

Studies of Genesis's Noah

Noah – The flawed tzaddik

Rabbi Yochanan perceived that something was wrong and it is not just that Noah did not try to save his generation, as is usually said..

Daniel Pinner

Oct 28, 2022

The Torah introduces us to the man who would save humanity from total annihilation in the Flood with the words, “These are the descendants of Noah: Noah was a righteous man, wholesome in his generations...” (Genesis 6:9).



The word בְּדֹרֹתָיו ("in his generations") seems to be superfluous: after all, in whose generations could Noah be righteous and wholesome if not in his own?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 108a) records two contradictory opinions of the inference of the word בְּדֹרֹתָיו ("in his generations"). Rabbi Yochanan interprets it as denigrating Noah: compared to his generations – the generations of idolatry and violent robbery – he was righteous; in normal generations he would not have stood out.

Reish Lakish takes the opposite view, interpreting it as praising Noah: even in his generations, with all the all-pervasive evil influences surrounding him since birth, he still remained righteous; how much more righteous would he have been had he lived in normal generations.

Now Rabbi Yochanan's view needs some explaining: since the Torah states explicitly that "Noah was a righteous man, wholesome," why does Rabbi Yochanan seek to find some hint that he was anything less? Granted, the seemingly-superfluous word בְּדֹרֹתָיו needs an explanation – but in this case, why not take Reish Lakish's approach and interpret it to Noah's credit?

Indeed, the major commentators find nothing but praise.

Says the Ibn Ezra: "'In his generations' – [he was righteous] both in the generation of the flood and in the subsequent generations, because he lived until Abraham was 58 years old".

And the Ramban comments: "In my opinion, the correct explanation according to the simple meaning is that he was the only tzaddik in those generations; there was no one who was righteous, no one who was wholesome apart from him".

So what possible hint does the Torah provide to justify Rabbi Yochanan's interpretation?

The standard explanations are that unlike Abraham, who protested G-d's judgement to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:23-33), Noah made no protest when G-d told him that He planned to destroy the whole of humanity.

And that unlike Abraham, who brought thousands of people to belief in the One true G-d, Noah did not influence even one single person in the world to repent. True, he saved himself and his immediate family from the Flood – but that was all.

Having said this, I offer another observation of Noah's deficiency:

After a year on board the ark, Noah sent forth a raven, which returned because it found nowhere to land (Genesis 8:7).

He subsequently send forth a dove, with the same result (vs. 8-9). Then, seven days later, he again sent forth the dove: "And the dove came to him at evening-time, and behold! – she had a plucked olive-leaf in her beak. Thus Noah knew that the waters had lessened from on the earth" (v. 11).

But Noah's interpretation was faulty:

"From where did the dove bring this leaf? – She brought it from the Land of Israel, because it had not been inundated in the Flood" (Midrash Lekach Tov, Vayikra Rabbah 31:10, Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 1:4 et al.); or more specifically, she brought the olive-leaf from an olive-tree on the Mount of Olives (Targum Yonatan, Genesis 8:11).

That is to say – this olive-leaf did not indicate any lessening of the flood-waters: it came from the Land of Israel (specifically from Jerusalem), which had never been affected by the Flood.

Noah should have realised this. He should have appreciated the significance of a leaf from the Land of Israel. He should have realised that

an olive-tree which had been subjected to the boiling flood-waters (vide Rosh Hashanah 12a, Sanhedrin 108b, Zevachim 113b) and been submerged for a year would not be putting forth any fresh leaves.

He should have understood that this leaf came from Israel.

But Noah failed to appreciate its true significance. And that indicated something fundamentally defective about him. If he was so not-attuned to the significance of the Land of Israel, then even though he was “a righteous man, wholesome in his generations”, Rabbi Yochanan perceived that something was wrong.

Rashi (commentary to Genesis 6:9) paraphrases the Talmud: “Noah was a righteous man, wholesome in his generations’ – compared with his generation he was righteous, but had he been in Abraham’s generation, he would not have been considered as anything”.

