

THE FIRST SHIPBUILDER



WHAT would you think of a man who built a great big boat right in the middle of a field where there was no water? I guess you'd say, "My, that would be a very strange man." But there was a man who did that a long, long time ago, and he wasn't strange, either! He did it because God asked him to; and God asked him because he knew that some day there would be water in that field, and the man would need a boat to keep from being drowned. And who was that man? His name was Noah!

Of course that was a very long time ago. There weren't nearly as many people on the earth as there are now, but most of the people who were on the earth were very wicked. You see, that same old Satan, who did all he could to make Adam and Eve disobey God, kept right on trying to make people do things that weren't right. And as more and more people lived on the earth they became very wicked, so wicked that God knew the best thing to do was to cover

the whole earth with water, in order that all the wicked people would be drowned.

Of course, everybody wasn't wicked. Noah was a very good man. He loved God, and wanted to do everything he could to please God. And God loved Noah, too. He didn't want Noah to be drowned in the water that was coming upon the earth, so he told him to build a great big boat. The Bible calls it an ark.

Noah had never seen a boat of any kind, because he didn't live near the ocean. Besides, there weren't any boats on the ocean—not that long ago. Boats are used to carry things to other people, and to bring things back from people who live in different parts of the world. But when Noah lived on the earth there were no people in other parts of the world, so there was no need for boats.

Well, I guess you wonder how Noah could build a boat if he had never seen a boat! But he could, because God told him how to do it. God told him how long the boat should be, and how high and how wide it should be, and how many decks it should have. How long do you suppose that boat was? Why, it was over five hundred feet long! That is a big boat. It is larger than many of the boats which travel all the way across the ocean today.

Noah's boat had to be large, because God wanted him to put some of all the different kinds of animals into it—and birds too, mind you! God knew that the water would be over all the earth, and he wanted the animals and birds to live on the earth after the water dried up. That is the reason he told Noah to make the ark so big.

Of course there wasn't room for very many of each kind of the various animals and birds. There was just room enough for two of most of them, like lions and tigers and squirrels. There were some animals, though, that were more important, such as cows and sheep, so God told Noah to take seven each of these more important animals.

The next time you go to the circus, or to the zoo, just count up all the animals you see, and then you will know why Noah's ark had to be so big.

And now I suppose you will wonder if Noah was the only man God wanted to go into the ark. Well, not exactly; but still there weren't very many. Noah had three sons who also loved God, and God wanted to save these three sons, too. Their names were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. That last name is a hard one to pronounce, but probably his father and mother liked it all right.

And Noah had a very good wife, too, and she loved God, and he didn't want her to be drowned, either.

Besides, Noah's three sons all had good wives, so God told Noah to take the whole family into the ark. Altogether there were eight people—Noah and his wife, and his three sons and their wives.

Now you will want to know something of how Noah built the ark, and how long it took him to do it. Well, it was a very long job. You see, Noah didn't have all the good tools to work with that people have today when they build boats. They had some tools, though.

The Bible tells us that the people at that time had musical instruments, and they would need tools to make those, wouldn't they? So Noah must have had all the tools he really needed to build the ark.

Still, he couldn't build that boat as fast as we build boats today. For one thing, he didn't have very many people to help him. Maybe you think Noah could build that boat in two or three weeks' time, but he couldn't. The Bible doesn't tell us how long it took Noah to build the ark, but it must have taken him a very long time.

I guess you think that Noah must have been a pretty old man when the water came. Well, he was. You know, people at that time lived to be very, very old. Why, can you imagine that Noah was five hundred years old before he even started to build the ark? He was 600 years old when the flood came. And after the flood he lived over 300 years more! My, wasn't he an old man! But he wasn't the oldest man who ever lived.

The oldest man who ever lived was Methuselah. And how old do you suppose Methuselah was when he died? Why, he was nine hundred and sixty-nine years old! That's about ten times older than

people live to be now. Do you think you would like to live more than nine hundred years?

