

Noah

There is a figure in human history that the Qur'an calls a prophet and the Bible calls a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), but he could also be described as a carpenter, sailor, manager of a floating zoo or as a wine grower. You may have already guessed that this person was Noah, called Nûh by Muslims and mentioned over a hundred times in the Qur'an. Actually, versions of his story have been preserved in the traditions of at least 270 different peoples on all continents of the world. The biblical account is contained in chapters 6-9 of the book of Genesis. Let's review his story to draw lessons from it which apply to us today.

HIS STORY

"When the Lord saw that man's wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every scheme his mind thought of was nothing but evil all the time, the Lord regretted that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. Then the Lord said, 'I will wipe off from the face of the earth mankind, whom I created, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I made them.' Noah, however, found favor in the sight of the Lord. These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries; Noah walked with God. And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with wickedness. God saw how corrupt the earth was, for every creature had corrupted its way on the earth. Then God said to Noah, 'I have decided to put an end to every creature, for the earth is filled with wickedness because of them; therefore I am going to destroy them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it with pitch inside and outside. This is how you are to make it: The ark will be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. You are to make a roof, finishing the sides of the ark to within 18 inches of the roof. You are to put a door in the side of the ark. Make it with lower, middle, and upper decks.

'Understand that I am bringing a flood—floodwaters on the earth to destroy every

creature under heaven with the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will die. But I will establish My covenant with you, and you will enter the ark with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. You are also to bring into the ark two of all the living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of everything—from the birds according to their kinds, from the livestock according to their kinds, and from the animals that crawl on the ground according to their kinds—will come to you so that you can keep them alive. Take with you every kind of food that is eaten; gather it as food for you and for them.' And Noah did this. He did everything that God had commanded him." (Genesis 6:5-22)

During the years that Noah spent constructing the ark, God showed patience toward people (1 Peter 3:20), and Noah preached and tried to warn them and lead them to repentance (2 Peter 2:5). But finally the day came when God said to Noah:

"Enter the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before Me in this generation. You are to take with you seven pairs, a male and its female, of all the clean animals, and two of the animals that are not clean... (Genesis 7:1,2). Seven days from now I will make it rain on the earth...' (Genesis 7:4) And Noah did everything that the Lord commanded him (Genesis 7:5). The seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the sources of the watery depths burst open, the floodgates of the sky were opened, and the rain fell on the earth 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:11,12). The flood continued for 40 days on the earth; the waters increased and lifted up the ark so that it rose above the earth. The waters surged and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. Then the waters surged even higher on the earth, and all the high mountains under the whole sky were covered. The mountains were covered as the waters surged above them more than 20 feet. Every creature perished—those that crawl on the earth, birds, livestock, wildlife, and those that swarm on the earth, as well as all mankind (Genesis 7:17-21). Everything with the breath of the spirit of life in its nostrils—everything on dry land died... Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark (Genesis 7:22,23b). The

ark came to rest in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat.

The waters continued to recede until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were visible. After 40 days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made, and he sent out a raven. It went back and forth until the waters had dried up from the earth (Genesis 8:4-7). So Noah waited seven more days and sent out the dove from the ark again. When the dove came to him at evening, there was a plucked olive leaf in her beak. So Noah knew that the water on the earth's surface had gone down." (Genesis 8:10,11).

After a total of a year and ten days in the ark, Noah and his family went out along with all the animals. Noah built an altar that he consecrated to the Lord. From the large animals and the birds, he took an animal of every kind that was considered pure and offered them to the Lord on the altar as a sacrifice completely consumed by the fire. The Lord smelled the pleasant aroma of the sacrifice and said, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, even though man's inclination is evil from his youth. And I will never again strike down every living thing as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease" (Genesis 8:20-22). God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). "I confirm My covenant with you that never again will every creature be wiped out by the waters of a flood; there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth" (Genesis 9:11). And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all future generations: I have placed My bow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth" (Genesis 9:12,13).

