

5785 - Genesis 6-11 - Noah (Noah)

THE WINDOW¹

The waters decreased continuously until the tenth month; in the tenth, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains could be seen.

At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made.

He sent forth the raven, and it went back and forth ... He sent off the dove from with him, to see if the waters had abated from the face of the earth. But the dove did not find a rest for the sole of her foot ...

He waited a further seven days, and he again sent the dove from the ark. The dove came in to him in the evening, and, lo, in her mouth was a plucked olive leaf; and Noah knew that the waters had eased from upon the earth.

Genesis 8:6-11

It happened before: **A world drowning in violence awaited redemption.** It waited for divine action, because man had done all that was in his power, and the rest was up to G-d.

Man waited in a sealed ark, but the ark had a window. And from the window, a dove was dispatched to circle the skies, to agitate the heavens with its restless reconnaissance. For the next four thousand years, its spread wings and the olive leaf⁽¹⁾ clutched in its beak would symbolize humanity's quest for harmony and peace.

ONE RAVEN AND THREE DOVES

The verses quoted at the beginning of this essay describe a sequence of events that transpired in the tenth month of the year-long Flood that covered the earth in Noah's days.

As related in the seventh and eighth chapters of Genesis, rain fell for forty days and nights, after which the floodwaters churned and swelled for another five months. Finally, the waters calmed and began to subside. As the water level fell, the ark settled on top of Mount Ararat. Soon the mountain peaks began to break the surface of the water. A few weeks later, Noah opened the window in the sealed ark⁽²⁾ and sent out a raven. A week later, Noah sent a dove, followed by two more doves, each after another seven-day interval. The purpose of these missions was "to see if the waters had abated from the face of the earth."

Why did Noah dispatch these winged emissaries? We can appreciate that he was eager to rebuild, to replace the mayhem of the Flood with a new, harmonious world. However, it would seem that Noah would have had little use for whatever information these reconnaissance flights might

provide to him. In fact, a careful reading of the Torah's account shows that even after Noah was convinced that the Flood was over, he could not act on his own assessment that the earth was ready for a new beginning to take root. Noah had originally entered the ark by the explicit command of G-d, and **as long as he did not receive further instructions to the contrary, the divine injunction, "Come into the ark,"⁽³⁾ remained in force.** Only upon being commanded to "Go out from the ark"⁽⁴⁾—a command which in fact came some two months after the dove had delivered the sign of the "plucked olive leaf" to the ark—could Noah emerge from the ark and begin settling and developing the world outside the ark.

Hence the question: For what purpose did Noah dispatch the raven and the doves?

A FLOATING UTOPIA

Our sages teach that Noah's ark was **a prototype of the divinely perfect future world of Moshiach.**⁽⁵⁾ Every species of animal, including many which ordinarily prey on one another, coexisted in harmony within the ark's walls, reminiscent of the era when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ... the lion shall eat straw like the ox ... they shall not hurt nor destroy ... for the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d ..."⁽⁶⁾ G-d's command to Noah to "Go out from the ark" in order to "be fruitful and multiply upon the earth represents **the divine empowerment to begin the task of realizing this ideal on a universal scale.**

In our own lives, "Noah's ark" represents our own efforts to create sanctums of holiness in the midst of the floodwaters of material life. Here, too, our life's mission consists of two phases. First we are instructed, "Come into the ark." As the chaos of a morally and spiritually confused world churns about us, we must create havens of tranquility and sanctity, sheltered by the protective words of Torah and prayer.⁽⁷⁾

But our personal "arks" are not ends in themselves. **Ultimately they must serve as the seeds from which a new world, embracing the entirety of creation, will unfold.** Our mission is to create a world free of greed, jealousy, and hate; a world suffused with the wisdom and goodness of its Creator. The objective is to translate the G-dliness we have cultivated within our personal "arks" into the divinely perfect world of Moshiach.

The directive, "Come into the ark," which characterizes our task during the Flood" years of history, is but a prelude to the "Go out from the ark" of the era of Moshiach, when the holiness and perfection of a Torah-defined existence will extend to all of creation.

WAITING IS NOT A PASSIVE ACTIVITY

1 Yanki Tauber, *The Inside Story, Genesis*, (Meaningful Life Center), pp. 109-113.

As with Noah, we must await the word. **It is not for us to decide that the era of Moshiach has begun.** It is by G-d's command that we entered the "ark," and it is G-d who will send Moshiach to herald the new dawn.

This may lead to the belief that we should passively wait for the redemption. Therein lies the lesson of Noah's winged emissaries: Well before he was commanded to "Go out from the ark, Noah opened a window to the outside world. As soon as he sensed signs of the Flood's abatement, he dispatched messengers to "test the waters" and confirm the fact that the world was ready for renewal.

Noah did not content himself with developing the inner world of his ark while allowing history to take its course. Rather, he did everything in his power to establish the world's readiness, thereby hastening the divine empowerment to make his ark a universal reality.

