

Lessons from the life and times of Noah

Genesis 6:1-10:32

Introduction to the series

This series will be unique in that it will follow a specific structure that will remain the same for all 8 weeks of the series. Each sermon will be broken into these three parts: 1) identification of a specific attribute of Noah listed in scripture; 2) a point of speculation about the life and times of Noah; 3) a point of application for us. This format will not vary during this series.

1. Identification of attributes. Noah was one of the most prolific God-followers in all the Bible. In nearly every instance, the character (attribute) he exhibits is not only unique for its time, but superlative to virtually everyone else in scripture! We will use his formidable example to help us aspire to a better walk with God.
2. Point of speculation. There is much about the pre-flood world that we will never understand, and not even the best scientists can prove. However, there are evidences that support the Biblical narrative about the flood, and we will look at some of the more profound of those. In other cases, we will simply speculate, along with the rest of humanity, about what might have been “The Life and Times of Noah”. (I expect to have great fun with this!)
3. Point of application. Once we understand the depths to which each of the attributes of Noah reached into his inner being, we will see how we might aspire to the same levels of greatness he exhibited.

Righteousness

(Genesis 6:5-9)

The Bible says that Noah “walked with God”. Up to the days of Noah, only one other man was credited with this distinction and that was Enoch. (Gen. 5:22-24; Hebrews 11:5) Both of these men lived lives so closely in line with God’s intentions for mankind that the Bible declares they pleased God, or found favor with God. In the case of Noah he did this in the face of a wicked, vile world; one whose thoughts were only evil all the time. This lifestyle of righteousness sets him apart in all of history...an amazing commitment to being the person God intended him to be.

It is interesting to note in the Genealogy of Genesis chapter 5 that the lives of Adam and Noah are overlapped by the lifespan of one man, Methuselah! The implication is that it is possible that Methuselah could have actually spoken with Adam about his sin in the Garden of Eden and related those thoughts first hand to his grandson Noah! He would

have had hundreds of years during which he could have spoken to each of them. (note: we don't know that Methuselah was drowned in the flood, but we do know his life ended in the year of the flood, and he was not included with those who survived the flood on the ark)

We can only speculate about just how great was the measure of wickedness in the world at the time of the flood. It would be interesting to know just how many people might have been populating the earth at that time. We know the evil and violence in the world filled God's heart with pain, and he was sad that he had ever made man in the first place. This must have meant it had declined to a point unrecognizable from the utopia of the Garden of Eden.

So, at a point in history when there were no laws given by God to govern man's behavior; a time when mankind was free to choose any lifestyle that could be imagined; Noah chose righteousness. Oh, that we would, with our knowledge of the choices of Jesus, in a time in history less vile than that of Noah, choose to please God with our own lifestyle choices...to recognize that we are no longer slaves to sin, but to righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18)

Faith

(Hebrews 11:7 and 13-16)

Hebrews 11:1 identifies faith as being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. The chapter goes on to focus on the faith of Noah, who in holy fear built the ark. To consider the measure of faith it would take to accept from God the news that all of humanity, as well as every living creature on earth was to be wiped out by a global flood would take a level of faith unimaginable. To then believe God to the extent that he would spend 120 years in preparation for that flood, a large portion of it building an ark in which to survive it, again is beyond comprehension.

But as incomprehensible as this may seem, Hebrews points out an even greater measure of faith exhibited by Noah. (Hebrews 11:13-16) The Hebrew writer indicates in these verses that Noah was one among the Old Testament faithful who was looking forward to much more than re-establishing himself in a post-flood world. He was at the time of the flood already looking forward to a heavenly home. His faith in God went so deep as to see past the circumstances of his time and place in history. He was one who, "died not having received what was promised". He survived the flood and afterward died knowing that he had only been a stranger, an alien on the earth; that his true home was still ahead of him. Amazing!

We may be able to add to the strength of Noah's already immeasurable level of faith, by speculating about the pre-flood ecosystem. It is possible that Noah had never seen rain prior to the 40 days and 40 nights of it he experienced while on the ark. The pre-flood world may have been much more terrarium-like than anyone has ever imagine. (well,

there may be a few who have imagined it; but they would represent a very small minority of scientific thinkers)

We should pause and be thankful for the time in history in which we live. Jesus has already lived, died and resurrected! The Holy Spirit lives in each of us! The written Word of God is available to all of us! Our faith, as genuine and real as it is, lies in many things that we need not imagine; hope for, yes, but we live in a post-flood; post-Old Testament Law; post-advent, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus world! The evidence for our hope in Christ is mountainous compared to the unknowns of Noah's life and times. Oh, that we would aspire to the levels of faith exhibited in Noah's responses to God!

