

Noah
By
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Ham leaned left and whispered something to Shem, while their wives sat in the back of the main room of Noah and Naamah's humble abode. Nervous chatter and gestures filled the room as they awaited the urgent news that had called the family together on such short notice. Naamah, however, sat quietly at the back of the room with her three daughters-in-law and revealed nothing of the news, in spite of the girls continued prying. The room went still when Noah pulled back the blanket covering the entrance doorway and stepped into the house.

Japeth furrowed his brow at the gravity that weighed on Noah's demeanor. "Father, pray tell us what is it that causes us to stop all of our business and rush home. What is it that marks your eyes with seriousness? Are you ill?"

The heads turned from Japeth and focused back on Noah. He slowly looked into each person's eyes and then breathed in deeply as he stared at his beloved wife. With a nod, "Were it as simple as illness, Japeth, were it so simple." Noah paused to gather his thoughts. "The Lord came to me with ominous news. We are to build an ark, immediately."

Gasps were heard among the family as they looked to each other for understanding, and whispers hummed throughout the room. Shem asked. "An ark? There is no water for an ark, father! Why an ark?" The family did not question their father's assertion that the Lord had come to him. Their belief was strong, and throughout their lives they had witnessed sufficient evidence that Noah and the Lord had a deep relationship, one that provided grace and providence, and success in all the family's endeavors.

"There will be a great flood to end all life. The Lord intends to rid his earth of the vileness that has grown upon it. Our family has been chosen to begin anew." Noah looked down at the floor, then back at his family. "The Lord will provide us with animals in pairs to inhabit the earth after the flood recedes."

Ham interrupted his father. "Animals? What animals?"

Noah smiled. "All the world's animals and we shall gather seeds from all the world's plants. We must also gather sufficient feed for forty days."

"Impossible." Ham looked to Japeth for clarity. "It's impossible to build an ark large enough for this deed. How big must it be to do this, father?"

"Three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits tall." Noah said soberly.

“Impossible!” Said Ham again.

Shem exclaimed. “It will require more material than we have! How can this be done?”

Japeth calmly asked. “When will the floods come?” Shem and Ham nod in understanding of this most important question.

Noah replied. “When the ark is built.”

Shem’s wife spoke softly. “What will we tell the villagers of this huge ark we are building?”

“The truth.” Noah stated.

“But they will think we have lost our minds, father.” She replied.

Noah shook his head in agreement. “So it will be my daughter. Suffer we will their ignorant scorn. Suffer they will when the rains come.” Noah turned for the door. “Tomorrow we begin construction.”

During the months that followed, Noah’s family worked dusk to dawn building the ark, gathering supplies and caring for the animals as they arrived. An ebb and flow of villagers came by to watch their work, and many mocked them for their seeming foolishness. But the family ignored their criticism and worked stoically, with conviction.

After the final spike was set, heavy rains began to fall and the family began loading the animals and supplies onto the ark which took many days of arduous work. Villagers watched nervously. No longer did they offer snide remarks and laugh at Noah’s family’s folly. Some even approached Noah, asking to join the family aboard the ark if the waters continued to rise, but Noah said no.

The rain continued to pound the earth and after ten days, the soil became saturated and caused large lakes to form on the low lands, driving villagers to the high ground where the ark rested on its blocks.

Naamah stood at the railing of the top deck and listened to the calls and pleas of friends and their families, crying out to be allowed aboard. Most had brought supplies and their animals with them - their source of wealth. The muffled cries carried through the drowning rain, growing in desperation and bent Naamah’s heart. She went to plead their case to Noah. “Noah, have mercy on our friends and their families. We must save them.”

“No. That is not the Lord’s command.”

“The Lord is a forgiving lord and respects graciousness in our lives. Would he not appreciate our compassion on these poor souls?” Naamah argued. “Is it not our deeds we are to be judged on? What more honorable deed is there than to save our fellow man from disaster?”

Noah’s voice was firm. “The Lord gave his command. His purpose is to rid the world of evil. Ours is not to question his word.”

“Noah, I cannot watch our neighbors perish when we have so much and plenty of room on this big boat.”

“A boat our hands built, food our hands cultivated and harvested, and the animals we have gathered and tended to. All of this we have done while our neighbors stood by laughing at us, mocking us, calling us fools for working slavishly to protect our family. Warned them I did. The same opportunity they had, but they chose to be spectators and entertain themselves with our labors. Now we should sacrifice because of their foolishness?”

Naamah pondered Noah’s words for a moment. “Your argument is valid. Fools they are. Guidance you did give them and know they do of your oneness with the Lord. But, Noah, all the more reason for our compassion. A man does not only starve for the lack of nourishment but also for the lack of common sense. And, compassion for both we should have.”

Exasperated, Noah stormed off. “Enough of this. I have to ready the ark for the high waters.”

