

The Days of Noah

“As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came.”
—Luke 17:26,27

THESE WORDS OF EXPLANATION were given by Jesus to his disciples about conditions just prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God. They were initially prompted by the Pharisees who wanted to know “when the kingdom of God should come.” (Luke 17:20,21) Jesus had answered the Pharisees by explaining that the kingdom would not come with

obvious signs, especially those conjured up in their own minds, and that furthermore, they were unaware that the Royal Majesty of that kingdom, Jesus himself, was in their own midst at that very moment. Thus likewise it would be in the days following the return of the Son of man when he would be present.

This same point is made by Jesus in Matthew chapter 24. The words recorded in this chapter were in response to the private inquiry by the disciples of Jesus recorded in verse 3 as to the destruction of the Temple, the signs of his coming [Greek: *parousia*

or “presence”] and of the end of the world [Greek: *aion* or “age”]. Jesus responded by giving his disciples numerous signposts related to these future events. One of these dealt with the days of Noah. Jesus prefaced his reference to Noah’s day with the reminder of their present unawareness of any specific date or moment in time that these things would occur, saying, “Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only. And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the presence of the Son of man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the presence of the Son of man.”—Matt. 24:36-39, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*

God’s people have been watching and waiting for his kingdom to be set up in power and glory. However, before this event can become a reality, “the end of the age,” the present Gospel Age, and the end of this “present evil world,” must come. (Gal. 1:4) It is interesting to note the emphasis our Lord placed on the uncertainty of the date when he told his disciples about the signs concerning his presence and the end of the age. This would imply that we should lean more on a proper and careful interpretation of the signs.

NOAH’S DAY

It would be well, also, to learn more about Noah’s day. We receive considerable assistance from the Apostle Peter, who says much about Noah, one of

five Old Testament characters mentioned by him in his two epistles. Peter's writings reflect the struggle in his life to overcome impulsiveness, anxiety, ambition, and other weaknesses of the flesh such as afflict all of us. Hence he contrasts the things temporal with the things eternal, and supplies many valuable lessons and admonitions for the Christian, using the events of Noah's day as an illustration.

One of the important subjects with which Peter associates Noah's experiences is that of baptism. This is found in I Peter 3:18-22. In that account Peter tells of the marvelous example we have in Jesus, who was an example not only for us but also for the angelic creation, including those who were disobedient in Noah's time and were now "spirits in prison." He says of these, "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."—vss. 20,21

Here we have an allegory based on Noah and his family being carried to safety through the great Deluge. This illustration can be expanded to emphasize that the ark saved eight humans from a watery grave while others were perishing. The ark, although submerged in water—both floating in water and drenched with rain from overhead—was the means of their salvation. This "like figure," Peter says, is intended to portray that the church of Christ is saved from death through baptism. This does

not mean that the act of baptism in water is a means of salvation, but rather that symbolic baptism into Christ and the death of the human will and acceptance of God's will, together with being raised into Christ, is the means of salvation.—Rom. 6:3-11

The picture given by Peter may also be intended to illustrate that the whole world is a perishing world. The members of the church were of that world until they were rescued out of it through Christ. The ark represents Christ, and as Noah and his family were saved from death by obedience to God in entering the ark, so also the church is saved from death by obedience to God in consecration and baptism into Christ.

JESUS' WORDS

As we again carefully examine the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:36-39, one of the principal lessons he set forth was that of general unawareness or "life-as-usual" conditions which would prevail at the time of his return and subsequent invisible presence. We associate evil conditions with the days of Noah, too, but Jesus does not emphasize that point in this text. We know of the evil that prevailed in Noah's day from other Scriptures, in particular the Genesis account, chapters 6 and 7.

The world was almost totally unaware of Christ's presence at the time of his First Advent, even though he walked among mankind and did mighty works. John the Baptist plainly told the Pharisees, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not." (John 1:26) The same is true today in the time of Christ's second presence. In spite of numerous signs, there is almost total unawareness of his presence,

and again it is a true saying, “There standeth one among you, whom ye know not.”

Apparently Jesus’ point in mentioning Noah’s day was not only that this lack of awareness would prevail, but that it would last until a complete change would take place in the world’s social order. The life-as-usual conditions would tend to camouflage the preparations for setting up of the kingdom and, in particular, Christ’s presence.