Obedience

(Genesis 6:22 and 7:5)

In our current 21st century business climate project success is measured by three terms: quantity, quality and time! A project is deemed to be successful if all the expected work is done, at the agreed-upon level of quality, in the time frame outlined for it. This means that errors, omissions, and missed-deadlines do not occur! May I insert a moment of levity into our comprehension of Noah's awesome character? Ok... I know of NO business in existence to today, given the same workforce, tools and raw materials Noah had for the construction of the ark that could have brought the project in with NO errors, NO omissions, ON time, and NO change orders! (we get no indication from scripture that Noah never negotiated with God regarding HIS expectations for the project.)

Footnote: there is a matter of budget that should be recognized here. You might add the term, "cost" to the three I noted previously. Although significant in this era, it does not seem relevant to the life and times of Noah.

But Noah did it! He brought it in on time, as specified by the orders he was given. (Genesis 6:14-16) Cypress wood, rooms in it, coated with pitch inside and out, 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, 45 feet high, a roof for it, finished to within 18 inches of the top, a door in the side, with lower, middle and upper decks!

The Bible says (Genesis 7:5) that Noah did all, or everything God asked him to do; (Genesis 6:22) just as specified by God, Himself; and (Genesis 7:11-12) it was ready by the 600th year of Noah's life, by the 17th day of the 2nd month that year! Right on time!

In short, Noah did exactly what he was told to do: he obeyed!

We can be confident that no such ark existed before God commanded Noah to build his. We can speculate, that other forms of watercraft may have existed, but that nothing on this scale existed before Noah built his at God's instruction. It is interesting to note that wave pools of the 21st century can still prove that a barge-like vessel with

proportions 30 units long to 3 units high to 5 units wide is the most stable in the worst of oceanic conditions.

Can you imagine how safe we might feel, particularly during the storms of our lives, if we did ALL that God asked of us, EXACTLY the way He has asked us to do it, at the precise TIME the He asks us to do it...so that we would be prepared for the day the storm hit us? Oh, that we would aspire to the level of obedience demonstrated by Noah!

Preaching

(2 Peter 2:7)

Scholars have estimated that Noah spent approximately 55-75 years to construct the ark. These years fell within the 120 years God had declared as the final years for humanity on the earth. (Genesis 6:3) The New Testament (2 Peter 2:7) clearly indicates that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. Putting all this information together, we see that Noah's commission was not only to build an immense ark, but he was to use it as a visible warning to the world, an object lesson to tell the world about its need for righteous living. As we will see in the lesson following this one, God's heart is clearly touched by mankind's repentance. Therefore, all the while God's plan to destroy the earth was moving forward, His message of righteousness and repentance was preached.

Noah was not just a builder, he was a preacher! We know the content of all of his sermons...righteousness! We also know two other significant facts about them. First we know there were no converts! No responses at the altar call. No one effected by the preaching. No one changed. No one repented! (Genesis 6:5) Speaking of the thoughts of mankind; "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil, continually". If we combine some New Testament passages with what we know about the results of Noah's preaching, we can also assume there were scoffers, and folks who figured everything would go on as it always had. (2 Peter 3:3-6; Jude 1:18; Luke 17:26-27)

The second factor of note about Noah's preaching was that he preached while he worked! There are no indications in either the Genesis narrative or in the rest of scripture that Noah stopped working to preach, or stopped preaching to work. The object lesson he needed for every sermon he preached was in his hands; and as the years stretched out, in the monument he built. He simply went about building exactly what he was told to build, while telling anyone who would listen about their need to change their lives; to honor God; to repent. Building and preaching were equal parts of every day Noah spent on this planet for 120 years!

We can only speculate about the nature of people who ignored Noah. You might think of them as Neanderthal, more concerned with their next meal than Noah's messages;

all indications to the contrary! The Biblical and archeological records left for us post-flood seem to indicate an age of brilliance, which evidently persisted prior to the flood. (it would be hard to figure how such brilliance appeared in history after the flood, if it were not present in humanity before the flood) Unless, as does the History Channel, you are willing to concede that we've been invaded by aliens from other planets and cultures who have radically altered our intelligence quotient along the way, then you probably will agree with me that those that built the Pyramids, Stonehenge, and a huge array of similar structures on earth are indicators that Noah preached to people with a great capacity to understand what he was saying to them!

