

# “Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

By

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Written in honor of Rabbi Marcelo R. Bronstein on the occasion of his retirement as a Rabbi at Congregation B’nai Jeshurun, New York, NY

The Sedrah of Noah  
Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 9 to Chapter 11 Verse 32

Haftara Noah – Isaiah Chapter 54 to Chapter 55 Verse 5

There are certain things to be learned about Noah (נֹחַ) as the previous Sedrah of Genesis (בְּרֵאשִׁית) draws to an end, that will help us better appreciate who Noah was, where he fits into the history of the world, by which we mean the history of Mankind, and how what Noah did can serve as a lesson from which each of us can learn something that will hopefully enhance our lives today and everyday for the rest of our lives.

The first thing we might notice is not exactly about Noah when we first read the Sedrah of Genesis or listen to it being chanted. In Genesis Chapter 5 Verse 24 “And Enoch walked with G-d.” וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים . When we read that, it reminds us of the first time we heard that phrase; but it was, “and Noah walked with G-d.”

Surely, every little kid who goes to Hebrew School in any of the major Jewish Branches learns the “Rashi” on the first Verse of the Sedrah of Noah, Genesis Chapter 10 Verse 9, where it tells us, “ ... with the L-rd Noah walked.”

וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים and where Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki; February 22, 1040 to July 13, 1105) ז”ל, compares the phrase used to describe Abraham’s relationship to the L-rd; i.e. Genesis Chapter 24 Verse 40, “The L-rd before whom I walk said to me ...” וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לִפְנֵיו

And, how Rashi compares these major Biblical figures; Abraham was more able to function independently “... walked before the L-rd” where Noah was more dependant upon the L-rd for help in maintaining his own personal righteousness; it says “Noah walked with the L-rd.” When we were in school, the rabbi put it into perspective for us by comparing the two characters to little “kids” as they are growing up and demonstrate their relative dependence or independence by either walking with their parents and even holding their parent’s hand or by running out in front of their parents with a certain amount of self assurance or

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 1 of 52

even pride if not cockiness, youngsters or kids, of a certain age can appreciate the comparison since they may have younger siblings who are right at that special time in the development or maturation of a “little one” or, they may have a distant personal remembrance of when they themselves had gone through the same or a similar type of developmental milestone.

Now, to read or to hear virtually the same description referring to Enoch, whoever Enoch might have been must stop those of us who grew up knowing that it was Noah who “walked with G-d” and to ask “Why is the Torah saying the same thing about this man called Enoch?”

There are Biblical commentators who “massage” the Torah’s language here for one reason or another. But, taken as it is in its “black letter” essence, “Enoch walked with G-d” is what the Torah is reporting to us as it does later on at Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 9 about Noah. The reason is right in front of us. From the generation of Adam and Eve to the generation of Noah, a total of ten generations, there were but two personages singled out by the Torah, Enoch and Noah, as men who “walked with G-d,” which can only be taken as an extremely positive description of those two individuals. The incremental but continuous degradation of the human community was clearly unacceptable to the L-rd. Enoch was, apparently, a man who went against the tide but not effectively enough to stem that tide; only to temporarily delay what became the inevitable result; i.e. the almost complete destruction of ‘Mankind’ and of the animals that moved upon or flew over the earth.

There are those who interpret the number of years that Enoch lived, which was three hundred and sixty-five years, and the way the Torah describes his death, i.e. “Enoch walked with G-d, and he was not; for G-d took him.,” as an indication that Enoch was particularly, or at least comparatively, frail and could not continue against the wave of debauchery that was apparently forever in his face. It is surmised that the L-rd took Enoch to save him from the extreme pain involved in trying to continue living under the hostile and deplorable conditions of his day.

This is not to say that Enoch and Noah were necessarily of the same character or type, but, there was something that they did have in common. They each “walked with G-d.” What that phrase also tells us is that everyone else did not. Which is to say that what “Mankind” was devolving into was a community of ruthless barbarians with absolutely no respect for anything or anyone; not even for the L-rd. Could such a “community” with absolutely no moral compass be what the L-rd had intended or hoped that “Man” would become when the L-rd created the World and then created “Man” in His image and placed him, “Man,” in that World?

Surely, this is not what the L-rd had intended for “Man” to become. So, what went wrong? Could not the all powerful, all-knowing and omnipresent G-d of all gods

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 2 of 52

(small “g”) create a “Man” who would be “angelic” and “perfect” right out of the box?

Our first guess would be that G-d can do anything, but, for whatever reason, He created “Man” with something that precluded and continues to preclude him (“Man”) from being anything close to perfect; Freedom of Will. “Man” can follow, if he so chooses, his most base and even his (“Man’s”) most self-destructive instinct. That is apparently what, generation-by-generation following Adam and Eve, did with only the rare deviation by Enoch and, later, by Noah, who chose to live their lives with respect for their fellow man, with respect for nature in general and with what we might refer to as common decency, compassion or love. Nothing at all like that apparently was evidenced in any of the other generations or the generations in total from Adam and Eve right on to and through the generation of Noah.

We can, however, guess as well that Man’s descent was an incremental progression of debauchery and evil doings rather than a full blown avalanche that happened all at once.

We have been told there is a, or there are commentators, who read into the Torah having been started with the letter “Bais” ב in order to teach us something. Since the Hebrew alphabet is usually represented with the letter “Aleph” א first, one might expect the Torah to have been started with an “Aleph א.”

The reason the letter “bais” ב was chosen to begin the Torah according to one commentator we are told is because of that letter’s shape. That is, because it has a roof-like top that connects seamlessly to its right-sided vertical element and continues, again, seamlessly to its base that runs the full length of the entire superstructure of the letter. The commentator holds that the letter “bais” ב with its wide and uninterrupted opening facing all of the Torah that follows is to serve as a non-verbal sign or message for us to focus on what the Torah would now be revealing and expounding upon for us to focus and not to concern ourselves with what may have come before.

The commentators tell us further that what apparently came before; on the other side of the first letter of the Torah; the letter “bais” ב, were creations of other worlds that ended poorly to where they had to be destroyed by the L-rd.

Those worlds that came before either had too much or too little of something. Or, they were in some way a complete disappointment to the L-rd who had, as He was doing again when He created our world, “in the beginning” בְּרֵאשִׁית which really translates better as “Firstly” or “First” or “To begin with” because we really do not have any indication of a definite article; i.e. “The.” And, if that is the

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 3 of 52

case, that it was not “in the beginning” then we have all the more evidence that our nameless commentator is correct, that there were, indeed, other previously failed worlds that had been created and destroyed by G-d before this one; the one in which we are living; our World.

To allay any fears that you may have, allow us to skip to the end in a way before we fill in or discuss all that transpires in the Sedrah of Noah and say that we, in this World, are safe. We can breath easy. G-d will not destroy the world as He apparently had done or may have done to other worlds before ours. We know this because of the appearance of a rainbow as noted in Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 13 to 17 when we are told that the appearance of a rainbow will forever serve as a symbol to us; i.e. to everyone who follows, Jews and non-Jews alike, everyone, that G-d will never bring such destruction to “Mankind” as he had done with the Flood.

There is still a great deal to discuss in the remainder of the Sedrah, but why not deal with such an important issue as this promise from the Almighty that we, as a World community, are, indeed, here to stay?

What we do, each of us, individually, and all of us collectively as “Mankind” is completely up to us. But, destruction of the World as perhaps did happen to other worlds before ours by the L-rd, is apparently not in the cards. That is not to say that “Mankind” might not develop a way to destroy itself and the World as we know it. But, that would be entirely up to “Mankind;” to us.

The Sedrah Genesis foreshadows the life of Noah further when it tells us in Genesis Chapter 5 Verses 28 to 32 about Lemech לֵמֶךְ, who was Noah’s father, and at once what Lemech feels about his son and how important he believes Noah will eventually become. Genesis Chapter 5 Verse 29 “and he called his name Noah, saying this same shall comfort us in our work and in the toil of our hands, which cometh from the ground, which the L-rd hath cursed.”

Rashi helps us understand the meaning of Noah נֹחַ in Genesis Chapter 5 Verse 29 “This same shall comfort us.” Rashi says it means that he shall give us “rest” from the toil of our hands. Rashi explains that until Noah they, “Mankind,” had no implements (tools) for plowing and he prepared for them such instruments.” But, Rashi does not simply leave it there for us. Rashi explains the grammatical foundation from which the name Noah emanates and, in doing so, he shows what would have been Noah’s name were his father to have described him slightly differently; i.e. Menahchem מְנַחֵם which would be translated as the “Comforter” or the “Consoler” where Noah is perhaps best translated as “Giver of Rest.”

People name their children in certain ways. Some of us chose names of earlier relatives who have died and, in doing so, hope to both memorialize those who were so special in our lives and, hopefully, to pass on to the new babies receiving those names, the endearing qualities that those people were known to have possessed.

We know from later on in the Torah at Exodus Chapter 2 Verse 24 when the L-rd remembers His People who had been enslaved for four hundred years that there were four things that the L-rd sited as having made the Jewish People worthy of being remembered and redeemed from slavery: they retained their language, they continued to wear clothing in the way of their ancestors, they secreted away and protected the bones of Joseph to whom they had sworn that they would do so that his bones could be eventually buried with his family in their own Land, and for naming their children with the names of their ancestors.

That was not, apparently, the way children were named in the first ten generations from Adam to Noah. Perhaps closer to the way these earliest people may have named their children is the way Native American People are known to have named their young. An example: The baby boy was already strong and very muscular at birth with a certain look on his face that read “strength” and “intensity” so his parents named him “Young Bull.” As the little boy grew, he excelled in all things athletic and was faster than anyone around. So, as was their custom, they changed his name to match this attribute and called him by a new name; “Swift Bull.” In time, as various opportunities presented themselves, the emerging young man proved to be an extremely capable and even a heroic warrior, which led to his name being again modified to reflect these very special qualities. They called him by his new name “Brave Bull. His leadership skills became very well known to where others began to turn to him for guidance and advice with such great regularity that he had his name modified yet again to be “Wise Bull.” Later, as life took its toll on his strengths to where he was no longer able to participate in the physically demanding parts of normal Native American life, his own life became more focused on helping others in the community resolve their differences in the way of a judge or even as a life coach to use today’s parlance and he became known, then, by the name that the entire country, if not the entire world, would eventually know him as; “Sitting Bull.”

The Torah tells us then of the extent of Lemech’s life, that he died and then that Noah was five hundred years old and begot Shem, Ham and Japheth, before it begins to provide an overview, which is something on the order of an “executive summary,” of how “Mankind” was evolving from the point of view of what might be termed its morality quotient, which, as we can see, was not at all high.

As the first Sedrah of the Torah ends, it does so on a bit of an up beat, which may be something the rabbis who established the divisions we refer to as Sedrahs or Parshas, and which comprise the annual cycle of weekly Shabbas

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 5 of 52

Torah readings, and that is to end in such a way, on a positive rather than end on a negative note. Here, at the end of the Sedrah or Parshas Braishes, Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 7, things are so bad that we are told “and the L-rd said. ‘I will blot out Man who I have created from the face of the earth; both Man and beast and creeping things; and fowl of the air; for it repent me that I have made them.”

Ugh! Wow! Here we are again. Things are so bad that it looks like G-d is ready to destroy the world ... in a similar way apparently that He had done before. But, in the very next verse, there is a last moment reprieve. Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 8, when the Torah tells us that all is not lost, it says, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the L-rd.” And, the Sedrah ends. It is an up beat ending indeed. And, now, even if it may seem as if we went all around the World to go across the street, we should have a better appreciation of what the World was like at the time of Noah and just how key a person Noah truly truly was. That second “truly” is not a mistake. It was written that way on purpose. We might even take a moment here to say that no matter how our first understanding of Noah was impressed upon us; i.e. that he was not as strong a character as Abraham, “who walked before G-d.” (Genesis Chapter 24 Verse 40), “And He said unto me ‘... the L-rd before whom I walk.” We can see now how very special Noah truly truly was.

In a time when debauchery and inhuman activities was the way of the World, Noah, with no help from anyone, was able to rise above the rest of his generations; so much so that he gave the L-rd a reason and a way to give the World, our World, and “Mankind,” us, a chance to start all over again with Noah and his family.

The Sedrah Noah, Genesis Chapter 6 verse 9 to Chapter 11 Verse 32, is where we learn the details of the way G-d brought about the end of the generations from after Adam and Eve through the generation of Noah save, of course, for Noah and his family.

We really do not learn very much more about Noah’s qualities; of what won the L-rd over to select him as the man who, along with his family, would be the progenitors of “Mankind” from then and onward.