That evening Naamah gathered Japeth, Shem and Ham, and their wives to plead her case before more compassionate ears, hoping to find allies to help her convince Noah to save the villagers.

Japeth spoke up first after hearing her plea. “Mother, father’s wisdom has never been in doubt and now the rains have come as he said. How can we challenge his wisdom on this matter?”

“Mother’s heart is right, brother.” Ham interjected. “They are our friends. Many have children. Can we not make room for them, double up the animals and ration the food? It is a small village.”

Shem stepped to his mother’s side. “Ham is right, Japeth. We have built a giant boat and can find sufficient room for all. We must also have them bring their own supplies.”

Japeth shook his head in disagreement. “Trust in our father’s judgment, I do. Know we do not how long the rains will last. The Lord gave his command on the supplies for the

animals and for us, not the entire village.”

Japeth’s wife stared up at his face. “True it is, Japeth, but the villagers will have supplies too. They could add them to ours. Would that not help?”

All but Japeth nod agreement. He stood shaking his head. “The Lord has created a natural order to the world. This is against his natural order. His purpose was firm and this is contrary to the natural order. It is folly to go against the natural order.”

“Come.” Said Naamah. “We must plead our argument to Noah.”

Noah was inspecting the supply stalls on the lower deck when he heard his family’s footsteps marching down the stairway. He stood tall with his hands on his hips, ready for the argument he had been anticipating. His loving wife was a conspirator when passion on a matter flamed at her heart, and it only took a wounded bird to fan those flames. He noticed that the normally assertive Japeth now straggled at the back of the pack. Noah smiled. “Strong is their argument and passionate their hearts, eh, Japeth?”

“So it is, father. Arguments of the heart are difficult to debate, even when the logic is so obvious.”

Noah put up his right hand before anyone else could speak. “Then there is no more to discuss.” He said firmly. “No is my word. This boat was built for us, food stocked for us and the Lord’s animals, and so it shall be. There is no more to discuss.”

The rain continued to fill the low lands and inched up the high knoll the ark rested on. Within days, the water forced the villagers to huddle with their animals against the hull of the ark. Ham and Shem stood at the railing with their mother. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she watched her friends and their families shiver as their raised hands pleaded for mercy. “I cannot stand to see such suffrage.”

Ham looked at Shem. “Father is wise, but this we cannot stand for. I am going to drop the door and allow them in.”

“I will help you.” Shem nodded. “He will forgive us when he sees that it is the right thing to do.”

“Let’s hope.” Said Ham in a less than confident tone. “Let us hope.”

Noah came to the rail beside Naamah and when he looked down he saw that the loading door was unsealed and open. Villagers and their animals were filing up the ramp.

He ran down to the bottom deck and yelled. “No. No, this cannot be. Stop, you must get off. There is no more room, nor enough food.” But no one paid him any heed. Helplessness overwhelmed Noah. Dejected he muttered. “My sons, what have you done?” He stared hollowly at them. “You know not what you have done.” Then he turned and walked up to his cabin, shut the door and locked it.

Day after day a deluge rained down upon the land and after many days the water rose to within a man’s height of the top deck and the ark rocked off from the blocks it rested upon, rolling gently on the waves. While the rains were heavy, the waters remained calm. Noah’s one order to Ham and Shem was to be sure that the passengers maintain a balanced distribution of weight across the boat. He had stored most of the heavy supplies at the bottom of the boat to provide ballast to keep the ark upright, especially if there was a storm. He then spent most of his time tending to the animals. Noah also suggested to the boys that the villagers could earn their keep by assisting with the chores. For a few days after they set about floating, a small number did help the family, but when they realized that their fellow villagers were relaxing and enjoying a leisurely cruise, they quit helping.

Noah smiled at Ham and Shem when they complained to the elders about help with the chores and they said that there was nothing they could do, it was not their village. This was Noah’s ark.

The rains were unrelenting and at the twenty-fifth day afloat, Japeth came to Noah. “Father, I have inventoried our supplies. There is enough feed for the Lord’s animals for another fifteen days. For us, only ten days remain if we ration. I fear some villagers are stealing food for their animals and their families.”

“Tell your brothers, and instruct them to guard the supplies. I will explain this to the family at our next meal. Someone will have to alert the villagers that they are not to take our supplies. Shem said they had agreed to bring their own.”

After Japeth’s report, Shem said to Ham. “The villagers promised to use only their own supplies. That was our agreement. We must speak to the elders.”

Ham nodded once. “Let us go now.” Both walked to the upper deck without a word. Each reflected upon their father’s warnings.

“But you are the village elders. The villagers will heed your direction.” Ham argued with the three men sitting in a stall on the second deck.

“Yes, Ham, listen they might do, but heed, they may not. Assuredly, you must understand that some did not bring enough food for their families. This has been a long time. How could they have known how much to bring? Many brought all they had. Yet, it seems not enough.” The eldest of the three replied.