What can we learn from Noah, the preacher? First, we should learn to keep preaching regardless of the numbers of responses, or lack thereof. We, way more than Noah, have been given good news, of great joy, which is for all people! We need to tell the world about Jesus, whether they listen or not! And second, we should learn to preach while we work. We need to preach everywhere; all the time; while we continue to live our lives, regardless of its demands. Oh, that we would!

Patience

(1 Peter 3:20)

In the summer of 1991, I began to prepare logs I wanted to use to build a log home. The logs came to me from the Greene Sullivan State Forest, here in Indiana. They were 40 feet long, and though they had been stripped of their branches, they still had all their bark on them. I spent that summer, and fall, cutting the logs into shorter, more manageable lengths, and peeling the bark off of them with a 13 inch draw knife. I hand-peeled 272 logs, 40 feet in length (actually, my daughter Amy helped me all she could) which translates into 10,880 linear feet of bark off of logs 12 to 15 inches in diameter at the breast height. It was the most difficult physical task I've ever accomplished. (or, ever will)

It was a job that was mind-altering, to the point that I learned when standing up to stretch, never to look at the pile of unfinished logs; but always to focus my attention on the slowly growing pile of logs that had been peeled. It was simply too difficult to look at what was left to do, considering the difficulty of the task. I knew I wouldn't have the patience to continue if I stared at that unfinished pile.

I did a few quick calculations, and have estimated the total linear footage for Noah, for the exterior walls, floor decks, and posts and braces at 242,942 feet; over 22 times the footage I peeled in 6 months. (If you prefer to think he used an adz and squared the logs, it only increases the already outrageously labor intensive job) WHO has the patience for a task like that? And folks, all that does is get the logs ready for use...thinking through preservative treatment, the joinery, the pegging and lashing, as

well as the maneuvering and placing of the logs some 45 feet in the air, is incomprehensible to me.

But Noah stuck with it, and finished it!

Will you allow for this short internal summary which may increase your respect for Noah's patience with this task? Ok... Noah accomplished all this while living a righteous life, while preparing himself for an adventure he had never experienced and probably couldn't imagine but he accepted by faith, while obeying every instruction he had been given to the letter, while preaching to people who wouldn't listen (or respond) to him.

Now, while Noah was exhibiting all this patience with this unimaginable task, God was also being patient, and preparing his part of this enterprise. (1 Peter 3:20) We can only speculate how God planned to completely eliminate life from planet earth, getting enough water to fall and be released from the fountains of the deep to reach 22 ½ feet above the highest mountaintops without destroying earth altogether. Maybe he prepared and used a comet to do it! If so, during the 120 years he waited on Noah, he was preparing his part of the cataclysm. It is interesting to note that as recently as a few decades ago the majority of the scientific community scoffed at the idea of an extraterrestrial object impacting earth; a concept now more widely accepted by that same community.

Oh that we could learn to patiently go about the tasks of life God has appointed for each of us, trusting that He is being patient with all of humanity as He waits to end all suffering, all pain, all doubt by ushering in the end of history.

Judgment

(Genesis 8:1)

Being judged by God can be one of the scariest thoughts one can imagine. It doesn't have to be, because of Jesus' sacrifice for us; but this lesson series looks to a point in history long before Jesus came to earth. So, what might it have been like for Noah to hear God say (Genesis 6:13) "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth". Do you have enough imagination to visualize what it might have been like to hear those words from God?

Surely there was only one way for Noah to respond to such an announcement: I can hear Noah saying, "Ok, so whatever you want from me, you've got it... I'm in; just tell me what you want me to do"! And surely each of us would respond in the same way, right? With such impending doom looming over everything on earth, would we not have told God what so obviously Noah did? Sure we would.

How then did Noah escape this judgment? I love the message in the first verse of Genesis chapter 8: “and God remembered Noah”. In the midst of destroying EVERYTHING he had made, all life, as well as the terrarium-like features of the earth, he remembered Noah. God didn’t forget that He had given His instructions for deliverance to one man and his family... and he remembered him!

Do you recall these words of Jesus from Matthew 7? ²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” In essence He was saying, “I don’t remember you”!

It’s obvious that when we each face judgment, having Him recognize us and remember us will be a very important contributor to our deliverance.

In case you may be a doubter, regarding the whole Noah narrative as simply a “flood myth”; consider all the evidences world-wide which are gaining more scientific respect every year that passes: polystrates in the geologic record; quick frozen Mammoths in a massive herd in northern Siberia; what was Lake Utah and how it created the Grand Canyon; marine fossils found world-wide on the tops of the highest mountains on earth...to name a few.