But, let us take a moment here, before we launch into an overview of our Sedrah and acknowledge just how right Lemech was when he named his son Noah; “Giver of Rest.” It may have been that Noah developed the plow as certain commentators have put forth, which certainly would have allowed the land to be farmed and not mean that people would have to continue to live off whatever grew wherever it might grow. We take it for granted, but it was anything but.

To a far greater extent, Noah gave us, all of us today, from his immediate family and himself, right on through to Abraham our Father and the other “Avos”,

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 6 of 52

Fathers, to absolutely every generation since his own, the opportunity to live life in all its wonderful and amazing ways but somewhat insulated or protected from the absolute horrors that, unchecked, unfettered and unrestrained human beings can bring about if allowed to do so. We, as a society, know the downside risk of giving free reign to evil individuals. We establish rules or laws and take restraining measures against those who dare to transgress them. People in civilized communities rest easily when their laws are respected. Such laws began with Noah; “Giver of Rest.”

How Lemech could see that his new son could be such a special man is beyond our understanding. Was Lemech wishing his son would be the “Giver of Rest” by naming him as he did? Perhaps he was. But, as it turned out, Lemech was exactly right.

As the Sedrah of Noah begins, we are told that what will follow will be about the generations of Noah and then, instead, we are given what appears to be a rather laudatory review of the man himself; “Noah was in, his generations, a man (who was) righteous and whole-hearted; Noah walked with G-d.” We talked about the “walked with G-d” part earlier. Given just how important this man Noah is to us, knowing as much about him as a man; as a person, can only help us appreciate all the many aspects of our own personalities and capabilities and, perhaps, even of our own limitations or negative tendencies. Of course, we could just take the attitude as expressed in the song written by Jay Livingston with music by Ray Evans in 1956, “Que sera sera! Whatever will be will be. The future’s not ours to see. Que sera sera!” We are what we are and so what. Perhaps that is the way many approach life: “We’re not going to be here down the road, so who cares what I do now during my life.”

Really, is any one of us as important as Noah? Do any of us think in terms of being the progenitor of generations yet unborn, or, of conducting ourselves in such a way as to be worthy of being selected by the L-rd to continue the world He created with us as the “Man” in “Mankind?”

Maybe we should just read and regard the story of Noah as what it has probably become to most of us as we think of it from time-to-time; i.e. as a nice little Bible story that kids study in Hebrew school and that artists use as their inspiration for creations that will be recognized almost instantly by anyone who might see their work.

To regard the Sedrah of Noah as we suggest; that it is of the absolute greatest importance, perhaps puts too much pressure on us, or, perhaps it puts just the right amount of pressure on us. Let us see.

If you want pressure, then lean towards that interchange about comparing “Noah walked with G-d” and “Abraham walked before G-d.” Now, that’s pressure; to try

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 7 of 52

to be like Abraham our Father. But, before we simply pigeonhole Noah as a lower caliber Biblical figure, with all due respect to Rashi and to all the Hebrew school teachers who introduced us and zillions of other kids to Noah with the “Devar Torah” (Torah commentary) described above, let us give Noah a little closer scrutiny and consideration.

There are those who choose to look at the Torah’s description of Noah in Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 9 as less than laudatory. “Noah was in his generations a man righteous and whole-hearted ... “ They would say the phrase “in his generations” indicates that in other generations of more righteous people Noah would be just like everyone else; righteous, yes, but not worthy of any special mention. But, in Noah’s own generation(s), Noah stands out as righteous, because of how primitive and, frankly, inhuman the others in his generation(s) were.

We understand the desire to make such comparisons; to compartmentalize the various Biblical personalities; because to do so makes it that much easier to relate to these people, about whom we know next to nothing. Truly, there is a tendency to think of these earliest human beings as people with whom we might be able to relate; people like us. But, nothing could be farther from the truth. The generations from Adam and Eve through to and including Noah and his family were completely uncivilized barbarians with no redeeming attributes or qualities. None what so ever. The minute amount of “humanity” that was noticed in Enoch and later in Noah was all that stood between the L-rd ending it all and perhaps starting all over again – or dare we say “yet again,” and seeing if there was a sufficient base of what the L-rd was hoping would evolve from the start He had given “Man” into a creation worthy of nurturing further.

If you think we are merely speculating, think again. The words in the Torah are there in Black and White. We are adding nothing. There is no need to “spin” it to be something else other than what it is. Later in the Sedrah we will learn of the new respect that “Mankind” is to exhibit and have for life even as “Mankind is for the first time being permitted to eat meat; which is to say, to kill animals for use as food. The methods and limits established by the L-rd concerning how animals may be taken and used for food by “Man” are the beginning of what will later be referred to as the Seven Commandments of the Children of Noah (Shivah Mitzvos shel b’nai Noach), or the Noahide Laws.

Our rabbis have determined that the following seven laws were given to Noah and the sons of Noah and their wives to follow: Do not worship idols. Do not curse God. Do not commit murder. Do not commit adultery or sexual immorality. Do not steal. Do not eat flesh torn from a living animal. Establish courts of justice. The laws are not mentioned specifically in our Sedrah, but are derived from biblical sources and we mention them here to round out the topic

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 8 of 52

a much as possible, but also, since whom these people at the time of Noah were is so key to our understanding the Sedrah and the Torah's message to us.

The Noahide Laws became, and still are, the definitive "line in the sand" between civilized persons and barbarians with the understanding that a barbarian was (is) not worthy of being allowed to remain alive. (Barbarians could and can never be trusted not to kill anyone for no reason whatsoever and were and are, therefore, too dangerous to be allowed to exist at large in an open society for fear that they would kill others).

Granted; this is pretty tough talk. However, sitting in our comfortable homes today with dependable heat and air-conditioning, indoor plumbing, hot and cold running water, refrigeration and freezers and every modern appliance imaginable, it is hard to believe just how primitive the contemporaries of Noah and Noah himself actually were. We have nothing like that kind of people in our knowledge bank of today to which or to whom we can relate. Or, do we?

When some unbelievably creepy Englishman named "John," who is dressed in Arabian garb with his face completely covered, stands before a video camera with a man wearing a hood over his head and kneeling before him, and John then takes out a large knife, removes the hood of the kneeling man's head and then proceeds to cut the man's head from off of his neck right in front of the camera, we can see that the elements within the so called "human being," which come from the same background as we, all of us, have within us, stem from the same DNA genetic beginning as Noah. Crazy you say? Perhaps you are right. But, such barbarians are certainly not at all capable of remediation and only deserving of death.

How far have we come from the days of Noah? Not as far as one might think or one would hope.

Yes, it can be said that such abominations are done by crazy people. That might make it easier to understand. But, to know that human beings have within themselves the capability to do this type of thing is to confirm that barbarism exists today on this planet, which is a truly chilling thought.

Why do we introduce this frightening reality while investigating what is more often than not thought of as a nice little Bible story; The Story of Noah?

Why?

We do so because Bible stories are very serious stuff. Their messages are of the greatest importance now and forever more. That is why.

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 9 of 52

With that firmly in place in our minds, we are now ready to approach the story in the Sedrah of Noah and know that we are in for much more than the quaint “Bible story” we may have thought it was until now.

The Torah, at Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 10 completes laying the groundwork for us so we can see where it is going. It lets us know that Noah has three sons and that their names are Shem, Ham and Japheth so that we know that, whatever we learn going forward, Noah has a family and, therefore, a future which is everything at this point in the Torah because nothing else seems to be going very well. Even though, at the very beginning of the Torah we are told that “G-d saw that it was good” and that this was “good,” but when it comes to “Man,” i.e. to “Mankind,” that is whatever the L-rd had hoped “Mankind” would be like, the actual result was clearly way off the mark. But, what must capture our attention is that the Torah does not point a finger of guilt at “Man,” who we might think was the responsible party for the situation as it had evolved by then. No.

Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 11 reports, “And the Earth was corrupt before G-d, and the Earth was filled with violence.” “The Earth was corrupt before G-d,” has to make us think. The Earth is what it is. It moves along in its orbit around the sun and provides the necessities for life to exist. The Earth can not be corrupt. It is a vehicle. So, why does the Torah seem to give it other qualities to raise it to the level of something that can act in a certain way? Corrupt things may have been happening on the Earth, but the Earth itself was not responsible for that corruption.

What comes to mind is the discussion held earlier about why the Torah starts with the letter “Bais” ב and the “World” or “Worlds” that may have come before and which had been, for one reason or another, destroyed by the L-rd. This situation may be what was facing the L-rd as He continued to try to create “Mankind” but kept; or dare we say “keeps” getting disappointed by the results.

If that is the case, then what we may be a part of is a continuing effort by the L-rd to create a “Mankind” with members who will be the fine upstanding people of whom the L-rd could and would always be proud. Things that are done by the animals in the world are normal and, though they may be violent and completely without regard to compassion or civility, are acceptable and, frankly, expected if done, again, by animals. The same is not so with regard to human beings. Human beings are supposed to rise above their (or our) animal instincts. We can ask why did the L-rd even bother doing this; creating a World for a being such as we are, who have the potential to be so disturbingly capable of causing the L-rd to “start all over again” from time-to-time when “Mankind” descends to such a level of conduct that it goes below that which is minimally acceptable to Him, the L-rd? Judging just how long it took the L-rd to finally bring about the Flood and to start all over with Noah and Noah’s family; that level of acceptability is or seems to be fairly low.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 10 of 52

“And the Earth was filled with violence” is the second part of Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 11, which tells us that corruption and violence were just too much for the L-rd to allow it to continue as it was; again. The violence of nature was not part of the equation; just the violence of “Mankind” needed to be constrained, contained and mitigated on a continuing and on going basis.

And, in Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 12, we are allowed to sit in on and virtually observe the way the L-rd considered the evidence and made His judgment regarding the “Earth” and what needed to be done to get things back on track. “And the L-rd saw the Earth; and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their ways,” when Rashi explains that even cattle, beasts and fowl consorted (had sexual relations) with those who were not of their own species, it becomes clear as to how off track things had gone.

We can surmise that such involved “consorting” would not have been driven by the animals (i.e. cattle, beasts and fowl) but by humans, who were not restricted by what would be their “nature,” as animals would be, but who could, and apparently did, conjecture and engage in acts that corrupted the ways of the animals and, from such corruption, the various species must have become contaminated from then and onward save for those few examples that would have been somehow unexposed to such devastating behavior. Those animals would be the ones that Noah would be able to save on the Ark to begin the world all over again. We can only imagine that the animal pairs that Noah brought onto the Ark to save the many species were perhaps or very likely may have been baby animals that would have been less likely to have been exposed to inappropriate “consorting” behavior as mature animals would have been.

And now, just as simple as pie, the L-rd speaks directly to Noah in Genesis Chapter 6 Verses 13 to 21 where He tells Noah what He (the L-rd) is about to do and why and what He wanted Noah to do in preparation and that He (the L-rd) will establish a covenant with Noah. Is there a physicalization of the L-rd to which Noah can relate? Apparently there was not. Was the L-rd’s voice heard by Noah or was the communication made through some kind of mental telepathy? With Moses, way down the road in the Torah, in Exodus, Chapter 3 Verse 2, there is a burning bush that does not get consumed by the flames and through which the L-rd introduced Himself to Moses

“An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush, and behold, the thorn bush was burning with fire, but the thorn bush was not being consumed.”

Well, we do know that Noah walked with G-d, so it is entirely possible that Noah and the L-rd had a kind of “speaking” relationship right along and not only at this

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 11 of 52

particular juncture, when so much of what we know about the World at that moment, was about to change; and drastically.

The details of Noah's pre-Flood preparation procedure are fairly well known and make great sense in their practicality and immediacy. The amount of work associated with all that was necessary to do however is staggering to imagine let alone to actually plan out and do. Granted, these generations lived into the hundreds of years, which is clearly something with which we must find so strange given our normal life expectancy to be in terms of seventy plus years with someone living into their late nineties as being extraordinarily rare. And, the aging process for us would make anyone in such advanced years as close to nonproductive as could be imagined. So, to expect the building of an Ark, stocking it with food for an extended period of time, gathering two of every species that roamed or crawled upon or flew over the Earth has got to seem nigh onto impossible to any one of our generations.

