

## IN THE GRIP OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE

### A Bible study guide on the life of Noah

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#### 1. NOAH BUILDS AN ARK Gen.6:5-22

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** During the time between Adam and Noah, mankind lived without God's law. Their only law was "the Golden Rule" which says: *In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you* (Matt.7:12). Noah had to wait for sons to be born much longer than other men at that time. He was already 500 years old when three boys were born to him (5:28-32).

#### 6:5-7 and 11-12.

- How do you think everyday life was in the world described in verses 5,11 and12?
- Compare the time of Noah with our own time.
- What do you think about how God is depicted in verses 6-7?
- Do you think people were violent, because they didn't know the law of God, or for some other reason?
- How should Christians try to stem the flood of violence in our day?
- Why did God decide to destroy even animals along with human beings (7,13)?

**6:8-10. In verse 9 there are two Hebrew words describing Noah: righteous (tsaddik) and blameless (tamim). Righteousness is one of the most important words in the Bible. It means a person who is acceptable in God's sight.**

- Read carefully verses 8-9 and try to picture in your mind Noah's relation to God and to his neighbours. What can you say about it?
- Was Noah righteous because of his faith or because of his behaviour? Give your reasons.
- Think of how Noah had been able to keep his faith intact among such depravity.
- How do you think Noah's contemporaries felt about him?

**6:13-16. The total area of the ark was 10000 square metres (108000 square feet) in three stories; it was as big as an oil tanker of our day. Note that this happened before the Iron Age. At Noah's time one could occasionally extract some iron from meteorites, that was all.**

- Change the measurements of the ark into metres/ feet. What was prescribed for the length, breadth and depth of the ark?
- What were the differences between a regular ship and the ark?

**6:17-22. Some commentators of the OT have deduced from verses 5:32, 6:3, 7:6 that Noah was building the ark more than a hundred years. If this conclusion is correct he didn't have any sons when he started this huge project. His father Lemek was still alive; he died five years before the flood.**

- Consider different stages of the building process. What particular difficulties did Noah face?

- How do you think other people commented on the project when a huge ship was built on dry land?
- Peter calls Noah “*a herald of righteousness*” (2.Pet.2:5) and the author of Hebrews tells us that he “*condemned the world through his faith*” (Heb.11:7). This means that Noah preached to his contemporaries while building the ark. How can it be that no one repented during one hundred long years?
- What do you think Noah’s father and his siblings thought about his project of building an ark (5:28-30)?
- What about Noah’s wife? What kind of difficulties did she face?
- The sons of Noah were born while the ark was being built. Compare their early years with those of their peers?
- Imagine the girls who came from godless families but agreed nevertheless to marry Noah’s sons. What made them do that? Consider various alternatives.

### **Application:**

- What is the God-given task where you should be as faithful as Noah was in building the ark?
- How could we endure the criticism of the world around us without losing our courage?

### **THE GOSPEL:**

Noah was righteous in God’s eyes because he believed in God’s mercy. He did not build the ark in order to become righteous, but because he already was righteous. “*He became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith*” (Hebrews 11:7).

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## **2. THE FLOOD Gen.7**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION.** The following is a NT commentary to the life of Noah: *By faith Noah, when he was warned about things not yet seen, with reverent regard constructed an ark for the deliverance of his family. Through faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.* (Heb.11:7)

### **Verse 1. Here Noah is once more called “righteous” (tsaddik).**

- What exactly did Noah believe in according to Hebrews 11:7?
- How do faith and righteousness relate to each other according to this verse in Hebrews?
- How did Noah’s faith affect the lives of his wife, sons and daughters-in-law?

### **7:1-5**

- How do you think Noah felt when hearing again God’s words after one hundred years of silence (2-4)?
- How would you react if you suddenly heard that a catastrophe of that scale was soon to strike the earth (4)?

### **7:6-16. The animals were relatively tame at that time, because they were neither hunted nor eaten.**

- How do you think Noah coaxed all these animals to enter the ark during a single week (2-3, 8-9, 14-16)?
- How do you think Noah’s neighbours felt when they saw the strange migration of the animals?

- The families of Noah's daughters-in-law did not believe in God and the ark. Do you think these young women went to the ark on the basis of their own faith or on the basis of the faith of their father-in-law?
- Why didn't the Lord want Noah to close the door (16b)?

**11-12, 17-24. The earth was probably surrounded by a thick layer of clouds, which were suddenly "torn apart"/broke down. (In some translations of Gen.2:5-6 you get such an impression.) Jesus compares the time of Noah with the time at the end of the world: *For in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark. And they knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away. It will be the same at the coming of the Son of Man.* (Matt.24:38-39).**

- What things interested Noah's contemporaries? Compare to those of our contemporaries.
- Why did the catastrophe take everyone by surprise, although Noah had been proclaiming it for a hundred years?
- Think how people tried to save themselves and their children during the first days of the flood (21-23)?
- What do you suppose Noah's contemporaries thought about his sermons while they were facing death?
- When do the new-atheists of our time have to admit that Christians were right after all?
- What kind of thoughts were perhaps crossing the minds of Noah and his family during the 40 days when the whole earth was gradually filled with water?
- How do you think Noah and his family used their time inside the ark (24)?

**Peter writes in his epistle that the ark is in fact a prototype of baptism (1.Pet.3:20-21): *In the ark a few, that is eight souls, were delivered through water. And this prefigured baptism, which now saves you – not the washing off of physical dirt but the pledge of a good conscience to God – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.***

- What are the common traits between the Christian baptism and Noah's ark?
- What in the words of Peter show us that baptism is something God does for us in his mercy, not something we do for him?

