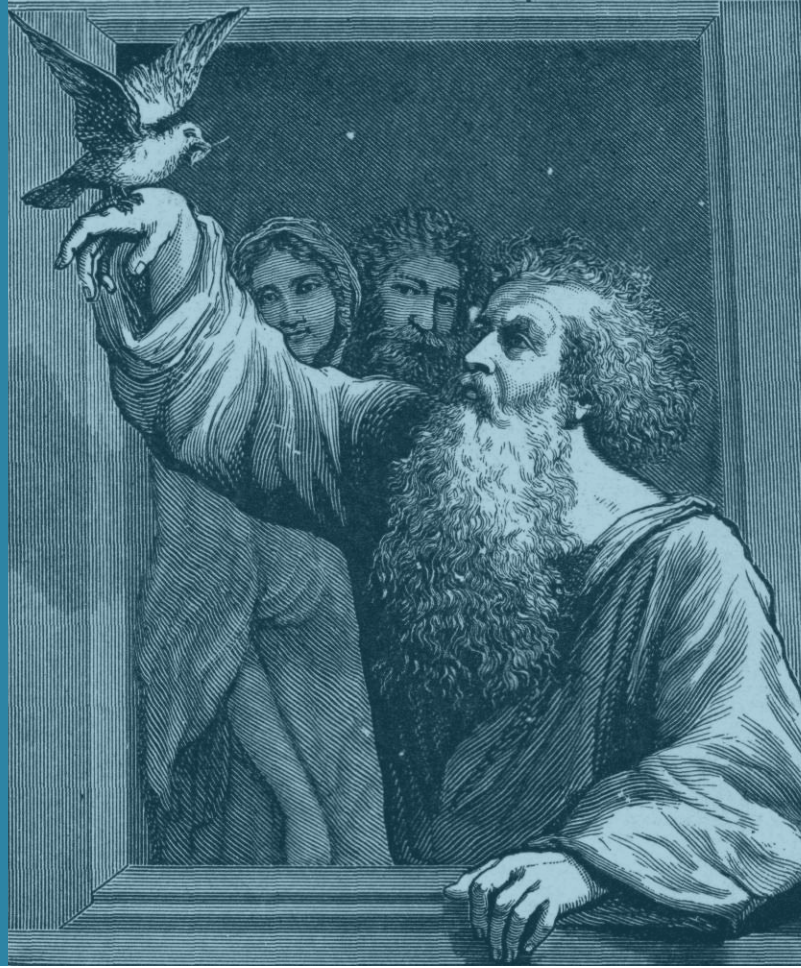


Noah Was Not a Man of Words

Torah Portion October 21, 2017



Parashat Noach (Noah)

Our weekly Torah portion begins with the following:

*This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. – Genesis 6:9
[NKJV]*

And already from the first verse we have questions. A question of relativity: what is a just man, perfect in his generations?

The accepted interpretation is that, according to his generation he was righteous. But if he was found to be in the generation of the righteous, such as Abraham or Moses, he would not be so esteemed. In relative terms – in relation to

his surroundings – Noah was a righteous man.

The criticism is stinging, and even insulting: it says that indeed there was a righteous man, but righteous in comparison with people who were completely evil. So much so that God had to destroy them and wash them away from the world. And if he were born in the generation of Abraham, Noah would not be considered to be much. He would have just been an average man.

Why don't the commentators like Noah?

Why don't the commentators like Noah? I think it is because of his silence. For example, Abraham hears about the desire to destroy Sodom. Immediately he starts negotiating with God, and he doesn't let up until he gets the answer he wants. That if there are 10 righteous people in Sodom, God will not destroy the city.

Or look at Moses – at the time of the sin of the golden calf, or any other sin of Israel, when God wanted to destroy and/or punish the people of Israel, Moses fiercely protects the people. He goes so far as to risk his own self:

Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written. – Exodus 32:32 [NKJV]

What Moses is saying is: either You forgive the people – or You count me with them and erase me from the Book of Life as well.

But Noah did not say a single word, for an entire world.

God wants to destroy the world – and Noah is silent, letting it happen without saying a single word neither in the defense of humanity, nor in the defense of all the creatures of the world.