That "... gathering two of every species that roamed or crawled upon or flew over the Earth ..." needs to be commented on also. We grew up knowing that Noah's Ark had a pair, a male and a female, of every species on board. But, for some reason we did not remember, were not reminded, or were absent the day they taught us about Genesis Chapter 7 Verses 2 and 3 which states:

(2) Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee seven and seven, each with his mate; and of the beasts that are not clean two [and two], each with his mate;

(3) Of the fowl also of the air, seven and seven, male and female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

The Torah does not elaborate at this juncture what was meant by "clean" or "unclean." But, we can reach forward to the laws of kosher animals and learn about animals that chew their cud and have split hooves, which might help us here since, when studying the Torah the rule is: "ain mukdam u'leiuchar be-Torah," which literally means "there is no 'earlier' or 'later' in the Torah." But, whatever the meanings may be regarding "clean" and "unclean," we do know that pairs of animals were the order of the day, but not as we see it represented in the many paintings and illustrations of Noah's Ark; just one pair of each species. There were at least seven pairs of the "clean" animals. And, there are even those who feel that the phrase "seven and seven" as expressed in the Hebrew, could actually mean seven times seven, which would mean 49 animals or even 49 pairs of those animals.

So, surely, it is clear that the Ark carried a sufficient number of examples of the "clean" animals to be able to replenish the stock of those species after the Flood and "just enough" of the "unclean" animals to do the same for them.

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 12 of 52

Now, let us return to the building of the Ark. In Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 22, we are told emphatically “thus did Noah according to all that G-d commanded him to do, so he did.” Rashi explains that the building of the Ark is to what this verse is referring since the gathering of the animal pairs is expounded upon in the next verses. But, from the simple way of looking at it, the verse teaches that G-d spoke to Noah, Noah listened and executed the plan as delineated. Holy Mackerel! Well, actually, we should remember that fish were excluded from Noah’s pre-Flood plan. Clearly, the generations of Noah and before did not engage in any “shenanigans” with sea creatures to where they were contaminated in the way of the land animals. There were apparently limits even for the barbarians that early “Mankind” seems to have been.

The building of the Ark and the myriad of tasks that had to be preformed to complete it remains something about which we can only speculate. Had there ever been such a project conceived and executed by man prior to the building of the Ark? We can safely guess that there had never been anything like this before. We can wonder also about the reaction of what others in the generations of Noah might have been and what Noah and his family might have had to say or to do when interacting with those people and how the questions they might have asked were answered. The Torah leaves all of that to those who might want to speculate about such things. If the Torah does not share something, we can take it that such unreported things are not considered to be important for us to know. But, from what we do know, the transitional period from when the L-rd first spoke to Noah and commanded him regarding the Ark and informed him as to what would be happening with regard to the Earth and its other inhabitants, must have been the most awkward and most frightening time the World has ever known. “Noah walked with G-d” is surely what allowed Noah to succeed in his life saving; really World saving, mission. How very special Noah must have been. Once his work was done, he truly brought “rest” to himself, his family and to all of “Mankind” to follow right through to us as we write and you read this piece about Noah and what he did for us all.

However long it took Noah and his family to complete the construction of the Ark, we again do not know. But, sometime after the work was done to where the Ark was sea worthy, the L-rd spoke again to Noah to move things forward. Genesis Chapter 7 Verse 1 “And the L-rd said unto Noah: ‘Come thou and all thy house into the Ark; for thee I have seen (to be) righteous before me in this generation.’” It reminds us of the naval command, “All hands on deck,” which is the typical order given when the captain needs to address the ship’s entire crew. But, secreted away in the opening order that will be launching the operation that will recast the World, as it was, to a new, and, hopefully, to a more successful version and one that will continue forever with no need to recast it again, is a lesson to us all; a lesson in courtesy, gentility and respect.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 13 of 52

Just a few verses earlier, when the Torah had referred to Noah in Genesis Chapter 6 Verse 9 as being “righteous and wholehearted,” it did so when speaking to us, the reader of the Torah. But, when the L-rd addresses Noah directly, the L-rd is careful to limit His praise for Noah to “righteous” and leaves off the “wholehearted” attribute. The lesson, as noted by Rashi, is that one (should) mention (only) part of the good qualities of a person in front of that person (as G-d does in this instance) but all of the person’s attributes when not in that person’s presence. Certainly, it is the right thing to do and here, even at this amazingly pivotal point in the history of the world, courtesy comes front and center. Perhaps, if the members of Noah’s generation were even the slightest bit courteous and gentile, we could conjecture that they might not have been doomed to destruction as they soon would be,

Genesis Chapter 7 continues with the detailed instructions concerning which animals Noah and his family are to collect and bring on to the Ark and outlines the timeline for when the Flood will begin, how it will be accomplished in terms of from where the waters will come, how long the waters will take to completely inundate the Earth and how long the waters will remain in place before subsiding. The Torah almost seems to peg the time in terms of Noah’s life; i.e. Genesis Chapter 7 Verse 11 “In the sixth hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month on the seventeenth day of the month on the same day where all the fountains of the great deep broken up and the windows of heaven opened.” But, when was that? Could we somehow zero in on a day in the year when the Flood began? Probably not; unless, of course, there was a way to determine the day that Noah was born; which, again, we doubt can be done. So, why would the Torah take the time to include such facts as to when in the life of Noah, down to the very day that the waters began to flow and the making of the Flood that would erase all life on the surface of the Earth, save for the inhabitants of the Ark? The Torah shares things with us only when such things matter. So, there must be a reason to know that Noah was six hundred years one month and seventeen days old when the flood began. We are led to believe that the phrase “all the fountains of the deep broke up” was telling us that there was a seismic upheaval, which resulted in a tidal wave that kicked the Flood into high gear, so to speak, before the rains came. But the records of the time the Flood began being measured in reference to Noah’s life span remains a mystery to us.

Rashi takes a brief moment to note the way Noah and his sons went aboard the Ark in Genesis Chapter 7 Verse 7, “And Noah went in and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him into the Ark because of the waters of the Flood.” Rashi explains that the men and the women entered the Ark separately because they were forbidden to engage in marital relations while the World would be experiencing such deep grief.

Rashi also points out that even while Noah was actively building the Ark, he was kind of “like this and like that” in his personal belief that there would actually be a

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 14 of 52

need for the Ark, i.e. that there would ever really be a Flood. Rashi notes that the last phrase of Verse 7 “because of the Flood” is included by the Torah to tell us of Noah’s “off-again on-again” personal belief in the coming of the Flood and the proof of that being that he did not actually enter the Ark until the Flood was beginning.

The timing of the Flood, the forty days and forty nights of the rains, the one hundred and fifty days that the water remained in place is all detailed for us. Can we learn something from this in and of itself?

There is no record of what life was like aboard the Ark. Surely, there are those who may want to know what went on. Who fed the animals? Was there any loss of any animals along the way? After all, the Ark was, in a sense, G-d’s insurance policy for the World. There was no back up plan.

Genesis Chapter 8 documents the end of the journey of the Ark and does so in tremendous detail at that. The waters began to decrease after one hundred and fifty days of being in place all over the World. In the seventh month on the seventeenth day of the month the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. After forty days, Noah opened the window. The process included the sending of the raven and then of the Dove and then, days later, of the dove again and, then, the second return of the dove with an olive branch, which proved that the waters had abated. After another seven days, Noah again sent out the dove, which did not return. Now, in Verse 13, the Torah details for us that this had been taking place in the six hundredth and first year, the first month and the first day of the month that Noah determined that the waters had fully abated. But, to what is the Torah referring when it says “six hundred and one years?” i.e. “six hundred and one years” from when, is what we want to know. Perhaps since Noah’s birth, which would corroborate our reading of Genesis Chapter 7 Verse 11 where the Torah noted when the Flood began. And, then, at last, G-d spoke to Noah telling him to disembark from the Ark.

At Genesis Chapter 8 Verse 20, we are told of the altar Noah built and the burnt sacrifices he offered to the L-rd and, in Verse 21, that the L-rd smelt the sweet savor of the offerings and we are told what the L-rd said in His heart: “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more anything living, as I have done.” Then, continuing in Verse 22, “While the Earth remaineth, seedtime, and harvest and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”

We read this with some concern. We are particularly concerned with the statement “for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” This is referring to “Man,” who G-d created in His image. He gives “Man” or allows “Man” to have free will, which could well be what allows “Man” to go off in directions that

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 15 of 52

are diametrically opposed to what G-d clearly hoped man would allow himself to become. Short of making “Man” be what He wanted him to be, which would be, by definition to remove “Man’s” freedom of will, He, the L-rd, is kind of stuck or, should we say, saddled with “Man,” who veers so far off course that “starting over” is what had been apparently almost unavoidable.

Now, with the advent, first, of Enoch, who “walked with G-d,” and later with Noah, who also walked with G-d” and apparently had even more going for him, G-d was able to weed the garden called Earth with the Flood as His implement, and, now, He, G-d apparently feels, finally, that all is right with the World.

So, this statement, that “Man’s imagination is evil from his youth” makes us wonder. First, the translation of the word “Yaitser” יָצַר as “imagination” is perhaps convenient, but not really what “Yaitser” יָצַר means. “Yaitser” יָצַר means “instinct” or “leaning” or “impulse” or “desire.” Another thing that concerns us is that though the statement places the start of “Man’s evil instinct” back to “Man’s” youth but it does not mean that it stays in “Man’s” youth. So, what one can take from this is that “Man” has an evil leaning right from the “get go,” which tells us it is not a “learned” trait but a natural bent that is for “Man” to somehow hold in check.

If the Torah stopped right here and now at this point, we would rightly wonder why would the L-rd have developed such a being where evil is in its very nature, and, apparently, very much a part of it? Then, from the perspective of knowing that down the road the same genetic code brings about Abraham and the evolution of the Jewish People but, still with all the evil leanings right from its youth, how could that evil leaning be counteracted? Of course, the early Covenantal Jews, the “Avos,” the Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were apparently so clear as to what life was all about, what their mission on earth was to be, that they needed no more than to live their lives in harmony with the Covenantal Agreement they had made with the L-rd, and all would be and all was well.

However, since four hundred years of slavery was to be part of the Jewish People’s history, the gap between the “Avos,” the Fathers, and the Jews who came out of Egypt four hundred years later, was greater than can even be described. The overarching difference was that the “Avos,” the Fathers, needed nothing in the way of a rule book or guidelines in order to live their lives in accordance with the tenets of the Covenantal Agreement with G-d. The later Jews needed the Torah to fill the gap. And, even with the amazing gift of the Torah, it took an entire generation after the Sin of the Spies (Deuteronomy Chapter 1 Verses 21 to 26) to get the Jewish People back on track and, more than that, through the history of the Jewish People going forward, the entire population would stray so far from the Covenantal path to where they would be expelled from the Holy Land and the Holy Temple would be destroyed, not once

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 16 of 52

but twice, as punishment for transgressing the elements outlined in the Covenantal Agreement.

The Jewish People has yet to be fully redeemed, though we may be on our way to that given that the Holy Land is at least and at last in the possession of the Jewish People again. It is, of course, our hope and our prayer that the Holy Temple be rebuilt again and in our time.

Genesis Chapter 9 is where G-d fulfills the promise He made to Noah at the beginning of the Sedrah about establishing a Covenant between the L-rd and Noah. In verse 1, G-d blesses Noah and his sons with a similar blessing that G-d had given to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the Earth." The thing about a blessing that is rather a surprise is that one usually thinks of a blessing as a kind of gift where the one being blessed is getting something special just like this with nothing due in return. But in reality, the receiving of a blessing comes with a reciprocal responsibility. It is as if, when the L-rd blesses Noah and his sons in this way, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the Earth," that they are then charged with doing so; no easy task really. It is like that with any blessing. If one is blessed with a beautiful singing voice for example, singing exclusively in the shower so no one else can enjoy or perhaps be inspired by the music one can make seems quite a waste.

Genesis Chapter 9 continues what might be seen as the formal launching, or re-launching, of the World with Noah and his family as the main focus of the L-rd's attention. It is explained in detail that "Man" will now be seen much differently than "he" had been until now. All animal life from that point on will be subservient to "Man" and, all living things, including all animals will be available to "Man" now for food where, in the past, that was not at all the case. Until now, "Man" had not been allowed to use animals for food.

There is, however, a very interesting fine tuning of the big news regarding "Man" being allowed to eat the meat of animals. In Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 4, the Torah begins to put in place what are the minimally expected requirements for acting as an acceptable human being in G-d's newly re-launched World.

To appreciate this first of several conduct guidelines for "Man," it might be a good idea to frame this first rule in what we can be called real life. It is, in "real life," perfectly acceptable for animals to live their lives as they do. There are no guidelines provided to them. Their nature is as it is and how it plays out is acceptable to the L-rd. For one animal to chase another, capture it and devour it even while that other animal is still alive is not at all discussed in the Torah because for animals to do what they need to do to eat and, thereby, to stay alive and to be able to feed their young is of their nature and perfectly acceptable. With that as an understanding, the same is now, from the moment the L-rd made His declaration in Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 4, completely unacceptable behavior

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 17 of 52

for “Man” to act in that manner. Furthermore, the only knowledge that “Man” had of how meat from animals gets eaten, until this new rule from the L-rd, was from “Man” observing animals doing what they do; tearing the flesh from another animal’s bones, whether their prey was dead or still alive, and eating it raw in a bloody mess.