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### 3. A NEW BEGINNING Gen.8

**1-5. Verse 1b resembles the beginning verses of the whole Bible. The Hebrew word "wind" can also be translated by the word "spirit / Spirit". There was no rudder in the ark; that is why it could not be steered/ manoeuvred. Nobody knew yet that Noah's family would have to spend more than a year in the ark.**

- How may Noah's family have felt knowing that they were the only human beings on earth?
- Think of different factors which made the year in the ark an ordeal of faith for Noah and his family.
- What gave hope for Noah and his family?
- What ordeal in our life could perhaps be compared to Noah's life in the ark?
- How many months had passed, when the ark stopped atop a mountain (4, cf. 7:11)?
- The mountain range of Ararat is situated at the border area between Turkey and Armenia of our day, and inhabited by Kurds. (See map). In no point of human history has it been an

easy place to reach. What do you think about the rumours about there having been sighted a frame of a big ship, partly covered with snow?

#### 6-12

- Why have all these details been written in the Bible?
- What was Noah's purpose in sending birds from the ark?
- How many months did the raven have to spend outside the ark before the land was dry (4,6,14)?
- What did those three doves tell Noah about the rate with which the surface of the earth was getting dry (8-12)?
- Why did they have to wait for two more months even after the olive tree was in leaf? Think of various reasons.

#### 13-19

- What was the difference between living in the ark with, versus without a roof (13)?
- What do you think was the most wonderful thing for humans and animals the day they were let out of their year-long confinement (16-17)?
- What was peculiar in the way the humans and animals left the ark (18-19)?
- In what respect is leaving the ark a prototype of the end of the world and the start of the new creation?

**20-22. These verses show that mankind had a vague idea of clean animals (fit for sacrifice) even before the law of Moses was given. Noah had brought seven pairs of clean animals into the ark (7:2).**

- Why did Noah want to build an altar for the Lord the first thing after stepping on the newly created world (20)?
- Why did the Lord give his promise when smelling the aroma of the sacrifice, not before that (21)?
- What does the promise in verse 21 mean? See also the beginning of verse 22 and 2.Pet.3:7.
- Compare verses 6:5 and 8:21. What do they show about mankind before and after the fall?
- How does radical evil manifest itself in our day?
- What are the things that will not change until the end of the world, regardless of climate change or nuclear war (21-22)?

#### **Application:**

- What is the message of this story for our own time?
- What are the things that make it difficult for modern man to believe in a historical flood? (Jesus believed it, though...)
- Which facts speak for this story to be historically true? (for example in the area of geology or genetics)

**THE GOSPEL:** The flood did not wipe out original sin. The thoughts and plans of human beings were selfish and evil even after the flood, and they still are. But the sacrifice of Noah was a prototype of the death of Jesus. The blood had to be poured out so that the mankind would get their sins forgiven and get a new beginning.

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### **4. NOAH'S COVENANT AND NOAH'S SIN Gen.9**

**1-4. The relation between humans and animals was changed after the flood.**

- Why did the Lord say the same blessing to Noah's family as he had said in the fifth and sixth day of creation (1,7, cf. Gen.1:22,28)?

- Why do you think God wanted to reorganize the relationship between humans and animals at this point (2)?
- What would have happened if humankind had not been allowed to eat animal products until this day (3)?
- Why must there be a state of war between humans and animals in this fallen world?
- How does the ban to eat blood connect with the sacrifices in the Old Testament and with the death of Jesus (4)?

**5-7. As we remember, violence had swelled into huge proportions before the fall (6:5). These verses are considered to be the starting point of a legal system in this world.**

- Why is it not good for a society that everyone does what he/she considers to be right?
- Why must God be the force behind any legal system - why isn't man enough?
- How does God justify capital punishment for murderers?
- What does God seem to think about capital punishment in general (cf. Rom. 13:4)?
- What light do these verses shed on the problem of human value?
- What are the limits of the law of the land, as far as restraining evil and violence goes?

**8-17. God had promised to make a covenant with Noah (6:18). He does it now.**

- Why was a covenant between God and his creation needed exactly at this point (8-11)?
- Why did God want to make his first covenant with all of creation, not just with human beings (10)?
- Why is it important that there be a visible sign marking the establishment of a covenant (12-16)?
- What does God want you to think about, say, climate change, when you see a rainbow in clouds?

**18-23**

- What do you think: did Noah know what he was doing when drinking wine or didn't he (20-21)?
- Compare the Noah who built the ark and preached the Word to the Noah depicted in verse 21?
- Why was it such a shock for Noah's sons to witness the naked body of their father (22-23)?
- How does it usually affect children when they see their parents drunk?
- Why doesn't the Bible keep silent on the sins of its heroes?
- How should a Christian relate to alcohol? (How should he/she relate to it in a country where alcoholism is rampant/ a big problem?)

**24-27. (You can leave this out if the time is short.) These words have been used in defending racial prejudice and oppression, even slavery and apartheid. It is really inappropriate, because a) there is no word "race" in the whole Bible and b) among Canaan's descendants there were both black and white people. Jews and Arabs are descendants of Shem and Europeans are thought to be descendants of Japheth.**

- Why do you think this curse is written in the Bible?
- Why have Europe and North America lost the blessing which was promised to Japheth (27a)?
- Why do you think the Christian church is blossoming among the descendants of Ham in Africa just now?

**THE GOSPEL:** Shem's special blessing meant that the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind would be born from his descendants. But in Jesus the whole world was chosen again to be the

recipient of God's gospel and his blessing. *After these things I looked, and here was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. They were shouting out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* (Rev.7:9-10).

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