
⁶*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 26:5.
⁷*Ibid.*, 28:8.
⁸*Jasher* 4:17-18.
⁹*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 26:5; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I, 2.3
¹⁰Ben Gurion, I, 119, 154; *Zohar: Bereshith* 56a.
¹¹*Ibid.*, 152, 155; *Jasher* 4:5-6, 12.
¹²Animals were also destroyed because they had perverted their lifestyle. They were also no longer necessary on the earth without man since they had been created for his sake (Ginzberg, V, 180, note 32; Ben Gurion, I, 197-198).
¹³It is said that Noah participated in the vices of the times until he was 48 years old when he repented (*Midrash Rabba: Noah*, 30:8). He apparently withdrew from the wicked and lived in the mountains where he studied the books of the righteous, particularly Enoch (*Zohar: Bereshith*, 58b).
¹⁴Ginzberg, V, 132.

- ¹⁵*Ibid.*, I, 147. (Cf. *Genesis* 5:29.)
¹⁶Origin, *Contra Celsum*, III, 41; Tertullian, *Genesis* 3:30; *Midrash Rabba: Noah* 30:7; Since he was also building the ark, it was only one hundred years according to the *Apocalypse of Paul*, 50.
¹⁷*Talmud: Sanhedrin* 108a; *Midrash Rabba: Eccles.* 9:15.; Ben Gurion, I, 179.
¹⁸*Sibylline Oracles*, I, 177-233.
¹⁹*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 26:6; Ben Gurion, I, 188.
²⁰*Ibid.*; Philo, *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesis*, 1:19; Josephus, *Antiquit.*, I, 37; Lanctantius, *Institutiones*, 2:14-15.
²¹*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 30:7.
²²Five: *Jasher* 3:34; Ben Gurion, I, 183. Fifty-two: *Pirke de R.E.*, 23. One hundred: Origin: *Contra Cels.*, 4:41; Augustine: *Civitas Dei*, 15:27; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 3:3.
²³*Pirke de R.E.*, 23.
²⁴*Hypostasis of the Archons*, p. 31, line 16; Epiphanius, *Pan. Haer.*, 26:1 According to the Koran she was assigned to hell for this action (Sura 66:10).
²⁵*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 32:11; *Talmud: Sanhedrin* 108b; *Pirke de R.E.* 23; *Targum Yerushalmi*, Genesis 6:14-15; Josephus, *Ant.*, I, 3.2.
²⁶Ben Gurion, I, 201.
²⁷*Sefer Noah*, 150-160; 2. *Enoch* 33:12; 1. *Enoch* 10:1-3.
²⁸360 and 900: Ben Gurion, I, 203-204. 366: *Pirke de R.E.*, 23. 606; Ben Gurion, I, 201. 330 and 900; *Midrash Rabba: Noah* 31:11. Philo mentions four floors in *De Vita Mosis*, 2:60.
²⁹*Pirke de R.E.*, 23.
³⁰*Midrash Rabba: Noah* 32:4.
³¹*Pirke de R.E.*, 23.
³²Ben Gurion, I, 201; Hippolytus, *Arabic Fragment to the Pentateuch*, Genesis 6:18.
³³*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 31:11; *Pirke de R.E.*, 23. In Genesis 6:16 it mentioned a window in the ark. The Hebrew TSOHAR, however, refers to a light rather than a window in our sense.
³⁴For example, *Pirke de R.E.*, 23; Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, 15:27.
³⁵*Jasher* 6:2.
³⁶*Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 32:13, 32:8.
³⁷*Ibid.*, 32:8; *Pirke de R.E.*, 23; *Targum Yeru.*, Gen. 5:20; Philo, *Moses*, 2:12.
³⁸*Pirke de R.E.*, 23; *Midrash Rabba: Noah* 31:12. Anciently men and women were also kept separate in the churches, where they sat on different sides of the aisle.
³⁹*Book of Adam and Eve*, II, 8:11.
⁴⁰*Jasher* 4:20, 5:6, 21.
⁴¹Ginzberg, I, 142, 154; *Midrash Rabba: Noah* 32:7. Some believe that Methuselah's name means "when he is dead it (i.e., the flood) will come."
⁴²According to the Masoretic Text. It is 2642 by the Septuagint and 2262 in Josephus, *Ant.*, I, 3.3. Philo set the date exactly on Noah's birthday in *Quaestiones*, 2:33, 47. It was also the day of the Vernal Equinox.
⁴³Ginzberg, I, 162.
⁴⁴*Jasher* 6:11. See also Ben Gurion, I, 184.
⁴⁵Ginzberg, I, 158.
⁴⁶*Zohar: Noah* 62a, 66a.
⁴⁷Ben Gurion, I, 195-196; *Midrash Rabba: Bereshith*, 28:2.
⁴⁸Because of the extreme longevity the antediluvians lived to be contemporaries to their own posterity to the fifth and sixth generation (Ben Gurion, I, 188). Barring diseases and large scale wars, the population could have reached several billion by the time of the deluge (See Cleon W. Skousen, *The First 2000 years*, pp. 139-145).
⁴⁹Ben Gurion, I, 186; Ginzberg, I, 162.
⁵⁰Ginzberg, V, 181-182.
⁵¹*Ibid.*, 182.
⁵²Ben Gurion, I, 210. Some writings assert that only figs were available on the ark. See *Midrash Rabba: Noah*, 31:14; Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, 15:27.
⁵³Ben Gurion, I, 210; *Talmud: Sanhedrin*, 108b.
⁵⁴*Midrash Rabba: Noah* 30:6.
⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 32:11.
⁵⁶Philo, *Quaestiones*, 2:49. Eight people entered the ark and eight left, showing that no children were born during that year.
⁵⁷*Midrash Rabba: Noah* 32:11; *Talmud: Sanhedrin* 108b; Ben Gurion, I, 209.
⁵⁸*Pirke de R.E.*, 23 note 12; Ben Gurion, I, 219. However, see *The New Bible Commentary*, F. Davidson ed., second edition, 1954. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids. Pp. 84 & 85.

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