Learning by example is a fairly simple concept. As a matter of fact, to “unlearn” something that has been the norm or the universally acceptable way of doing things is to ask quite a bit; particularly from those who are new in the arena. So, to demand that “Man” approach the newly allowed eating of the meat of animals with the restrictions delineated in Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 4, which is that the animal be completely drained of its blood and, therefore, no longer alive, means that “Man” must adapt what might be normal for the “animal” part of his nature by superimposing these rules on his way of doing things in this area of his new life. Rashi actually illuminates this restriction regarding how “Man” is allowed to eat meat from animals by explaining that it is forbidden for “Man” to eat meat from an animal where the meat was taken from that animal while that animal was still alive.

Blood continues to be the focus of the Torah in Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 5 and 6 when we learn that the life of every person means something. Indeed, until this Torah declaration that the taking of any life of any man or woman will have dire consequences; i.e. death, no value at all was assigned to the life of any human being. When the Torah refers to “your blood,” Rashi interprets it to mean that suicide is forbidden. Of course, there is no consequence mentioned for such a transgression as that, which does make the spiritual part of us wonder about the reason for even introducing it here among other transgressions that do come with a punishment; i.e. death.

Then, at Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 7, there is a quick, if brief, change of gears by the Torah from the life and death issues of permission to use the meat from animals for food and then the establishing of the standard punishment for animal or “Man” for the taking the life of a human being, to the life continuing instruction to “be fruitful and multiply; swarm the Earth and multiply therein.” It is as if life is the main theme and here, in just a handful of verses, the Torah establishes the way “Man” is to behave; being respectful of animals by never eating meat that was taken from alive animal or eating the blood of an animal; knowing that those who might kill another human would do so at the forfeit of their own life; and then, the command is given to continue life by creating the next generation. Live. Keep living. Remove from the community those who take human lives. Create more human beings to live their lives. That, in a nutshell is apparently the way the L-rd wants the world to run.

With these new guidelines for living having been announced, in Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 9 through 17 the L-rd declares the establishment of His Covenant with

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 18 of 52

Noah, Noah's family, all of those who come after them and with all the living creatures that were saved on the Ark. The L-rd's Covenant was basically His promise that He would never again cause the Earth to be flooded (destroyed) as He had done to the generations of Noah, save of course for Noah and Noah's family. Then, as something to which we can all relate, the Lord tells us that the Rainbow in the sky that follows a storm will be a reminder to Him and as a sign for us of His Covenant to never destroy the world again.

G-d's Covenant following the Flood that destroyed the population is interesting. The Covenant that comes later in the Torah between the L-rd and Abraham is what we might call "two-sided." That is to say that both participants in that covenant had responsibilities. As long as the Jewish People live in accordance with the way the L-rd expects them to live and that they will worship no other gods (small "g") they would be allowed to stay in the Land of Israel and all their needs would be met. See the "Shema Yesroel" for the exact details of that Covenant. (Deuteronomy Chapter 6 Verses 4 through 9, Deuteronomy Chapter 11 Verses 13 through 21 and Numbers Chapter 15 Verses 37 through 41).

G-d's Covenant made after the Flood may have been to Noah and to the rest of the inhabitants of the World from then and onward, but it is clearly a "one-sided" covenant. There is nothing required of Noah or anyone or any thing else, except, of course, to continue to exist. The image of the "Rainbow" that is seen after rainstorms is, of course, very beautiful. That this image will serve as a means to "jog the memory" of the L-rd is also interesting. Does anyone really believe that the L-rd needs a "memory aid" of any kind? Surely, the all powerful and all knowing G-d needs no help remembering anything; particularly that He will never again destroy the World. One would think that destroying the World would be such a tremendous event and of such great importance that the L-rd would, again, need no reminder about His commitment to preserve it. But, apparently, that is not the case. Perhaps there is an anger or disappointment level that even the L-rd could reach to where the continuance of that which was so disturbing to Him could no longer be tolerated and no longer, therefore, allowed to continue to exist. If that is the case, then we might be able to conclude that after the Flood the L-rd was convinced that as "evil" as "Man" may be, "Man's" good qualities can eventually supersede or overcome the "evil" tendencies, which to the L-rd would justify the allowing of the World, "Mankind," to continue.

Here, might be a good place to see where all this fits into the Creation of the World and of "Man" and of G-d's plan, or should we say hope, for it.

There is what seems to be a progressive refinement in the Torah of the nature of "Man." The L-rd was and is still hoping that "Man" will be an independent self-determining being with the World as his home and everything within it for "Man" to do with as he might.

Adam and Eve adjusted as best as they could but ended up forced from the Garden of Eden for having disappointed the L-rd.

There seems to be a relatively slow but yet a deliberate and progressive refinement of what, apparently, the L-rd wanted and continues to want “Mankind” to be with regard to how “Man” conducts his life. It is possible that in creating “Man,” the L-rd was anticipating that given that “Man” is made in the image of G-d, Genesis Chapter 1 Verse 26 that “Man” would evolve into caring and loving beings. (How could G-d think of Himself as anything other than caring and loving?)

But, Adam and Eve, with all they had to learn about life and living with nothing and no one to help them adapt, became somewhat of a disappointment in that the L-rd was all but forced to drive them out of the Garden of Eden and into the World without much more than the animal skins on their backs and, perhaps, the knowledge that they would not live forever and that from then on they would have to fend for themselves; “with the sweat of your brow will you eat bread” (Genesis Chapter 3 Verse 19) and “in pain shall you bare children” (Genesis Chapter 3 Verse 16), where, in Eden, everything had been prepared for them.

“Man,” outside of the Garden of Eden, was literally on his own. Aside from not being meat eaters, the World was there for him to dominate and in which to thrive. But, without a plan and without any kind of example to follow, save for observing how the other animals on the Earth behaved and the way they lived, the Humans seemed to have made far more decisions that limited or lowered the meaning of their lives they were living to where they were not much better, and in some ways worse, than the other animals themselves; to where they apparently ruined them; the other animals, as well as having ruined themselves.

The L-rd was so “disappointed” by “Man’s” slid into degradation that He could only see one way out, which was finding as worthy a successor as He could, which was Noah and Noah’s family, erasing the vast majority of “Mankind,” as it was and starting over again with Noah and his family.

Peering into the future, even with the advent of Abraham and his followers, “Mankind” stays its ground for the most part as worshipers of idols, performers of human and child sacrifice, that are, in themselves, witness to exactly what the L-rd had hoped, and surely still hopes, that “Man” would not become. The vast majority of the people of that time were an abomination to the L-rd.

But, what evolved at ten generations out from Noah was the development of a personality who somehow “saw the light” by reasoning or otherwise determining that there must be a “ruler of all rulers,” a “creator of all creators,” a “king of all kings,” a “G-d (with a big “G”) of all gods (all the others of which would be with a

small “g”)” and he was able to recognize G-d and to establish a working Covenantal Relationship with G-d that endures even until today.

It is by being compliant with the Covenantal Agreement with the L-rd that the Jewish People serve as a “light;” the very same “light” that Abraham saw and chose to follow; a “light” unto the World, and, from that vantage point, to hopefully attract others to live in similar ways, and to eventually reject the detestable ways of the mainstream of “Mankind” of that day, and perhaps even of today, who worship idols and other gods (small “g”). The Jewish People, even in its imperfect leaning closer to and further away from the ways of the Torah, continues, in a certain way now in its fractionated existence, to be morally just and, in being the champion of the one and only G-d, and, to some extent, there are those who still live by the particulars of the Covenantal Agreement, which, if focused on the One G-d belief and have a total commitment to it. “Hear Oh Israel the L-rd or G-d the L-rd is One.” Deuteronomy Chapter 6 Verse 4, and the entire “Shama” which encompasses Deuteronomy Chapter 6 Verses 4 to 9, Chapter 11 Verses 13 to 21 and Numbers Chapter 15 Verses 37 to 41.

When we recite the “Shama” in its entirety during the morning and evening prayers, or when we touch a mezuzah, which is the container that holds a copy of the “Shama” and which is placed or affixed to door posts and gates of Jewish owned buildings, when entering or leaving a building with a mezuzah affixed to its doorposts, it is not for “good luck” but, rather, it is our acknowledgement of the Covenantal Agreement between us and G-d and our complete rejection of the worshiping of other gods (small “g”); much heavier indeed than one might realize when one allows what we are doing to become routine.

So, where does this leave us? Adam and Eve, the first iteration of “Mankind,” leads to “Man” being removed from the Garden of Eden, which in G-d’s initial plan, is where “Man,” in this, then, new world, was to live. Out of Eden, “Man” develops in a much less than hoped for way that leads in an almost straight line curve to the generations of Noah and G-d’s decision to begin the World and “Mankind” over again with Noah and Noah’s family as “the new beginning.” “Mankind” advances in a somewhat more acceptable manner with a somewhat more civilized way of living but with a propensity towards being a fear-driven society resulting in all sorts of worshiping of parts of nature that are beyond “Man’s” control such as the sun, the moon, the weather, the stars, the oceans; nearly everything really.

It is said, “Ignorance of the law is no excuse.” But, ignorance is still ignorance and, fear is a powerful driver or motivator. Perhaps the only equal but opposite motivational force to fear is desire. Desire may well be what drove Abraham to determine what really set the World in motion and was behind that list of parts of nature just enumerated. That simple “discovery” by Abraham and the Covenantal Agreement Relationship that developed directly from it brought about the Jewish

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 21 of 52

People. The Jewish People have been, since then, a veritable “light” unto the other nations of the World; perhaps in the way of a lighthouse warning travelers at sea about the deadly dangers that exist near by should they stay on their current course; or, maybe as the illumination that discloses certain truths that would otherwise be difficult to see and through which others might substantially improve their lives as well as the lives of others around them; or, even as a light that will allow others to see what life really can have in store for them instead of their continuing to live their lives in the darkness of fear and ignorance where their ugly and evil inclinations more easily come to the fore and lead to nothing but doom and destruction.

That is where we stand today. We can see it in the news reports all the time. Barbaric individuals doing grotesque and uncivilized things to others and even to themselves where, for them, the only way that is deserved is what G-d did to such as they are when He brought the Flood; i.e. removal from the World. Then, in our everyday lives, we see and even know great numbers of individuals whose understanding of life is of a more positive approach. But which is still leaning towards the more primitive elements in “Man’s” nature, with ignorance, fear, belief in “luck” and all manner of supernatural things and stories that somehow quiet their baser tendencies but, which make them extremely vulnerable to falling off into the much baser and lurid ways where they could and often do become unredeemable and, like those removed by G-d during the Flood, are only a threat to and worthy only of removal from society. The two remaining groups are a small, now fractionated; Jewish People who are oriented towards doing good deeds for the most part, and, in far greater numbers, those who are taught that “belief” is what will bring them eternal life after suffering through life on Earth. The “believe and you will be saved” may be comforting to them, but in its pure and simple state, it is leaving Human beings much closer to the lives lived by those before Abraham ever existed and, perhaps, worse, before Noah, when “Mankind” was at, perhaps, its very lowest point.

Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 18 through 28 tells us of the beginning of the new world. That statement may seem a bit grandiose or even over stated given that after the flood waters receded and nature could begin to get back to itself, the sun and the moon and the stars were still up in the sky, as they were before, and, once the people and the animals saved from destruction on the ark, everything would be pretty much as it was.

But, there were changes that would make the world radically different than it had been before the Flood, at least from the perspective of “Mankind;” at that juncture Noah, his sons and their wives. Civility, as demanded by the Noahide Laws; the Seven Mitzvos or Commandments of Noah, would change everything. And here, as the New World, the newly revised history of “Mankind” is about to begin, the Torah directs its focus in its recounting of this pivotal moment in the history of “Mankind;” i.e. the history of the World. But, it does so in a way that is perplexing.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 22 of 52

“And these were the sons of Noah, the ones who came out from the ark: Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan.” (Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 18).

Rather than directing our attention to Noah, who, after all, was the “Man” who got us (the World) where we are in a way, the Torah, instead, lists the “sons” of Noah who it says went forth from the ark by name but also notes that Noah’s son Ham is the father of Canaan.

We really need to pause here and ask ourselves why the Torah would share that information with us at this juncture. Can we surmise that Canaan had not yet been born at the time that Noah and his family disembarked from the ark? We can. We were led to believe that there was no cohabitation between the sexes during the entire episode of the Flood. So, unless Ham’s wife had been pregnant just prior to the Flood and before she and her family; that is Noah and his family, boarded the ark, it would be safe to say Canaan came somewhat further on down the line.