Oh that we would regard judgment as reality, just as Noah did, and respond as he did...doing everything He could to be remembered by God when the day came for judgment to be unleashed!

Promise

(Genesis 9:12-16)

I remember a story my mom told me that happened when she was just 15 years old. She and her friends had very little spending money, but would save their pennies to go to the Friday night “10 cent show”. On one of those occasions, she remembered seeing the premiere of the movie, “The Wizard of Oz”. And she told me a fun fact that I would never have otherwise realized. If you recall, the opening scenes of the movie are in black and white. That was done intentionally by the producers, because at that time, the movie industry only produced movies filmed in black and white... no color. And then, as you recall, when Dorothy opened the door of her house after the tornado had lifted it and carried it away to the Land of Oz, everything about the Land of Oz was in vivid color! She told me that the response in the theater was audible as she and her friends gasped while they gazed at the Land of Oz on that theater screen in full color for the very first time!

So, can you imagine Noah's response to seeing the colors of the rainbow for the very first time? Can you visualize him breaking the seal on the door of the ark and walking out into a completely different world, a completely different smell in the air, a landscape carved into canyons, exposing towering mountains, and seeing for the first time ever, a rainbow! He must have known, "we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto"!

And not only was he walking out into a different kind of world, reshaped by the powerful waters of the flood, but also into a promise from God, because the sign of the rainbow was intended by God to be a reminder of His promise to mankind, never to flood the world again. His bow in the clouds was to be a sign first to Himself, but then to all of us that He would never again destroy life on such a scale, in such a manner, ever again. (even if a time came that we returned to the kind of vile, wicked, violent choice-making that had broken God's heart and caused Him to flood the world the first time)

We can only speculate how many were the differences in the world, post-flood. They must have been innumerable. To list a few the Bible says only after the flood, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." What if the world before the flood wasn't hot and cold, or had summers and winters? What if the world before the flood didn't wobble on its axis, but rotated serenely and perfectly creating all equal length days and nights... and thereby no summers and winters, only constantly temperate climatic conditions?

Noah must have realized that The One in whom he had placed his trust, his whole life and future, who could flood a world and change it so radically, almost unrecognizably, was The One who could be trusted to keep His promises post-flood too; especially when He sealed them with the sign of the rainbow!

Oh how wonderful it would be if we all would trust Jesus' words about His covenant with us, and the radical changes He was bringing into the world when He said, "this is the New Covenant, in my blood, shed for many for the remission of sins"! What a life-giving promise, sealed by the shedding of His own blood!

Foreshadowing

(Matthew 24:37-39)

There is another judgment coming, one last radical change to the universe as we know it! And, about this final day of history we know very little, except for one phrase that Jesus used to describe it: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, ³⁷ but only the Father. ³⁷ As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and 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."

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man! Now that we have come to understand a little more about these “days of Noah”, do you have a better image of where this world is headed? Can you imagine days when people are so into themselves, that they go about the business of their lives ignoring righteous living; ignoring people of faith around them; ignoring people who are trying to obey God with their choices; ignoring the sermons they hear; ignoring the whole concept of future judgment; ignoring the promises of God? That’s exactly what we have learned about the people who lived in the “Life and Times of Noah”.

I’m not one who looks to current events, or economic trends, or world climatic conditions, or military advances or outcomes for my view of the kind of days that will lead up to the return of Christ to end history and this world as we know it. I think one verse of the New Testament sums up my viewpoint very succinctly: (2 Peter 3:9) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. This is not a verse jerked out of its context for my use. When you read 2 Peter 3:3-10 you come to realize that this verse is tucked into a whole passage about that final day when God will end history and this world as it now exists.

It seems to me that God is simply waiting for days that resemble the Life and Times of Noah; where no one is repenting; no one is heeding His call; no one is turning to come back home from their prodigal lives. He is patiently waiting until there is no more reason to wait to end history; to bring about the ultimate destruction of His creation...not just rearranging things a little, but wiping EVERYTHING out and creating something altogether new!

We can only speculate about how He will do this...but, the simple science found in every atom and molecule in the universe may give us a hint. (as well as a good understanding of the verses of 2 Peter 3:3-10)

Oh that we would recognize the conditions of Noah’s day. Oh that we would aspire to the choices of his life. Oh that we would see the day coming and like the 5 wise virgins, who kept their lamps all trimmed and burning and even brought extra oil and therefore kept themselves ready for the day when the Groom returns for His bride!