Today, we find ourselves at the same crossroads that Noah faced forty-one centuries ago. All around us, we detect signs of a world that is bettering and perfecting itself, beating its nuclear swords into the plowshares of aid to the hungry, and accepting the principles of freedom, justice, and compassion as universal givens. Amidst this calming and abatement of the Flood's waters, we cannot, and must not, closet ourselves in our insulated arks, concerning ourselves only with the perfection of our individual lives and communities, waiting for G-d to send Moshiach. We must throw open the windows of our "arks" and reach out to a world that is shedding the turmoil of its chaotic past. Our continued efforts to establish that the world is indeed ready for redemption will hasten the divine word from on high, instructing us that the era of universal peace is upon us.

- (1) The dove dispatched by Noah returned with an "olive leaf" (*aleh zayit*) in its beak. An early mistranslation gave us the "olive branch."
- (2) G-d's instruction to Noah regarding the construction of the ark included the provision to "make a window for the ark" (Genesis 6:16).
- (3) Genesis 7:1.
- (4) Ibid., 8:15-16.
- (5) Radak on Isaiah 11:6; Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Sefer HaMaamarim (Book of Discourses) Ethalech Liozna*, p. 57; Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, *Hemshech VeKachah* 5637, sections 95-96.
- (6) Isaiah 11:6-9.
- (7) *Teivah*, the Hebrew word for "ark" used in the Torah's account of Noah's Flood, also means "word." See the essay, "Life in a Box," pp. 82-86 above.

1. *A world drowning in violence awaited redemption ...*

- a. The second half of the 20th century was much less violent. The available data suggests that the second half of the 20th century was considerably less violent than the first half by a number of measures.²

² <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/world-become-peaceful-since-wwi/#:~:text=There%20have%20been%20significantly%20fewer,toward%20a%20more%20peaceful%20world.>

There have been significantly fewer deaths in the last quarter of the previous 100 years, a dramatically higher number of alliances, a lower armed forces rate and a higher percentage of democratic governments.

These are all very positive strides toward a more peaceful world. **However, increased levels of violence over the last decade may mean a reversal of this trend.**

Additionally, modern violence tends to diverge in a few key ways from the violence the world saw 100 years ago, suggesting that to some degree violence is simply changing shape.

This can be seen in the types of conflict occurring and the regions witnessing those conflicts, in the ways civilians are affected by those conflicts, and in the resources states are using to combat societal violence.

These differences mean that while the overall level of violence in the world has decreased in the 100 years, it is affecting some levels of society today more than ever.

- b. Globally, the absolute number of war deaths has been declining since 1946. And yet, **conflict and violence are currently on the rise**, with many conflicts today waged between non-state actors such as political militias, criminal, and international terrorist groups. Unresolved regional tensions, a breakdown in the rule of law, absent or co-opted state institutions, illicit economic gain, and the scarcity of resources exacerbated by climate change, have become dominant drivers of conflict.³

In 2016, more countries experienced violent conflict than at any point in almost 30 years. At the same time, conflicts are becoming more fragmented. For example, the number of armed groups involved in the Syrian civil war has mushroomed from eight to several thousand since the outbreak of the conflict. Furthermore, the regionalisation of conflict, which interlinks political, socio-economic and military issues across borders, has seen many conflicts become longer, more protracted, and less responsive to traditional forms of resolution.

c. Matthew 24:6-8

⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains.

³ <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence#:~:text=ENTRENCHED%20CONFLICT,become%20dominant%20drivers%20of%20conflict.>

2. Noah had originally entered the ark by the explicit command of G-d, and as long as (Noah) did not receive further instructions to the contrary, the divine injunction, "Come into the ark," remained in force.

a. Exodus 20:8-11

⁸"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

1) Mark 1:21

²¹(Yeshua and his disciples) went to Capernaum, and **when the Sabbath came, Yeshua went into the synagogue** and began to teach.

2) Acts 13:13-15

¹⁴**On the Sabbath (Paul and his companions) entered the synagogue and sat down.** ¹⁵After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

3) (Yeshua) did not abolish the Sabbath **but fulfilled its true meaning ... (he) shifted the focus from strict rule-keeping to the heart of worship and rest in God.**⁴

Early ~~Christians~~ (Believers) began to worship on Sunday to commemorate the resurrection of (Yeshua), **BUT THERE IS NO EXPLICIT BIBLICAL COMMAND TO CHANGE THE SABBATH FROM SATURDAY TO SUNDAY.**

Before the second century, early ~~Christians~~ (Believers), who were mostly Jewish, **observed the Sabbath on Saturday.** However, they began to move away from the Sabbath, **which was a day of restrictions, and instead worship on Sunday, which was associated with the freedom of (Yeshua's) resurrection.**