But, still, even as the “new world;” that is as “Mankind” was now, about to go forward with Noah his wife, their three sons and their sons’ wives being the progenitors of the World’s population from then and onward, and, hopefully, a positive step forward from the almost total disappointment that the generation of man before Noah had been, the Torah, for some reason, takes time to alert us about Canaan and where he fits into the scheme of things. In the very next verse the Torah states that these three were the sons of Noah and from these the entire earth was overspread; or, perhaps, and from these (people) would be dispersed (throughout) all of the earth.

The Torah could have just told us that these were the three sons of Noah who went forth from the Ark and it could have named them, as it did, and, then, continued to say that from these three the entire earth would be filled with people.

Simple.

But, instead, the Torah identifies the three sons of Noah as those who went forth from the Ark and singles out one of Noah’s sons, Ham, as being the father of Canaan and then, in the next verse, the Torah explains how the earth would be filled with the offspring on these sons of Noah.

The commentators tell us that the mentioning of Canaan at this juncture and in this way was done because of the verses, Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 20 through 28 that follow and in which the Torah reports to us of the happenings dealing with Noah and his sons where Noah has succumbed to “drink” and, somehow, gets

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 23 of 52

discovered asleep in his tent and in the nude by his son Ham, who tells both of his brothers, who take certain steps while Noah was still “not himself” (drunk or under the influence of the wine and unconscious) to protect their father from experiencing any further such embarrassment or eventual embarrassment. We learn, also, of Noah’s reaction to how Ham and apparently treated him; or was it Canaan?

Please Note: We do not learn exactly what Ham had done to Noah, his father, we only learn that Noah was somehow made to at least feel victimized by Ham and we are told the way Noah chooses to pay his son Ham back for how Ham has treated (read: victimized) him; Noah; his own father, was to curse Ham’s son; Canaan.

Yes, we probably should and we will review the details of this incident. But, just on its face, there may be something to learn from what was clearly a low point for Noah, who, we know was surely not treated all that well by the commentators, as discussed earlier; i.e. Noah walked “with” G-d and Abraham walked “in front” of G-d. But, this is more than the words of commentators trying to explain or understand things that happened; gosh, nearly 4,359 years earlier according to some Biblical scholars. It is really the Torah’s own report at the “black letter” level; i.e. as it is written in the Torah with no “spin” or “interpretation;” just the facts as they are stated in the Torah.

Let us take this apart and put it back together at the simple “Black Letter” level and see if we can learn anything from it:

Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 20: “And Noah, a man of the earth (husbandman) planted a vineyard.” Rashi explains that Noah “saved” wine vines on the Ark and planted them when the Ark came to rest and after they disembarked. The verse says, “he planted a vineyard” so we can understand that Noah did not just have a vine or two with him on the Ark, but, rather, he had a sufficient number of grapevines that would yield a crop of grapes from which to make wine. Planting a vineyard would surely have taken a great deal of time. The growing of the grapes, we are guessing, would have taken quite a while before the grapes could have been harvested so that wine could be made. One would guess it would have been at least several months before a crop could have been harvested and wine made.

So, if we are to think that the transition being put forth for our edification by the Torah was something like Noah and his family disembarked from the Ark after the Flood and Noah got drunk; we really need to think again. That scenario in that time frame would have been impossible. But, for some reason, the Torah puts this incident about Noah’s becoming drunk and all that follows, which surely did have a profound effect on Noah and on how he felt about his son Ham because of it and what he did with regard to Ham to express his negative

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 24 of 52

feelings, was presented as the next most important thing to tell us. The World is in the process of getting re-launched and we are wondering why the Torah chooses, at this very special juncture in the history of “Mankind,” to jump ahead to an incident of such disappointment and disillusionment, sadness and which is almost like going backward to before the Flood when “Mankind’s” debauchery and incivility brought about the L-rd’s decision to find a way to start again and, in doing so, to, hopefully, leave behind that which caused the need for the Flood and hopefully see the better parts of “Mankind” flourish.

Before we put our analytical magnifying glass up to the situation described regarding Noah and his son Ham, we can study the simple surface level for the Torah’s message. We can come back to the incident between Noah and his son Ham afterwards.

Whatever was “going on” in the nature of “Man” that caused it to spin it into such a nosedive from a “worthiness” point of view such that G-d had to find a way to “push the restart button,” which was of course the selecting of Noah and his family to be the new beginning of “Mankind” and of course the Flood, which wiped the slate clean of all that was unacceptable to the L-rd, is apparently still in place and, perhaps always will be.

Right away, we need to recall that back in Genesis during the story of Creation at every step we were told “and G-d saw that it was “good” and on the sixth day, when G-d created “man” He, the L-rd, said it was “very good.”

So, now, with the Flood, that which had been “good” was now erased because it was “bad” or, is that not it? No. What had been created by G-d was indeed “good.” And, even “Man,” as created by G-d was surely “very good.” But, what “Man” had done with what G-d had created, including what “Man” had done with himself, was what was so unacceptable to the L-rd that He had to erase it in a certain way and start, for the most part, all over again. So much so, the major elements of creation; the universe; the World and its place in the universe, the plants and animals were all fine. But, with “Man” being the overarching reason for the creation of the World, it was clearly the L-rd’s hope that, given a new beginning, “Man’s” better nature would rise to the occasion and, that “Man’s” freedom of will would be harnessed sufficiently this time to avoid committing the kind of debauchery evil inclinations that were and that apparently still are part of the makeup of “Mankind” that resulted in the need for G-d to start over again as He did.

So, now, the Flood is done. The Ark has come to rest. The passengers have disembarked and life on earth is starting up again. Certain things can be surmised. Food for Noah and his family would have to have been first from the sea; i.e. fish and whatever sea vegetation was available would have had to suffice. Then as the land came back into flower, certain plants could be

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 25 of 52

harvested for food. After a certain amount of time, the animals that had been saved on the Ark and were, now, again, in the wild, could be counted on to have multiplied sufficiently to where they could be hunted for food as well. Until that development, taking an animal for food would result in its annihilation as a species. So, time, a considerable amount of time, would have had to have past before anything like a normal life could have expected to be lived. The Torah does not need to tell us about such basics as this because there simply is no other way that this could have happened.

What the Torah does come to tell us is what we could not presume or figure out on our own; and that which will have significance going forward; not just in the time of the Torah, but even until today as we write and as you read these words. We can see now that Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 18 through 27 are presented to make sure that we understand that as long as there are human beings walking on this earth, there will be a strain of evil, uncivilized animalistic, unrestrained tendencies in absolutely everyone of those human beings; every single one; even in you and even in me. The same uncontrolled uncaring wildness and brutality that was the way of the world of the generations of Noah and before is apparently permanently interwoven into the makeup of every human being. No matter how cute and cuddly they may be as babies or how well educated and capable they may seem as youngsters and as they grow into adulthood, human beings still have the capability to allow the natural tendency to act out as a barbarian and, thereby, supplant and replace all the wonderful humanity that is also part of their makeup. It is the downside risk of the L-rd's having given "Man" freedom of will.

There is nothing that can be done to purge that negative possibility from anyone. It is always there in everyone, and, therefore, everyone needs to be careful not to let it surface in them and, more importantly, not to act out in any way with that as the motivator. We need to protect against our own acting out as a barbarian and to watch out for situations where others may be doing so and to move to have such barbarians stopped.

Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 28 sums up Noah's life by noting how many years he lived after the Flood; which was three hundred and fifty years, and how many years he lived over-all, which was nine hundred and fifty years, and ends by telling us that he died.

But, before that plane and simple cap is placed on what we know about the man who was Noah, we get to learn about Noah's way of dealing with the adversity he apparently experienced at the hands of his son Ham. The Torah, in Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 21 to 25, tells us how Noah drank wine and became inebriated and that he was "uncovered" within his tent. The word in Hebrew, "Vahyesgal," is most often translated as "and he was uncovered." The Bal Haturim Chumash renders it as "and he uncovered himself." And, Rashi helps us by pointing out

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 26 of 52

that the word in the Torah is in the “Hispalet” conjunction, which is the reflexive, which means that “he uncovered himself” is a more accurate translation.

Under the circumstances, it is important that we know the details of what actually happened to Noah, since Noah’s reaction to the entire situation comprises the last bits of information that we learn about Noah before the Torah brings down the proverbial curtain on his role in the amazing drama that is the continuing history of “Mankind,” of which, remember, we, each of us, is an important part.

The commentators focus on lessons that can be learned about יַיִן (Yayeen) wine such as a root of the word for wine is related to the word “wail;” i.e. “heavy emotional crying.” They point out that drinking wine can lead to wailing. We can take that as something to note as interesting. But, whether the Torah is teaching that to us as its big news at this juncture is not exactly clear to us.

But, what we can know is that something apparently happened to Noah while he was in a state of inebriation, drunk, from the wine he had enjoyed and that he, on his own, had allowed himself to get so drunk as to be out of control and completely vulnerable.

From where did Noah’s ability or talent to make wine come? Well, we know that Noah carried the grape vines on to the Ark for the purpose of growing them later, which would surely have been for the purpose of making wine, which, in turn, would have been for experiencing the “feeling” that one gets when one drinks alcoholic beverages or indulges in other hallucinogenic substances.

Surely, Noah included the grape vines in the valuable cargo of the Ark because he wanted to continue “enjoying” his wine when the Flood would finally subside. So, wine had to have been a part of Noah’s life before the Flood. Now, was the wine experience that Noah wanted to be able to have now and again just the feeling of euphoria that alcohol gives us when it flows through our systems, or was he looking for an even greater escape from the regular day-to-day work of life on earth?

One could guess what it was like for man living on earth before or after the Flood. Everyday had to have been, pretty much, the same. Whatever one needed to do to gather food to eat had to be done on a constant basis. There may not have been the “reporting to work” as we do in our world to day, but the constant drive to do what needed to be done to sustain one’s existence had to take its toll on people to where any kind of euphoric escape would become a welcomed one. Night had to have been so dark that one would be forced to stay still until dawn being afraid of the dark must have been absolutely constant and paralytic. When, apparently, tent-like structures may have been the highest level of protection against the elements that primitive man may have been able to make for himself, getting drunk must have been a very welcomed relief from the stresses of being

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 27 of 52

what we, today, easily referred to as “cave men.” Cave men are apparently what Noah and the generation before and immediately after the Flood actually were; really, not much more advanced than cave men.

The Torah handles the situation described in Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 22 with great care and respect. We are not told exactly what was done to make Noah feel such animosity that he would curse his grandson Canaan as he does. We are not even told whether Ham, Noah’s son, or Canaan, Noah’s grandson, was the actual perpetrator of the infraction against Noah. There exists a rather wide range of suggested possibilities among the commentators including some very damaging and immoral ones. The only thing we absolutely need to know is that whatever it was that was done to “insult” Noah as he was, it was proof positive that the “evil” that was a driving force in “Mankind” and that resulted in the Flood, was and is still present in “Mankind” and would and will need to be dealt with by each and every person for as long as “Man” walks on the face of the earth, The freedom of will that makes man different than all of the other animals is also what can allow a person of civility to plunge himself or herself into the depths of depravity on the order of a barbarian; unworthy of being allowed to live; i.e. with no respect for human life; completely untrustworthy; capable of doing anything to anyone at any time; worse than any animal.

Because of the highly charged and extremely sensitive and personal type of subject matter that this verse is often interpreted to involve, many schools and teachers work around or even avoid dealing with this area when children of delicate ages are involved.

There is a question that does not appear to be raised by commentators with regard to Noah’s “tent” as mentioned or alluded to in Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 21, 22 and 23. We are told that Noah was naked in his tent when he fell into a drunken stupor. If Noah’s tent was closed on all sides, how would his son Ham have “seen his father’s nakedness?” And, when his brothers were informed of their father’s nakedness, why did they feel they needed to cover him? Why could they not have just closed the tent flap if it had indeed been left open? Why Noah needed to be covered over if he was “in” his tent is left unexplained and, apparently, unquestioned by our sages. The entire incident basically does not happen if the tent was enclosed and hiding Noah from view. Simply closing his tent up would have been sufficient by Noah’s son’s Shem and Jepheth even if they had learned of their father’s vulnerability from their brother Ham. How Ham might have “noticed” Noah’s nakedness is also not clear. If Noah was in his tent and if the tent was closed on all sides, how could anyone have “noticed” him? Perhaps Noah was shouting out meaningless words or phrases in his drunken stupor, which might have alerted Ham or Ham’s son Canaan of the opportunity to give vent to certain leanings towards doing things that were unnatural.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 28 of 52

Airing this question does not make things any better and there may not be sufficient details provided by the Torah to gain the best possible appreciation of what had actually happened. But, even without the missing details, there is a certain amount of illumination that comes from taking this into consideration.