SCOFFERS

The Apostle Peter further prophesied: “There shall come in the latter end of the days scoffers, according to their own desires going on, and saying, Where is the promise of his presence? for since the fathers did fall asleep, all things so remain from the beginning of the creation.” (II Pet. 3:3,4, *Young’s Literal Translation*) Peter then challenges the memory of these scoffers and continues, “This they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth held together out of the water and amidst water, by the word of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”—vss. 5-7, *RVIC*

The scoffers of these last days will have seemingly forgotten the days of Noah and the great change in Earth’s society and in the spiritual rulership, represented by the heavens, which took place as a result of the Flood. For if they would only remember, or believe, what happened in Noah’s day, they would understand that today’s social order and spiritual

rulership is reserved for destruction in the great time of trouble, and will be replaced by a new social order, a “new earth,” and a new spiritual rulership, “new heavens,” “wherein dwelleth righteousness.”
—vs. 13

In these closing days of the Gospel Age and present evil world, the Lord’s people do not want to be listed with the scoffers of Peter’s prophecy. Rather, we want to be inspired by the promise of a glorious kingdom of righteousness, so that we strive toward “holy living and godliness.” (vss. 13,11, *RVIC*) Thus also, all of us should be inspired by the examples of righteousness given in God’s holy Word.

NOAH’S EXAMPLE

One of these is the example of Noah. When Jesus likens our day to the days of Noah, we should note Noah’s example when living in those days. God has used his Word with amazing efficiency to give us many lessons in a single incident. In addition to the principal lesson of the people’s unawareness in the illustration of Noah’s days, we also have the lesson of the development and separation of the Christ class in this Gospel Age. It is fitting that a righteous man, such as Noah, should represent the Christ class. Ezekiel records this testimony of him in speaking of a land that sins against God, “Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it [a sinful land], they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.”
—Ezek. 14:14

When Noah was born, his father, Lamech, spoke a prophecy concerning him, “This one doth comfort us concerning our work, and concerning the labour

of our hands, because of the ground which Jehovah hath cursed.” (Gen. 5:29, *YLT*) Noah never fulfilled this prophecy. The earth has remained cursed to this day. The Christ class, however, whom he represented, will fulfill the prophecy by removing the “curse” not only from the earth, but from all mankind as well. (Rev. 22:3) Then all men and the earth will truly be at rest. The name Noah means “rest.”

It is recorded in the 6th chapter of Genesis how mankind became polluted by intermarriage with angelic creatures, producing a hybrid race which God never intended should have come into existence. (Gen. 6:4) Noah was untainted with the corruption in the earth by remaining righteous and pure. “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.” (vs. 9, *New American Standard Bible*) It is noteworthy that in addition to the life-as-usual illustration of eating and drinking in Noah’s day, Jesus should mention marrying and giving in marriage. Marriage in Noah’s day was evidently a very loose arrangement. Marriage has become a loose arrangement in our day also, and we might be inclined to think that a literal fulfillment of this situation was intended by God in giving us the example of Noah’s days. A literal fulfillment is possible. However, it is more likely that Jesus was emphasizing that God’s original mandate of filling the earth through procreation would still be in effect at the time of his presence and also that marriage would be one more way of distinguishing between the Christ class and others.

Noah was different from all others of his day because of his marriage. Likewise, in the end of this Gospel Age when there has been much debasement

of the sanctity of marriage, the Lord's people are different from all others because they are pledged, symbolically speaking, in marriage to the Lord. "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ," said the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth.—II Cor. 11:2

The use of a bridegroom and bride to illustrate Christ and his church in the Scriptures is to impress us with the close relationship existing between them. In the development of the Christ class, the picture of betrothal and the patient waiting of an espoused virgin for her Lord is a fitting one. This marriage picture is all the more striking when we recall that one of the several reasons for our Lord's return is the claiming of his bride in marriage.—Eph. 5:31,32; Rev. 19:7,8

GOD'S PLAN REVEALED

Because Noah was a righteous man who walked with his Creator, God took him into his confidence and revealed his plan to him. God also established a covenant with Noah, who did everything according to all that God "commanded him." (Gen. 6:18,22) The church, likewise, is counted as righteous, or justified, in God's sight, through faith in the blood of Christ, and the Heavenly Father has revealed his plan to them and has made a covenant with them. (Rom. 3:24-26; 5:1; Ps. 50:5) The church also walks with God by faith, and strives to daily follow his instructions.

Noah's reactions to the Lord's instructions were immediate. He started to build the ark as instructed and became one of the heroes of faith mentioned in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. "By faith Noah, being

warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” (Heb. 11:7, *NASB*) Noah found himself in the midst of a faithless and perverse generation. By demonstrating his loyalty to God, he judged the world of his day through his actions, showing them that righteousness was possible. The world was overthrown and Noah became the recipient of the promises for the righteous.

The footstep followers of Christ also live in the midst of a faithless and perverse generation. This is especially true in these last days when “men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.” (II Tim. 3:1-4) In the midst of these conditions, the church must continue to demonstrate faith and loyalty to God. By so doing they will demonstrate that, by the Lord’s grace and with his help, righteousness is possible. If thus “faithful unto death,” they are assured of life in the world to come.—Rev. 2:10

AN ACTIVE FAITH

The best way for followers of Christ to demonstrate faith is to make it active. Noah made his faith living and active by carrying out three important tasks. He built an ark; he preached righteousness by word of mouth and actions; and he took his family and the animals into the ark at the required time.