Why does Rashi suddenly bring in Abraham’s generation? The Talmud, after all, makes no mention whatsoever of Abraham or his generation.

– Maybe Rashi wants to call one of the fundamental differences between Abraham and Noah to our attention: G-d’s first-ever call to Abraham (with which next week’s parashah, Lech Lecha, begins) is for Abraham to leave his homeland and go to the Land of Israel.

Abraham merited inheriting the Land of Israel; Noah didn’t.

So as righteous and wholesome as Noah was “in his generations”, nevertheless because he failed to appreciate the unique qualities of the Land of Israel, “had he been in Abraham’s generation”, compared with Abraham who did appreciate the Land of Israel, “he would not have been considered as anything”.

Retrieved October 28,2022 from [Noah – The flawed tzaddik | Israel National News - Arutz Sheva](#)

Thou shalt not steal - from God

**Is stealing from one another really the reason for
The Flood?**

[Danny Ginsbourg](#)

Oct 28, 2022



Our Sages conclude, based on the words of our Parasha, that the verdict of the flood was determined only because 'the earth was full of robbery'- in other words, despite all the other grievous transgressions of the people, they would have been spared had they not all engaged in *onn*: in robbery.

Add our Sages: What was the nature of this robbery? It was not armed or violent robbery, but 'calculated' robbery, that could not be recovered through the courts: it was of such small amounts that could not be so claimed.

Further, their robbery was not, as our Sages teach, that which transgressed the Commandment: 'Thou shalt not steal', as that forbids kidnapping and stealing a 'soul': a person.

Instead, it 'only' transgressed the negative Mitzvah, in Parashat Mishpatim, against stealing property.

Why, then, did it merit such a terrible punishment, the virtual destruction of the whole generation?

To answer this, let us share two insights of our wise commentators:

The Kli Yakar, on the very first Rashi on the Torah, provides the following exposition as to why the Torah begins with the story of the Creation, and not, as we might have expected, with the first Mitzvah.

This, he explains, is that it was essential to our belief that G-d created, and continues to rule the world, and all in it.

By relating that He created the world, He forestalled the possibility of the nations claiming, that the 'conquest' by Bnei Israel of the land of Israel, proved that there 'was no Supreme Judge and no Justice', as, had there been One, He would not have permitted this 'unjust' act.

By relating that Hashem created this world, the Torah answered: As Hashem created the world and all in it, He justifiably gave the land to the nation most deserving of it- they did not 'steal' it.

He concludes: This clear declaration against robbery, is a foundation of our knowledge of the Creator, and His ways, and is therefore made clear at the very beginning- the בראשית - of the Torah.

The Chidushei Ha'rim on our Parasha, lays down that robbery 'is the אב: the father, of all transgressions'.

To understand this intriguing comment, and thereby, to hopefully answer our query, let us delve into another saying of our Sages: 'Whoever benefits

from anything in this world without pronouncing a bracha, is robbing Hashem of His bracha.'

Literally understood, this states that Hashem is 'owed' a bracha, by those who benefit from his particular benevolence.

On a deeper level, might it not mean that, by not acknowledging, by making a bracha, that that which we enjoyed, or are about to enjoy, is Hashem's, and that He, in His goodness, allowed us to utilize and benefit from it, the person is, in effect, 'denying' that the goodness comes from Hashem, and, instead, 'declares' that it is his.

This, surely, is the root of apostasy, and can rightly be described as the 'father of all sins'!

So, transposing this to the generation of the flood: as we have, they were only concerned with liability to man, and the earthly institutions.

They had no concern that their conduct might be transgressing Hashem's Will, presumably because it was of no relevance in their eyes- the peak of apostasy, and ingratitude, which, in turn, merited their singular punishment.

Retrieved October 28,2022 from [Thou shalt not steal - from God | Israel National News - Arutz Sheva](#)