Who did what to Noah is never made clear by the Torah. In Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 24 we are told that Noah came out of his drunken stupor and realized what his small son had done to him. Canaan was not Noah's son. But, there are those who point out that the phrase "small son" could well have meant "grandson," which might help explain why Noah focuses his diatribe of curses on Canaan.

In any event, the story involving Canaan helps confirm the timing we established above from our study of the vines Noah had brought onboard the Ark. The incident involving Canaan would have to have been when Canaan had at least reached his maturity, so we can easily place it anywhere from thirteen to twenty years following the disembarkation from the Ark. That would have been way beyond the time needed for the growing of the grape vines to where the grapes could have been harvested and from which wine could have been made. Much more may have happened between the disembarkation from the Ark and the time that this "incident" took place. But, of all that went on involving Noah, only this incident is considered worthy enough for the Torah to share with us before summing up the years of Noah after the Flood, 350 years, and all of the years of Noah, 950 years, before telling us that he died.

Others in the Chumash, the Torah, have their lives summed up by telling us how many years they lived and then telling us that they died. Here, with Noah, it is different. In Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 28 and 29 we first learn of how many years Noah lived after the Flood, 350, and, then, the total number of years he lived, 950, before being told that he died.

Surely, the Flood was a pivotal time. But, it is almost as if the Torah is telling us that Noah lived two lives; after the Flood being one life and his life in aggregate being the other.

Noah's life before the Flood was outstanding; literally. He stood out from almost all the rest of "Mankind" of that day. His life after the Flood was, apparently, productive, but, at the same time, less than laudatory. He must have worked hard to plant grape vines, to grow the grapes and to make wine. He may have been the "farmer" those who say he invented the plow thought him to be. But, he may have had the making of a drinking problem or an actual drinking problem as well.

Or, perhaps in a more positive side, Noah did have a rather uncanny way of knowing with whom he was dealing when it came to his family. While he was cursing his grandson Canaan, he blessed his other sons while almost being able to look into the future by saying what the descendants of his sons would be like.

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 29 of 52

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (June 20, 1808 to December 31, 1888), calls these verses, Genesis Chapter 9 Verses 25 to 27, the most far reaching prophecy ever uttered, for, in it, Noah encapsulated the entire course of human history.

Noah saw Canaan as being wicked and morally degraded. (Again, the Torah does not tell us what, if anything, Canaan did to Noah). Noah foresaw Shem as being life driven and, as we learn later, from Shem would come Israel; the Jewish People. Japheth was blessed with an eye for beauty and sensitivity; Shem was blessed with holiness and the divine presence. In the Stone Edition of the Torah, The Chumash, by Rabbi Nossou Scherman (1935 to Present) © 1993, 1994 by Mesorah Publications, Rabbi Scherman explains how these two major areas of man's innate creativity, the arts and inventiveness and, on the other hand, the spiritual truths as exemplified in Judaism. Rabbi Scherman presents an array of commentators, not the least of whom being Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who helps us see that without the temperance of the forces of Shem, the ideas of Torah and Mitzvos (commandments or good deeds), there is a tendency for the creativity of Japheth in the arts and in inventiveness to tend towards going off into areas that somehow drift towards heathenism, as seen in the Golden Calf, the ungrounded creativity; which historically ends badly. The influence of Shem tends to smooth this out – so, the two influences work better together. Rabbi Scherman concludes “such is the beauty of Japheth if it is divorced from the tents of Shem. Together, they are the perfection Noah envisioned; separate, they are the tragedy that fills the history of the World (“Mankind”).” (Page 45 comments on Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 27).

If we stopped reading the Sedrah of Noah right here, we would be able to take the following away from the Story of the World; i.e. the story of “Mankind;” the story of everyone of us that remains true even unto today: Noah's three sons, from whom all of us eventually must trace our roots, have elements we, all of us, would want as and would claim as our heritage; i.e. the DNA that drives us in everything we do. But, the bitter, or more aptly stated, the frightening truth, is that in each of these three men who were Noah's sons was also the negative elements; DNA, if you will, but certainly the “elements” that can be what leads man; people just like us, you and me even, to fall off the deep end and do things that are just what caused the L-rd to start all over again with Noah and his family. So, here we are. The lot has been cast. We can not escape it. Noah and his wife and his sons and their wives are the sources of all the driving sources of humanity that there has been from after the Flood until now.

So, everyone, every person, has the potential to be humane or to be inhumane; to be civilized or to act like a heathen. It is that simple. It is up to each one of us to control that which is unacceptable and that which would result in unacceptable actions.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 30 of 52

So, all those cute little stories about the pairs of animals climbing aboard the Ark, Noah's Ark, represent a great deal more than we, as youngsters, could have ever imagined. They would mean the L-rd's plan for the World is completely dependant on "Mankind" using our freedom of will; one person at a time, to choose wisely in such a way as to make life and the living of it holy; which is to say, special. But, one must know that the wrong choices made by those of us who choose to live lives that echo the actions of those who were killed during the Flood, are still possibilities and need to be protected against. Out of control, such barbarians can destroy the world, and, clearly, there is no remediation possible for such examples of "Mankind" gone wrong.

Genesis Chapter 10 Verses 1 through 32 presents in "name-by-name" detail the descendents of Noah out to some seventy different men, who each, apparently brought about families of their own and, eventually, settled all over the earth.

The Torah is very straight forward. It presents name-after-name on each of the three branches of Noah's family. Many editions of the Chumash, the Torah, will even include a kind of diagram showing who begat who from beginning to end. Helpful. There is also a Talmudic tradition that there are seventy primary nations, which is based on this list according to Rabbeinu Bachya, who lived in the eleventh century.

It does not appear to have been the custom at the time of the writing of the Torah to include the names of the women who gave birth to the men whose names appear on the list of seventy descendents of Noah. Or, for some reason, the Torah did not deem it necessary for us to know who the various women were who were involved in populating the world again after the Flood. However, the DNA contributed by Noah's wife and by the wives of his three sons had and still do have all as much to do with who we are; who everyone who ever lived was from Noah and beyond as that of their male counterparts. Noah gets singled out as being the source of all those who follow. Of course, the contribution of his wife and her own family's line and, too, the contributions of the family lines of the wives of Noah's three sons surely are part of the heritage of "Mankind." It all surely goes back to Adam and Eve, and we must know that whatever hope we have for "Mankind" to rise above whatever could innately bring about the kind of evil ways that resulted in the Flood and that may have shown itself in whatever it was that Ham or his son Canaan did to Noah, is still there in everyone and must be realized as that which can not be allowed to continue to be acted out.

Tendencies are just that; tendencies. But, actions are different. A bell can not be un-rung. This is very serious stuff. No more is the story of Noah all about the Ark. The Ark carried much much more than the pairs of animals it saved. Also, onboard the Ark was the future of "Mankind," which had in it the potential for good and the potential for evil. It absolutely must be said that if allowed to thrive, those who are, that is those who choose to be evil doers will turn the world into

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 31 of 52

everything that the Lord has shown us He did not want the world to be. It is up to “Mankind” to protect the world, which is to say to protect “Mankind” itself from the evil that some of “Mankind” can and might actually wreck upon the rest of “Mankind” in general. Such dangerous members of “Mankind” will always have to be stopped in their tracks before they can gain momentum.

We see this today in the form of those who are typically referred to as “terrorists;” witness attacks from as large as what was done on 9/11 to random attacks by a “madman” driving a truck into pedestrians and bicycle riders on the path of a city park. Though they may indeed terrorize people, calling such individuals “terrorists” does more to congratulate them than to properly label them. A much more accurate description for these individuals, in our opinion, would be “barbarians.” And, the way to deal with barbarians must be to stop them as early on as possible and to insure that such individuals are “secured” completely in such ways that they are not able to repeat such actions again. That is to say, that there must not be any thought that such perpetrators; such barbarians, can ever be remediated.

The Soncino Edition of the (Chumash) Pentateuch and Haftorahs Edited by the Late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire Dr. J. H. Hertz identifies each name on the list of seventy of Noah’s descendants and helps us by identifying where they actually were located and, where able, offers an explanation as to what each man’s name represented; or, why it may have been selected for that person. The positive feelings we get from all of that information can be very encouraging. What can concern one about this “information,” however, is that in most instances babies are named shortly after they are born. If the names of these seventy men came from the locals from where they eventually settled, then one would have to assume that they were born in that local, which was not always or not usually the case. Once again, the Torah provides names. The meanings of the names of the “nations” are open to interpretation. But, interpretations of what those names might mean, no matter how convincing they may appear to be, may not be actually so. We welcome all such efforts to gain a better understanding of what the Torah is sharing with us. In this instance, with the meaning of all the many, i.e. seventy, names of the descendants of Noah through his sons, we can at the very least know that there is no known similar list of any kind in any other culture or religion that tracks back the beginnings of humanity as this one in Genesis Chapter 10. For that reason, this chapter in Genesis is often referred to as a “Messianic” document.

As Genesis Chapter 10 comes to an end in Verse 32, we are reminded that the long and detailed list of men’s names just enumerated were the source of all the many nations that “separated on the earth after the Flood.” Or, was it “divided in the earth after the Flood.” We are told that this “dividing up” or “separation” of the many people, all descendants of Noah and his sons, but we are not told how that dividing up or separation came about.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 32 of 52

Genesis Chapter 11 Verses 1 through 32 is where the Torah now focuses on how and why the world got populated by “Mankind” after the Flood. What is or what might be considered odd about this part of the history of “Mankind” is that what might have been a big plus in the nature of “Man” becomes or, rather, turns out to be a negative.

We learn, right away, in Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 1 that everyone, all of these many people, were “of one language.” Rashi explains that the language that was spoken by everyone was “Lashon Kodesh,” which is to say, “The Holy Language” of Hebrew. Actually, that everyone spoke one language would make sense. After all, there was nothing that happened that would have brought about the breaking off of their language into other languages.

Under normal circumstances, one would applaud the ability of people to communicate with one another openly and without the need for intermediaries to translate or to interpret from one language to another. There is, after all, a certain amount or a degree of what might be called “nuance” that is, or would be very hard to include when one is attempting to translate from one language to another.

We would think that if there was a universal language, there would be a good chance that the people who spoke it, which at that time following the Flood was absolutely everyone in the world, would bring about what we would all want today or ever; peace and harmony.

But, that first verse in Genesis Chapter 11 goes a bit further though in telling us about the state of “Mankind” following the Flood. In addition to telling us that everyone spoke the same language it tells us “and the whole earth was of one language and of one speech.”

Wait. Isn't “of one language” and “of one speech” saying the same thing? The Stone Edition translates it differently: “The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose.”

There is quite a difference from “of one speech” to “of a common purpose.” We need clarity. שְׂפָה אֶחָדָה Shaw-Faw Eh-Chaws translates as “one language” rendered in the various Chumasheem (Bibles). But, דְּבָרִים וְאֶחָדִים OO-DeVaw-Reem Achaw-Deem ... that really does not translate as “one speech” or exactly as “of common purpose” either.

דְּבָרִים “De-Vaw-Reem” is a word we know very well as the title of the Fifth Book of the “Chumash” or the Bible, which translates in that application as “words.” We also know “DeVaw-Reem” from the Ten Commandments where the root of the

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 33 of 52

word for commandments is בְּרִיךְ Devar but the feminine is used, “DeeBros” even though either DeVaw-Reem or DeeBros would be correct according to the Ben Yahuda’s English-Hebrew Hebrew-English Dictionary, Page 42, Washington Square Press.

They all work. But, in our Sedrah (Parsha) of Noah, Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 1, what is it that the Torah means by “DeVaw-Reem Achaw-Deem?” “Achad” can mean “one,” “someone” or “first.” In the plural form, “Achaw-Deem” can mean “some,” “few” or “several.” So, what would seem to fit with the first part of the verse, “and it was (that) the entire earth (everyone) was of one language ...” would be “and of a few or of words or things or statements or, perhaps, ways of thinking or opinions.”

At this juncture, whether going by the translations that have been out there or by the ones suggested here, it would appear that, to some extent at least, the “Flood” had worked. The L-rd had deemed it necessary to start over with “Mankind” due to the rampant debauchery to which “Mankind” had devolved. At the same time, we are aware, from the way Noah cursed his grandson Canaan that there was “something” within “Man” that still harkens back to what resulted in the L-rd’s decision to bring about the “Flood” and restart with Noah and Noah’s family. So, for sure, “Mankind” was not what would or could be called “angelic;” far from it. But, the people who were making up “Mankind” following the Flood were apparently one community.