LESSONS ON GOD

The narrative that we have just followed teaches us fundamental truths about God and his relations with people. We see, for example, God's reactions in regard to our sins. First, God was saddened, grieved in His heart when He considered the rebellion and disobedience of man, his wickedness toward his fellow man, his lack of respect and gratitude toward his Creator. God hopes for better things on our part.

He knows that we are capable of doing better. And He is disappointed by our behavior. But there is also justified anger and the readiness to punish iniquity. In the second epistle of Peter, the author reminds us of several sinners whom God punished in the past, including the generation of Noah. Then he says that if God did not save all these people, we can be sure that God knows "to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9).

It is true that we do not always see the guilty punished according to their crimes; some enjoy good things all their lives without ever expressing a regret for their wrongdoing. But the God of the universe is not indifferent to the unrighteousness of men, and He demonstrated this in a dramatic way with the flood. It is true that God promised not to destroy the world by another worldwide flood, but His word tells us that "the present heavens and earth are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7).

But just as this story reminds us of God's severity, it also shows us His kindness. Peter tells us that God "patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared" (1 Peter 3:20). Why did He wait? "The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

We also see the goodness and mercy of God in the fact that he furnished a way to escape the judgment. Through Noah, he warned people of the flood that was coming and He provided the ark, a way for them to be saved from death. Today also, God warns us of the danger awaiting the sinner. He warns us by means of the Gospel. Similarly, He offers a way of salvation, which is Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ. To quote the apostle Peter again, "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness" (1 Peter 1:3).

THE TRAITS OF NOAH THAT WE MUST IMITATE

Besides the principles that concern God and His interactions with people, we see in the story of Noah characteristics of a faith that pleases God—a faith that we must imitate. According to Hebrews 11:1, "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (NIV). Faith is accepting a testimony based on confidence in the source of that testimony. I have not seen Jesus in person, but I am certain that he lived on this earth and that he is the

savior of the world when I consider the number of witnesses in secular history and even more in the sacred writing.

Do you realize that Noah had never seen rain, much less a worldwide flood? Today we talk about changes in the earth's climate, but the climate of the planet was very different in Noah's time compared to what we know now. According to Genesis 2:5,6, "the Lord God had not made it rain on the land... but water would come out of the ground and water the entire surface of the land." So Noah had never seen rain, but since he trusted God, who had told him that He would destroy the world in a flood, Noah acted accordingly.

Hebrews 11:7 says, "By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family." Notice that faith caused him to obey. There are many people who claim to have faith in God, but a faith that is not strong enough to be shown in obedience is useless. "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

But faith always meets obstacles. Satan is always trying to weaken or suffocate it. It is generally difficult to be in the minority. We wonder if we can really be right when everyone else seems to think the opposite of what we believe. But the masses are rarely right when it comes to God. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13,14, "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it."

We can easily imagine the difficulties that Noah must have encountered—the contempt and mockery of all those who surrounded him and who surely thought that only a fool would build a huge boat far from the sea. And why had he done it? Because he believed that a great rain was going to flood the entire world—even though neither Noah nor anyone else had ever seen rain! Noah would already have not been looked upon kindly because he did not participate in the wickedness of his generation. Peter reminded Christians that pagans "are surprised that you don't plunge with them into the same flood of wild living—and they slander you" (1 Peter 4:4). And when Noah told the others that the flood would come because of their sin and wickedness, they may have added anger and threats to mere mockery. Despite all

this, Noah kept his faith in what God had said.

CONCLUSION

Yes, there are many things that we can learn from the story of Noah. But one of the most important is that we must take seriously the warnings about the Day of Judgment, and we must prepare.

Jesus, in speaking of his return to judge the world, said in Luke 17:26,27, "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man: People went on eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day Noah boarded the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." Don't let the concerns and activities of this life distract you from preparing for the last day. God will judge sin—that is absolutely certain. He is now offering His grace to those who believe. But just like the people of former times who could not be saved once Noah and his family entered the ark and God shut the door, in the same way it will be too late to obtain forgiveness when we see Jesus coming from Heaven with his holy angels to judge the world. As the apostle Peter said in Acts 2:40, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!"