The resurrection of (Yeshua) on the first day of the week—Sunday—marked a pivotal moment for early ~~Christians~~ (Believers). It signified victory over sin and death and provided a new beginning. Because of this, the early church began gathering on Sundays to celebrate (Yeshua's) resurrection. Acts 20:7 mentions, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to

break bread, Paul talked with them." **This passage indicates that Sunday had become a regular day for Christian worship and fellowship.**

Constantine, a Christian convert, **made Sunday a day of rest and worship in 321** ... Sunday became known as the Lord's Day, and Christians now observe it as a day of rest and worship. The Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Methodist, and Baptist churches **have enshrined Sunday as the Christian Sabbath in their confessions of faith.**

a) Acts 20:7-8

⁷On **the first day of the week** (the disciples) came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave **the next day**, kept on talking until midnight. ⁸**There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting.**

—This was NOT a "Lord's Day" celebration, i.e., on a Sunday morning—this was something typically done in the Jewish community to commemorate *Havdalah*. Jews had their last meal of the Sabbath late in the afternoon and it became the "first day of the week" when three stars appeared in the night sky. When the Sabbath was over, they concluded their meal with the blessings said to differentiate the Sabbath from the beginning of a new week.

—Paul probably started speaking between 8-9 PM "talking until midnight"—not between 9-10 AM on a Sunday morning.

3. *As with Noah, we must await the word. It is not for us to decide that the era of Moshiach has begun. It is by G-d's command that we entered the "ark," and it is G-d who will send Moshiach to herald the new dawn.*

a. Matthew 24:36-39

³⁶But **about that day or hour (of Messiah's coming) no one knows**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

b. 1Thessalonians 5:1-4

¹Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ²for **you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.** ³While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴But you, brothers and

4 <https://www.wisdomonline.org/blog/sunday-vs-saturday-worship-understanding-the-shift-from-sabbath-to-sunday/#:~:text=Acts%2020%3A7%20mentions%2C%20%22,for%20Christian%20worship%20and%20fellowship>

sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

c. Revelation 3:1-3

¹"To the angel of the *kahal* in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ²Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ³Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, **I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.**

4. *Our sages teach that Noah's ark was a prototype of the divinely perfect future world of Moshiach.⁽⁵⁾ Every species of animal, including many which ordinarily prey on one another, coexisted in harmony within the ark's walls, reminiscent of the era when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ... the lion shall eat straw like the ox ... they shall not hurt nor destroy ... for the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d ..."*⁽⁶⁾ *G-d's command to Noah to "Go out from the ark" in order to "be fruitful and multiply upon the earth represents the divine empowerment to begin the task of realizing this ideal on a universal scale.*

a. 1Peter 3:17-22

¹⁷For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸For Messiah also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water **symbolizes** baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

- 1) 19-22 Instead of trying to weigh critically the many interpretations of this difficult passage, I present one approach. The imprisoned spirits are "the angels who sinned" (2 Ke 2:4) and "abandoned their proper sphere" (Yd 6). That is, they are the *b'nei-ha'elohim* ("sons of God" or "sons of the angels"), also called *nefilim* ("fallen ones"), who fell to earth from their proper sphere,

heaven, and "came in to the daughters of men" in the days of Noah (Gen 6:2-4).⁵

When Yeshua went and made a proclamation to them, he was doing what the rabbinic *midrashim* say Enoch did after he "walked with ha-elohim," which means that he walked either with "God" or with "the angels" (Gen 5:24).

Interpreters who believe the imprisoned spirits were the souls of human beings who died before Yeshua came (see 4:6&N) usually regard this proclamation as a salvation message, the implication being that dead people (or some of them) have (or once had) the possibility of being saved. But if the proclamation was to angels, it was not a salvation message, for these angels God has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for the Judgment of the Great Day" (Yd 6). Rather, the proclamation must have been Yeshua's announcement that, "Stripping the [evil angelic] rulers and authorities [that is, the ones still at large] of their power, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by means of the stake" (Co 2:15&N).

In the days of Noah, the **water** of the Flood which drowned most of humanity was the **means** (inasmuch as the **ark** floated on it) by which **a few people to be specific, eight** (Noah, his three sons, and the wives)—**were delivered. This water also pre-figures what delivers us now, the water of immersion** (or "baptism," Hebrew *t'vilah*; see Mt 3:1N). The water of the Red Sea was similarly understood by Sha'ul to prefigure immersion (1C 10:1-13&N). Kefa points out that the essence of immersion is **not** the physical **removal of dirt from the body**, but the spiritual transaction which accompanies the physical event, **one's pledge to keep a good conscience (v. 16) toward God**. Believers have the power to keep such a pledge only **through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah**, for this is what made it possible for him to send the Holy Spirit to them (Yn 14:16, 16:7; Ac 1:8), after going **into heaven** to intercede for them (MJ 7:25) **at the right hand of God** (see Mt 22:42N, Ac 7:55-56&N).

Thus Kefa compares the believers with Noah and his family, both being righteous minorities persecuted by wicked neighbors, and both being delivered from the forces of darkness through trusting God and obeying him.

5 David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary, (Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.), pp. 754-755.