A further demonstration of the way the people after the “Flood” were as one large entity is found in the very next verse, Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 2, “And it came to pass, when they journeyed from the East that they found a plain in the Land of Shinar and they dwelt there. Shinar is the general region of Mesopotamia, or Babylonia encompassing Babel/Babylon. The people had lived in the highlands of Armenia before migrating to Shinar according to Vulbert Ancient History 25. Rashi explains that the “flat place” was able to contain the entire population, which tells us just how important it was to the people to stay together as a group.

The Torah then reports that the people worked together to develop bricks with which to build. Rashi explains that the use of stones for building was not available in the flat area of Babel. Bricks were made from local clay and were usually baked by the sun. But, the Torah tells us that the people developed or decided to use furnaces to bake their building bricks because that would make their bricks much harder.

The Torah also tells us that the people would use a natural product for either joining or sealing the surfaces of the bricks they made. Bitumen, a naturally occurring oil related material, is most likely the “slime” that was used for this purpose.

In Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 4, we learn something rather revealing about Noah's descendants directly following the "Flood." The people come up with a plan to build a city and a tower that reaches high into the heavens and make for themselves a name lest they (or to protect themselves from) getting disbursed across the land."

That is interesting. Working backwards from the end of the verse, we can see the underlying motivation of the people of that time for at least developing a name themselves as a people, or perhaps it is that same concern that motivated them to decide to build a tower that will reach to the heavens and also to build a city. That motivation is the fear that they had of some how being divided up as a people and relocated or, perhaps dislocated from one another to all parts of the world.

The idea of their establishing a "name for themselves" makes one think. To establish a "name" for one's self would only mean something if there were other people who would value or appreciate or respect those people so that their "name" would mean something. But, without any other people to regard one's people from the outside, building a "name" for their people would be all but meaningless. So, we must ask, "Why would the Torah mention it as a possible motivation for why the people build the Tower?"

Staying together as a people was apparently very important to the decedents of Noah and his family following the "Flood." Their fear of being somehow subdivided and alienated from one another is motivated from something, but we are not told what that motivation might have been.

Who knows? Could it be something related to what had happened that brought about the "Flood" in the stunning results where everyone but Noah and his family were destroyed? Were the people afraid that history might repeat itself? Did they fear that if the people some how spun off into segmented groups, one group might become the next "Noah and his family" and, then everyone else would get eliminated by a "Flood" or by some other "natural" phenomenon.

That would be a pretty frightening thing to process; especially for the very primitive people who were the ones we are studying. The "Flood" was only known to them by reputation. But, it was surely not ever going to be forgotten for generations. So, these first post-Flood people can now more clearly be understood. They were more than afraid. They were terrified of being judged by G-d as failing to make the grade and, like so many of their predecessors, they would be killed in favor of a few, like Noah, who were judged somehow better than everyone else. The whole concept is frightening beyond measure when we consider it today. How much more so would it have been for those who had been born in the shadow of the "Flood?" This was, or, we should say, must have been, frightening to them beyond belief.

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 35 of 52

Their first thought every day must have been, “How can we protect ourselves against being destroyed by the L-rd like He did to the people killed by the “Flood?” Their initial thought that made sense to them was to do what we might refer to as “circling the wagons,” which, for them, was to live as a community, which, they would hope, would eliminate the possibility for one of them becoming, like Noah; which might result in the death of everyone else.

This will hopefully bring what we learn in Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 4 into sharper focus so that we can better appreciate what these still very primitive people were up against and how and why they did what they did.

Now, with, hopefully a better appreciation for what was motivating the way the descendents of Noah and his family were choosing to live, we can process and understand what the Torah shares with us next in Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 5, “And G-d came down to see the city and the Tower that had been built by the children of (the) man.”

We should also point out that that the word for G-d that the Torah uses here is “Yud Kay Vav Kay’ as opposed to “EILoKeemM,” which is usually referred to as the “L-rd.” The former name is usually taken to be reflective of the more compassionate side of G-d and the latter the more “rules” oriented side of G-d; i.e. the L-rd.

With that in mind, that is that G-d, in G-d’s more compassionate way, has come down to “take a look” at what “Mankind” has been up to since the “Flood.” The idea of G-d “coming down” as if G-d is on high some place and is not aware of something without “coming down” to check it out has got to be antithetical to how anyone of us envisions the Almighty; omnipotent, omnipresent one and only G-d could be. Even little kids would not buy into that idea; that G-d has to “come down” to check up on “Mankind.” There are those, according to Rashi, such as Rabbi Tanhuma bar Abba (Talmudic scholar of the fourth century of the common era who was one of the rabbinic scholars known as Ammoroiam, who were those scholars who followed the Tannayeim of the Mishnaic Period, and whose discussions became what is known as the Talmud, where Jewish Law was debated and upon which Jewish Law today is still based) who try to help us learn something from this description in the Torah that makes us wonder why is the Torah “playing with us” like this? “G-d came down to see ...” Rabbi Tanhum bar Abba tells us that G-d, indeed, does not have to come down to see what is going on but the Torah tells us that G-d did to teach a lesson to those who become our judges, which is not to condemn an offender until they, the judges themselves, understand everything involved in the case at hand; up close and personal.

That is a good lesson for the Torah to teach us and, perhaps, that is the reason the Torah tells us that G-d “came down.” But, there may be another reason,

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 36 of 52

which is, perhaps, of equal significance. Again, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of those about whom we are speaking. The people of the day, as we discussed above, lived in the shadow of the memory of the “Flood” and only knew what had happened before, during and directly after the “Flood” as they were informed by their forebears, Noah, his wife, their three sons the their sons three wives. So, what could they have known? At the very basic level, they knew that ten generations of people, all descendants of Adam and Eve, lived on Earth and that, for some reason, G-d singled out Noah and his sons and their wives and had them build an Ark, fill it with pairs of male and female animals from each species; of animals and of birds, and then, there was an all consuming Flood that destroyed all the animals and birds as well as all the human beings who remained on the Earth, and that after a certain amount of time the Flood waters receded and Noah and his family disembarked from the Ark and, over time, their offspring developed into the populations that was now settled in the area we now call Babylonia and that the people all spoke the same language and do (did) what they can to maintain themselves as a community rather than allowing themselves to devolve in to groups of segmented peoples or nations.

That is what these people know (knew). And that is what we know they did. We can be fairly certain that to these people the factors that brought about the “Flood” were not necessarily known or understood by them. Did these people know how debauched “Mankind” had become to where “Mankind” was almost a complete disappointment to G-d? Maybe they did; but, not necessarily. Whether the people who lived after the “Flood” knew much about those who came before the “Flood,” they did know that, save for the incident of the “Flood,” those who lived before the “Flood” and who died in the “Flood” had a lot in common with those who came after the “Flood.” The key difference is that the ones who came before the “Flood” had no idea what was going to happen to them or, perhaps, even why whatever was going to happen to them was going to happen to them. They were just over come by and died in the “Flood.” Those who came after the “Flood” knew about the “Flood” and how effective it was in destroying the population of the world of people back then. So, the difference is fairly obvious. Those who came after the “Flood” would had to have been conscious that at any time and with no warning something like a “Flood” could come and kill them outright and that there was no way for them to protect themselves against such an occurrence. They could deduce that if it, a Flood or a similar disaster, were to take place again and if there was to be a “Noah-like” personage who would be saved by an ark or other such device and have some kind of forewarning as Noah had, then it would be wise to do what one could to be near that “Noah-like” person so that when he (the Noah-like person) got the warning and any special instructions he might get, they (everyone else) might be able to save themselves as well from the coming destruction.

It is just logical. Nobody wants to die. With the knowledge of the “Flood” still hanging in the air, so to speak, one would surely look for absolutely any port in

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 37 of 52

the coming storm, whether one knew a storm was actually coming or not. Staying together as a community would go a long way to making such frightened individuals feel safer should the next “Noah-like” person get the message that a second “Flood,” for whatever reason, was on its way.

We really can not get a better understanding and appreciation for what drove the descendants of Noah, his wife, their three sons and their sons’ wives unless we get a feel for how they lived, which must have been in constant fear of the next “Flood.”

And, that had to lead to other thoughts of how they might somehow neutralize or at least reduce the possibilities or the chances that there would be another “Flood,” which would mean that they would be destroyed. That thinking could surely have led such primitive people to do whatever they could to take their anti-Flood initiative directly to the cause of such devastation. So, whatever their understanding of G-d might have been, it would have guided their actions in trying to confront their fears by doing what they could to take their case directly, or at least as directly as they could, to the source of the danger.

Since G-d was not in their midst, they would have to go to where G-d would logically have been located. The result of that thinking could certainly have lead them to the building of a Tower reaching up to the heavens above in hopes of being able to come “face-to-face” with G-d and to somehow neutralize the cause of their constant and unrelenting fear of the coming of the next “Flood,” which could have had their names on it. What the people who lived following the “Flood” did may sound utterly ridiculous to us today from our comfortable vantage point. But, they were doing what they could do to try to bring peace into their lives. As long as one lives in fear, for them, there is no peace.

G-d, in his compassionate way of interfacing with “Man” would know that “Mankind” was up to when “Mankind” was building the stone (brick) Tower up to the heavens, but there would probably need to be an interaction or an in person visit by G-d in order to learn why man was doing it.

Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 5 continues with G-d seeing the city and the Tower that “Mankind” following the “Flood” had been building. The last part of the verse referring to the city and the Tower says, “... which the children of (the) Man had built.” When it says “the children of (the) Man” it is not referring to Noah and his sons. In saying “the Man” the Torah is going back, way back at this juncture, to Adam, who was “the” Man as in “the first Man.”

The Torah does not see a difference between the people who are the descendants of Noah and Noah’s sons from the generations of Noah and before who were eliminated during the “Flood.”

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 38 of 52

One would think that if the L-rd was trying to avoid having to start all over again with a completely new World including an all new strain of humanoid it might make sense to do it the way He chose to be; i.e. by finding a particular person and those near to that person who would be the best of the worst and to then destroy everyone else and allow the best of the worst to be the progenitors of the next iteration of human beings. It is hard for us to think like that, but there is certain logic to it.

So, now, at this point, after the Flood and after the children of Noah have done what they were commanded to do and repopulated the World, when the L-rd is looking at what "Mankind" has evolved into, not in terms of what they are doing with their lives as a people, it is rather surprising that the Torah would refer to those people as the sons or the children of Adam and not as the children of Noah. It is not that the Torah is wrong. Because, we know that we all, eventually, can and must trace our roots back to Adam and Eve. But, by elimination the vast majority of people who were unacceptable to the L-rd to where the L-rd chose to eliminate every one of them, might not the Torah have focused, at least to some extent on the net effect of having "started over again" with the survivors of the weeding out process; i.e. Noah and his family?

The answer is, "No;" which tells us also that nothing had really changed except that the worst of the worst are gone and the animals that were saved on the Ark are probably ones that were not subjected to the debauchery and unnatural acts that their predecessors had apparently experienced. But, "Mankind" had not been improved by what was done; i.e. by the "Flood."

But, now, that makes sense. Freedom of will is just that; the freedom to think and to do as one wants to do. For "Mankind" to change, to be the "Mankind" that the L-rd apparently hopes that "Mankind" can be is up to "Mankind." Nothing has changed other than the message that the L-rd was not pleased and brought about the "Flood" to do what He had hoped would result in a "Mankind" that would be closer to His hoped for result.

We could and, perhaps, we should ask that of ourselves today. How is "Mankind" measuring up to the hoped for standards of the L-rd? Well, we are still here; you might retort. But, then, we know that the L-rd promised that He would never again do what He did in bringing about the "Flood" as noted above. The rainbow after rainstorms would be the constant reminder to the L-rd of that Promise He made.

Just still being here is, therefore, really not enough of an answer. "Mankind" is making progress" is perhaps a better observation as regards to how we are doing measured up against the L-rd's hope for us; for "Mankind." The existence of inhumane aberrations such as ISIS and other barbaric segments or individuals is proof that there is a long way to go before "Mankind" can be said to be more on

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 39 of 52

target than not in our march towards being all that the L-rd hoped and still hopes “Mankind” would and could eventually be.

And, in looking at it in this way, we can better understand why the Torah says in Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 5 “... which the children of (the) man; i.e. Adam built.” The Torah itself takes and provides us with a long term perspective view of the World, which is to say of “Mankind,” and, from that vantage point, we learn that literally everything counts. (See: Commentary on the Sedrah of Chayei Sarah entitled “Everything Counts” by Drew Kopf 2015 at the following URL address: <http://www.echelonartgallery.com/artists/dgk/paintings/jewish/05-chayei-sarah/chayei-sarah.html> )

In Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 6, the Torah gives us what almost sounds like the official report directly from the L-rd as to His take on what He saw when He came down to observe what “Mankind” was doing. “And the L-rd (the compassionate form is used) said: Behold (or Yes} they are one people and all of them have one language and now there will be nothing withheld from them; anything or all that they want to do.”