“Then call the heads of each family to a meeting and we will order them.” Shem growled at the elders.

“Or what?” Asked the eldest. “If they do not do as you say, then what? What will you do, Shem, throw us overboard? All of us?” He gave Shem a wry smile knowing that the villagers outnumbered Noah’s family ten to one.

Ham abruptly spun away from the elders and pulled at Shem’s arm to leave. As they walked away, laughter followed them, laughter at them. Shem looked at Ham, knowing that they were trapped by their own folly.

On the twenty-ninth day afloat, Noah realized that the female of the Lord’s chosen sheep was missing. It was not in its pen and the gate was closed. A check of the entire animals’ deck without finding the sheep left Noah to conclude his worst concerns had begun. He did not bother to ask the elders, nor mention it to his son’s. He knew where the sheep had gone.

Day by day the Lord’s animals became missing. On the thirty-ninth day, Noah stood at the bow looking at the dark skies of the night, looked upward into the pelting rain and cried quietly, knowing that his family had failed the Lord, the master of nature, his lord, of the orders he commanded.

A gust of wind rolled the boat with a shove, and Noah watched the far off clouds angrily roiling toward them. By the minute the winds increased and waves began to hammer the ark incessantly, sending Noah to his family to warn them of an approaching storm. He ordered the boys to notify the villagers to close all hatches and secure themselves in their stalls.

By midnight the winds howled and the waves battered the ark. It rolled violently against the ever increasing height of the waves. Noah’s family braced themselves to keep from being thrown about their cabins. Even with all the hatches and windows closed, water was leaking through and running down the stairways. Noah sent Japeth to the lower deck to see if any water had accumulated. Japeth returned in a breathless sprint. “Father, we must be taking on water fast! We must gather the men and begin bailing immediately.”

“Go to the villagers to get their help. All of you come with me to form a line. Shem, you and Ham go to the animal deck and gather all the buckets.” Noah barked.

Bailing in knee-deep water and hauling it to the top deck was arduous work, but the family members worked feverishly in coordinated harmony. After hours of labor, Japeth returned to Noah. “Most of the villagers have quit. They said it is a futile effort to keep up with the leakage.”

Noah handed a bucket up to Naamah and grabbed another. “We must not let it rise any farther, tell them. If we can maintain this level, we may be all right.” He shuffled his feet to maintain his balance as the ark heeled to the right.

Japeth grabbed at the door way to brace himself and looked back down at his father. Hopelessness marked his brow. “I tried, father, but most chose to drink wine and eat. Some remained, though, and are working hard.”

Noah nodded and handed Japheth a bucket. “Help me then. We shall try.”

Within an hour, the waves had grown so powerful it became impossible to continue bailing. It was becoming too dangerous to stay below, Noah ordered everyone to their top deck cabins, hoping the ark would be able to ride out the storm. On the way to his cabin, he stopped at the rail and realized that the water was now within half-a-man’s height to the top deck. He prayed that this severe storm would soon end. Then, the wind slapped the bow of the ark and Noah clung to the railing as the boat pitched right and the bow pointed down the trough between two large waves. The push of the wave the ark sat upon caused it to begin sliding down the wave’s wall. When it reached the bottom of the trough, the bow plowed deep into the ascending wall just as the wave behind it broke over the stern and drove the ark entirely underwater.

Noah was swept up by the roiling waters crashing down over the ark and thrown tumbling in its froth until he bobbed to the surface gasping for air. Flailing to stay afloat, he felt a hard thump against his back and spun around to see a hatch that had been torn away from the ship. It began floating away. Noah swam for his life to catch it and crawled onto it, then laid his head down to rest and catch his breath. Occasionally, he would call out for his family and rose to look for them, but saw, nor heard, nothing more than the storms fury.

The sun’s warmth woke Noah from an exhausted slumber. With the sunrise, the waters calmed and the rains ceased. He rolled over on his back and looked up to the clear blue skies and asked. “Why, good Lord? Why this? Why my family and your animals? Pray tell me, good Lord, why?”

Then the Lord spoke to Noah. “Your kind was created to have a will and I gave you all the freedom to choose his way. Gifted with superior intelligence, mankind was, with which he was to base his decisions. But mankind chose to follow their whims,

emotions, compulsions, desires and impulses rather than logic, thoughtful rationale and the guidance I provided.

I also assigned to mankind responsibility and consequences for their actions, of which they were to learn from. Hence, the use of their will, freedom and intelligence was their option. Responsibility for the consequences of their actions was not.

Mankind has proven unworthy of the stewardship of this earth. So, I shall leave it to the great creatures of the seas.

“You are a noble man, Noah, and soon you will join Japeth at my side.”

Noah laid his head back down on the hatch and whispered, “Peace be with you, Lord.”

“And with you, Noah.”