Corresponding activities of the church to those of Noah might be: studying God’s Word to learn of his plan and will; preaching the glad tidings to all

who are willing to listen; and developing “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,” and by so doing enter into his kingdom.—Heb. 12:14

Christians are to combine attaining a knowledge of God’s Word with service for the Lord and development of character. Each of these activities can be illustrated by a building project wherein a test is made of the final structure. Jesus used the example of building and the selection of the proper foundation as a picture of a wise man who hears the words of the Lord and does them. (Matt. 7:24-27) Thus, when the storms of life come—as especially evidenced by the trials and testings of these last days—the house built upon solid rock remains, whereas the house built upon sand is swept away.

Another example of building is presented by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 3:10-15. Here the foundation is the same, namely, the ransom of Jesus, but the superstructure can be different. Two classes are mentioned. One builds with gold, silver, and precious stones; the other builds with wood, hay, and stubble. Severe trials, represented by fire, are used to test the structure. The fire burns up the wood, hay, and stubble, but refines the gold, silver, and precious stones, making them stronger and of great beauty. These symbolic building materials are those used by the faithful child of God.

In Noah’s case, building the ark had to be precise and according to God’s instructions. Both the volume displacement of water and weight of materials were important, but so was the superstructure. The ark had to be large enough to float, strong enough to carry the animals and provisions, watertight to prevent water from entering from below, and be

constructed in such a way that would exclude water from above. From this standpoint, the ark may be thought of as picturing Christ, and that our building task in this age uses him as a model.

“PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

While Noah was constructing the ark he must have received many inquiries about his building project. This gave him an opportunity to preach about the righteousness of God. Hence he is called “a preacher of righteousness” by the Apostle Peter in II Peter 2:5. It is reasonable to expect that Noah encountered scoffers and was ridiculed because it had never rained before, as the earth’s need for moisture was supplied by a constant humid condition. Nevertheless, Noah continued to preach to others during the lengthy period of time that he and his sons were building the ark. However, when the ark was completed, little, if any, effect had resulted from Noah’s preaching. Only he and his family entered the ark, along with the animals selected under God’s direction.—Gen. 7:1-16

The preaching during the Gospel Age has been equally difficult. All of the church’s preaching about the great time of trouble, God’s plan, and the coming kingdom has brought few converts. However, those whom God wants transported into his kingdom through Christ will respond. Yet they cannot receive the Word of God unless there is “a preacher of righteousness” to help them. As Paul noted, “how shall they hear without a preacher?”—Rom. 10:13-17

It would be a triumph for the Adversary if he were able to delude the church into believing—especially

in these latter days—that character development is not important. Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish virgins emphasizes this. (Matt. 25:1-13) The foolish virgins’ absence of oil in their lamps represents a lack of the Holy Spirit by which the fruits of the spirit are developed. It is vitally necessary that we strive to be conformed to the character image of his Son if we are to attain a place in the heavenly phase of God’s kingdom.—Gal. 5:22,23; II Cor. 3:18

A NEW WORLD TO FOLLOW

Some might conclude that the picture of Noah is intended to show that only a righteous few will attain God’s kingdom. This is far from being true. The picture of Noah’s day is intended to illustrate the development of the Christ class and the end of this present evil world. All mankind is descended from Adam. After the Flood they also are descended from Noah. Following the deliverance of Noah and his family he started a new world with his wife and three sons and their wives. (Gen. 9:1) That new world did not become perfect because sin still remained. The Noah picture was intended to portray, however, how God will establish a new world of righteousness through the Christ class—Jesus and his bride, the church.

In this greater picture, the second Adam is our Lord Jesus. The Apostle Paul makes this comparison in I Corinthians 15:22, when he says that just as “in Adam” all die, “in Christ” all will have the opportunity to live again. He continues later in the same chapter, saying, “The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening

spirit.” (I Cor. 15:45) Hence when this present evil world is ended, the Christ class will establish a new world order, as did Noah, and give life anew to all the world of mankind. In this new world, righteousness will be established forever, with Jesus as the everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.—Isa. 9:6,7

The conclusion we should reach, therefore, is that the study of the days of Noah will not give us a date whereby we can determine when this present evil world will end, or when the church will be completed. Rather, we should expect evil to continue to the very end of these days. We should also expect the people to be unaware of impending destruction of this present order, and to mostly be indifferent to the very signs that encourage the Lord’s people. On the other hand, as Christians, we should never be discouraged and not be deterred by the deteriorating conditions in the world around us. Rather, we should put forth all the more effort to know God’s plan, to preach the glad tidings, and to be conformed to the image of his Son, Christ Jesus. Above all, we should continue watching and praying for his kingdom until it comes and God’s will is done on the earth, as it is done in heaven.—Matt. 6:10 ■

*“The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting
to everlasting upon them that fear him,
and his righteousness unto children’s children;
To such as keep his covenant, and to those that
remember his commandments to do them.”*

—Psalm 103:17,18