The difference between putting on a coat or lighting a stove

This can be described as the difference between putting on a coat or lighting a stove.

We are approaching the winter, and thank God we have been blessed with rain, and we must pray for more and more rain. And in the context of the winter, when it's cold, there are those who wear a coat, in order to warm up, and there are those who light an oven to heat others.

And this is the argument of many commentators. Noah was righteous – but it is not enough to be just “OK”. It is not wise to just build a personal rescue ship – to put on a coat and warm up alone.

Compare this with Abraham, who defended and tried to save even his complete opposites – the wicked Sodomites.

The understanding is that it is not enough to just to wear a coat, you can and should light the oven and warm the environment.

Noah is not a preacher or a Torah innovator, Noah is not a man of prophecy, or a philosopher, he is not a man of

thought or speech, he is not any of these things. So what is Noah? He was a man of work, a man of construction, a man of manual labor. Contrary to Noah's ark, when there was a need for a small box – like a shoebox – to float for a bit on the river, they got Moses' mother Jochebed. And look what a big deal they made out of it!

But when we need to save the human race, the animals, the vegetation, and all the wisdom needed to preserve creation, God got Noah, and our commentators do not approve of him.

Noah is good with large arks, with rescue missions, with practical responsibility, with physical construction and the working of the soil. He is not good with philosophical discussions or high spirituality.

Every member of the community must have a role

The New Testament gives us several lists of gifts, talents, abilities, etc. Some of these are gifts for physical labor and some are spiritual gifts:

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Messiah, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. – Romans 12:4-8 [NKJV] (amended)

Notice the end of the passage that we just read, "...he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Most importantly, everything we do must be with cheerfulness – if we do anything – it must look like we enjoy doing it, that we're doing it with all our heart.

Every person has a role, every person has a gift, and it is not possible nor is it right to make a comparison between gifts, people, and whatever role is considered to be more important.

Every member of the community must have a role, whether it is an official position, or an unofficial role, such as encouragement, listening, caring for the surroundings, prayer, or visiting the sick and the elderly. We are all members of the Body of Messiah, and we all must give our part for the better of the community.

It can not be that there is a member of the community, who has been with us for years, who has no official or unofficial role.

It is required of every member of the community to continue to give something of his/her own accord to the benefit of the community. Just like in a kibbutz.

Each of us has skills and gifts, and we must use them, and contribute them to the community!

Noah was not a man of words

Back to Noah, his mission, and the outcome.

The first man was given specific roles in the Garden of Eden,

and all of them are connected to the earth. Notice how important the matter of earth and vegetation is in the creation of the world.

And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.” – Genesis 1:29 [NKJV]

And it goes on:

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat...” – Genesis 1:15,16 [NKJV]

And the direct punishment of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden is:

Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return. – Genesis 3:17b-19 [NKJV]

So much land – and how does the Torah describe Noah?

And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. – Genesis 9:20 [NKJV]

Noah is not the captain of a ship; he is not a sailor; he is not the savior of the world nor the righteous man of the world. First and foremost, he is a man of the soil. He doesn't settle

just with the fruit as it is picked. Noah plants, preserves, and creates wine from the vine.

God cursed the first man (“cursed is the ground for your sake”) and Noah comes and works the soil and saves creation, by processing, planting, and raising food.

According to this test, Noah provides the flour and only after him Abraham and the Torah can come, according to the idea, “if there is no flour there is no Torah .”

In conclusion:

- **Noah was a righteous man** in his generation, was he righteous in relation to the evil environment? Or in his own right? It does not matter, what matters is that he was a man of deeds, he built the ark, he cared to feed all the creatures, and he replanted the Earth. **He was a man of deeds – and not a man of words.**
- **We cannot judge** between different gifts, we can, however, judge whether the person is doing his or her job properly, and **with cheerfulness.**
- **There is no work or gift that is more important or less important.** It is for each person to perform the role given to him or her. If we do not join hands and contribute to the community with everything we can give, we will never be able to make progress.
- **We are indebted** to the rabbi and the guide, just like we are indebted to the cantor, just like we are indebted to those who arrange the chairs, and just like we are indebted

to those who pay the electric bill. Without a combination of all these and more, we will not be able to exist – let alone advance.

Shabbat Shalom.

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