Well, by and by people will again be able to live that long, and much longer, too! The Bible tells us that the time is coming when people will keep right on living, and won't die at all. Won't that be wonderful? And there won't be any more sickness or trouble, either! To get back to Noah's ark, it did take him a long, long time to build it. But, you see, God wanted him to build that ark just right so it would not sink when the water came. Besides, it wouldn't have been comfortable for Noah and his family if that boat had leaked, would it? So God told him just how to make it. The last thing Noah was to put on the ark to keep the water out is what the Bible calls "pitch." I guess that was something like tar, and Noah spread it all over the ark.

Finally the ark was built, and Noah arranged to have all the animals go into it. Then he took his wife and his three sons and their wives, and they went into the ark. Noah had built a big door in the side of the ark, and after they were all in God closed the door, and they remained there for seven whole days. My, those must have been long days!

Finally it started to rain. And it rained, and rained, and rained, and rained.

And how long do you suppose it did rain? When it rains now for two or three days we get pretty tired of it, don't we? We wish it would stop and that the sun would shine again, so we could go out to play and do things. But it rained for more than just two or three days after Noah and the animals and birds went into the ark. It rained hard for forty whole long days! Think of that! That's almost six whole weeks. And it just rained, and rained, and rained, and rained!

With all that rain, what a lot of water there must have been!

Noah knew now just why God wanted him to build that ark, because right where he built the ark on that dry land it was now all covered with water. There was so much water that the ark floated. Of course that is what it was made for! It was lucky for Noah and his family that the ark did float, otherwise they would all have been

drowned. But Noah built that boat just the way God told him to build it, so it was really a good boat. And even though the water covered all the land, Noah and his family were in a safe place. There were some things about the boat which Noah built that were quite different from most big boats we see today. It didn't have any big, tall smokestacks; it didn't have sails or engines to make it go, either, because God didn't want the boat to go anywhere. He merely wanted it to float. So after it rained and rained for forty days, and the water covered over the ground everywhere, that ark just floated around. And there was nothing for Noah and his family to do but to wait for the water to dry up, and so they waited and waited.

After they had waited for two hundred and twenty-four days they looked out of the window which Noah had built in the top of the ark, and what do you suppose they saw? Why, they saw the tops of the mountains coming up out of the water, and then they knew that the water was drying up! Of course Noah didn't know just how much water had dried up. They didn't have airplanes, so they couldn't fly over the water to see if they could find some dry land.

So after waiting forty days more, he took one of the ravens—a raven, you know, is a big black bird like a crow—and pushed it out through the window. The raven flew away, and it continued to fly back and forth, so Noah was not too sure how much dry land there really was. Then he sent forth a dove which came back. Seven days later he sent forth the dove again. It flew around and finally came back to the ark with a pretty leaf in its mouth! And then Noah knew that there was dry land somewhere with trees on it.

Noah was a very smart man, wasn't he?

He waited seven days more while the water kept drying up, and then he sent the dove out again. This time it didn't come back at all. And then Noah really knew that there was plenty of dry land. It wasn't long after that when the waters were dried up so much that the ark rested right on the ground again. It was on a mountain which the Bible calls Ararat.

When Noah was very sure that the ground was dry enough, he opened up the big door in the side of the ark and they all came

out—his wife, and their three sons, and their wives, and all the animals and birds. My, it must have seemed good to get out of that big boat after all that time! Noah was very happy that God had been so good to his family, so he built an altar of stones, just as Abel did, and he made an offering to God. God was very much pleased with this. He told Noah that never, never again would he let it rain on the earth so much.

God wanted Noah really to believe this, so what do you suppose God did? He placed a beautiful rainbow in the sky, and he told Noah that this rainbow was a sign that never again would he let it rain and rain until all the land was covered with water. Now, isn't that wonderful?

We often see a rainbow even now, don't we? Yes, and whenever we see one, no matter how hard it might have been raining, it tells us not to be worried, that it will stop raining before all the land is covered over with water.

God has a very good reason why he doesn't want all the land covered over with water again. You see God made this earth to be man's home. And as I told you before, some day the whole earth will be just like the Garden of Eden. And then Noah and his family, and all the families who have ever lived on the earth, will come back from their graves, and they will live here in this beautiful big garden.

QUESTIONS

- Who was the first man to build a ship, and why did he build it on dry land?
- Why was it necessary for the first ship that was built to be large enough to hold so many animals?
- What caused this ship to float in water after it had been built on dry land?
- Why were there no engines in the ship that Noah built?