When you think about it, if someone was putting together a company or a team, having people able to communicate well and easily with one another and to have an appreciation for the common goals of the organization while being of a singular purpose, would be very desirable things and things that the leadership of such an organization would work hard to create or to develop.

So, when the L-rd sees what appear to be these very features in “Mankind” as it developed following the flood, it might be expected that the L-rd would be pleased. After all, except for the negative “experience” we learned about involving Canaan and his grandfather Noah, we know of no other activities by anyone in all of “Mankind” following the Flood that might be considered to be negative.

Taken by itself, the L-rd’s statement in Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 6 seems to simply state the facts and evaluates “Mankind” as “having its act together;” that it (“Mankind”) could do almost anything it (they) wanted to do.

If the Torah stopped right there, we might be able to take this evaluation of “Mankind” by the L-rd as a pretty good grade on “Mankind’s” second report card.

But, the Torah has more to tell us which gives us a better understanding of the way the L-rd apparently evaluated “Mankind’s” progress after the Flood. And, His “pretty good” does not seem to be that low of a grade at all. Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 7 says “Come let’s go down and confound (confuse – according to Rashi) there their language that they may not understand (as in may not hear since

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 40 of 52

“YeeshMa-oo” translates as “hear”} one another’s speech; (i.e. the language of a man’s friend).

Rashi notes that the Torah uses the same terminology or format to describe what the people might have said, “Come let us build ...” and what the L-rd may have said in presenting this “issue” to us. There are those who interpret Rashi as meaning to tell us that the “punishment corresponds to the deed” (The Sharfman and Isaiah JPS Linear Translation © 1949 page 95 of Genesis Volume I). But, whether Rashi was going that far in his commentary at this juncture is rather open to interpretation. Rashi is one who says it like it is. We are leaning towards leaving Rashi’s words for what they are; the Torah may be using this format to point out the importance to us, but not necessarily turning the actions of the L-rd into a symbolic “crime and punishment.”

What we might ask is why would the L-rd say, “Come let us go down...“when He was apparently already ‘down’ there? And, to whom was the L-rd addressing these remarks when He said, “Come, let us ...” Is the L-rd using what is termed “The We of Majesty” or was there someone such as an angel or angels who would be the ones He would have do what would need to be done to make it difficult for communication to be effective among “Mankind.” We use that phrase rather than to “confuse their language” or the like because the words the Torah uses does not necessarily translate to “confound” or “confuse” but rather to be audible or to be heard. “Aster Lo Yeshme-oo” Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 7 the word Yesh me-oo is from the word “shemah” which is the same “shemah” that is in “Shemah Yesro-ail” which is :Hear Oh Israel” which means “to hear.”

The net effect may have been the same whether the people could not hear one another well enough to communicate easily or whether their language some how got “discombobulated” (a technical term); either way they would not be able to work together as well as they had been doing before. How the L-rd accomplished this is not disclosed; only that it was done. Once the people were no longer of one language or for whatever reason were unable to communicate effectively among themselves, the tendency for those who could communicate with each other would logically have been to stay among themselves and to eventually drift away from the rest of the population.

Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 8 confirms this as it tells us, “and the L-rd (in His compassionate name form) scattered them from there upon the face of the entire earth and they ceased to continue to build the city.

Are we even told what it was that concerned the L-rd in either of His ways; i.e. rule oriented or compassionate leaning, about the way that “Mankind” had evolved after the Flood; i.e. that they spoke one language and chose to live as one singular community or even that they were building a city in the flat area now known as Babylon and that they were building a Tower? Apparently we are not.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 41 of 52

They just were and, for some reason, what they were doing was unacceptable to G-d.

We can see, as we discussed above, that “Mankind” after the Flood might very well have been afraid that another Flood would claim them and that staying as one people might go along way in protecting them against that eventuality. There are commentators who interpret “Man’s” building of a Tower as a veritable threat against the L-rd. We can see it as a way to get closer to the L-rd but to see it as an attack against the L-rd seems to be more conjecture than an actuality.

The L-rd’s decision to do what He did in causing “Mankind” to dissolve itself into different communities rather than to remain as one single people and to cause these groups to be fractionated entities and to migrate to areas all over the earth is just simply done. There is no explanation given. Nor is there a “How it was done” explanation given either. Poof! It just happened and was reported. But, since the form of G-d’s name that is used by the Torah at this juncture is the compassionate one, we are led to believe that G-d was not doing what He was doing in scattering “Mankind” all over the world and causing “Mankind” to speak different languages so much as a punishment but, rather, as a way to help “Mankind” to get out of its own way and to become all that its potential can allow it to become.

In a way, these verses, Genesis Chapter 11 Verses 7 and 8, can be seen as pivotal and as important as any verses in the entire Torah; including the very first verse, “In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth ...” Genesis Chapter 1 Verse 1. It is as if “Mankind” needed “pruning” in different ways like a plant might need to enable it to thrive. The uniqueness of “Mankind” in having freedom of will is one thing and is still there, but, apparently, a certain amount of guidance or redirection or help was needed to get “Mankind” on the right track to differentiate itself from the other animals on the earth and to rise to unfathomable heights to which freedom of will can allow, if not enable, “Mankind” to reach.

What would have happened to the World, which is to say to “Mankind,” had the L-rd allowed those who came after the Flood to have stayed as they were; speaking one language; being of one singular purpose; doing what they could do to protect themselves from being wiped out by the next Flood by staying as one unified people and close to whoever might be the next “Noah-like” person who might be worthy of saving from such destruction, and hoping to be able to “hitch a ride” with him, that “next Noah-like person, when the next Flood strikes.

Living life waiting for the proverbial next shoe to drop is not living. “Mankind” apparently was put on this earth to do much more than just tread water. “Man” needs to create. It is entirely possible that the L-rd saw that the way “Mankind” after the Flood was attempting to get through life was not as healthy as it might be and, without some help and guidance from the L-rd, “Mankind” would make no

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 42 of 52

meaningful forward progress. It may not have been so much as a punishment when the L-rd confounded their language but, rather, as a way to get “Mankind” to get back to the L-rd’s first commandment, which was “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” Being fruitful can mean more than just having children. It can also mean to be creative. Huddling together as a mass of humanity in fear of the next “Flood” would simply not allow “Man” to “fill the earth,” which was part of that first commandment. Now, with the help of G-d, and a gentle hand at that, since no one really had to die as was of course the case in the Flood, now, “Mankind” would be able to go on to reach its full potential; to “be fruitful” in every way possible and “to fill the earth.”

The Torah then proceeds to tie what amounts to a virtual bow around the entire subject of what happened with regard to “Mankind” following the Flood and how the way the people of that day had been endeavoring to live their lives and what the L-rd did to get “Mankind” reoriented towards its (towards G-d’s intended purpose); glory. In Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 9 the Torah reports, “Therefore or because of that which had happened, the name of this place was called “Babel,” because in this place the L-rd (in the benevolent form of the name) confounded the language of the entire earth and from then or from that place the L-rd (again in His benevolent name) scattered them upon the face of the entire earth.”

We know there are those who see all sorts of negativity in the people of the days following the Flood: building a Tower as they were doing and there are those who project on to the story how G-d knocked the Tower down. But, neither of these interpretations is supported by the words in the text of the Torah itself. Nowhere are we told that the Tower is destroyed or knocked down. There are similarly no negative appraisals regarding the facts that the people all spoke one language and that they lived in one area. It is simply observed and, then, somehow, something is done that brought about the (that is, G-d’s) desired change.

Our approach is to try and appreciate who these early people who lived after the Flood were and what could and would have motivated them to act as they were reported by the Torah to have acted. We believe that the words in the Torah support this view and to try and turn the words of the Torah into meaning what might make a “better” or a more “action-packed” story out of it might be an interesting exercise, but one that would risk allowing readers to misunderstand what we believe is the Torah’s actual message.

The Torah now details a generation at a time from Noah’s son Shem through to “Avram”, who later, of course, will be renamed Abraham. In a methodical way, we learn how old Shem was when his wife gave birth to the next leader of the next generation. We are also told that Shem lived a certain number of years and that he fathered other boys and girls. It does not state that Shem died. The same details are provided to us when a son was born and how old the father was at the time and how long that father lived and that he fathered other sons and

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 43 of 52

daughters. Finally, we are told of the birth of “Avram” and of his two brothers. We do learn that the father of “Avram,” Terah, died in Haran, which now sets the scene for the beginning of the Jewish People.

There is an interesting statement in the closing moments of our Sedrah when Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 31 tells us “Terah took his son “Avram” and Lot, the son of Haran, his grandson and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of “Avram” his son and they departed with them from Ur Kasdim to go to the Land of Canaan. They arrived at Haran and settled there.” The Torah states this in an apparent contradiction to the opening verses of the very next Sedrah, when, in Genesis Chapter 12 Verse 1 it says, “Now the L-rd said to “Avram,” “Get thee out of the country and from thy kindred and from thy father’s house unto the land that I will show you.”

Why would the Torah report that the L-rd commanded “Avram” to leave his homeland in the Sedrah of Lech Lecha when just a few verses earlier at the conclusion of Parshas Noah (the Sedrah of Noah) where we learn that “Avram” had already left his home with his father and family?

The apparent contradiction resulted in a well known “Machlokes” (argument or disagreement) between Rashi and the Iban Ezra. Rashi holds that the Torah in Lech Lecha is telling “Avram” to separate himself from there even further and leave (also) your father’s home (in Haran). Rashi sees the initial migration of Terah, which Rashi says was voluntary and preceded the commandment found in Lech Lecha chronologically.

The Iban Ezra takes a different approach by reminding us that “ain mukdam u’leiuchar be-Torah,” which literally means “there is no ‘earlier’ or ‘later’ in the Torah.” To the Iban Ezra, the chronology was simply reversed, which would explain everything.

The Ranbam, however, rejects the Iban Ezra’s interpretation because, if it was so, then the lead figure in the last few verses of Parshas (the Sedrah of) Noah would be “Avram” and not “Avram’s” father Terah.

The Rav (Joseph Ber Soloveitchik יוסף דב הלוי סולובייצ'יק February 27, 1903 - April 9, 1993) comes to the defense of the Iban Ezra by explaining that “Avram’s” father Terah experienced “hirkurei teshuvah” (stirrings of repentance) and eventually became a “Baal Teshuvah” i.e. one who has repented, and was, indeed, the one who was responsible for making the migration to Haran, which is on the way to the Land of Israel (the Land of Canaan), in order to begin living his new life. The Rav notes that the Torah, at the end of Parshas (the Sedrah of) Noah, makes Terah the main focus of the relocation initiative instead of “Avram,” because the Torah wanted to emphasize how Terah “came around” to recognizing the L-rd as the One-and-Only G-d and how he had abandoned his

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 44 of 52

lifelong career and business and livelihood as a manufacturer of idols for use by heathens in their worship of their many gods (small “g”) in which they believed.

The Rav goes on to point out that keeping “Avram” out of the “limelight” so to speak at this moment in favor of focusing on “Avram’s” father Terah also serves to remind us how effective “Avram” actually was in “educating” and “inspiring” and “supporting” at least his own father, if to a lesser extent his other family members with regard to the covenantal agreement with the L-rd. And, as the Rav notes further, there will be ample time for the Torah to focus on “Avram” later on.

One could ask why the Torah does not do the same delineation of “who-fathered-who” for Noah’s other two sons and follow the descent of those generations in a similar way that was done for Shem. It may even seem self-serving to some that the Torah focuses exclusively on the branch of “Mankind” that led to the formation of the Jewish People ... but, then what we really need to ask is what can we learn from this list of the ten generations of this particular branch of “Mankind” between Shem and “Avram” (Abraham)? Why does the Torah do this at all? What can we learn from what the Torah has documented for us here and in this way?

In this day and age, when we are able to learn all about our ancestral lineage with the scientific advantage of DNA analysis, there may be a leaning towards taking a “Ho-Hum” attitude regarding the Torah having invested so much effort to document Abraham’s lineage for us as it did at the end of our Sedrah. Clearly, the Torah wanted everyone to know for all time that there was, indeed, an uninterrupted line of descent from Adam, the First Man, to Noah, and through Shem, Noah’s son, directly to Abraham.

Do we really need this right now? Again, we have the advantage of living in the comfort of the year 2018. The Torah was written initially for those who were living 400 years after the children of Jacob, who had settled by necessity in Egypt and who had become and who remained slaves there for all that time and who were now, then, about to learn that their prayers to be freed (by G-d) were in the process of being answered. But, at least of equal importance, the soon to be newly freed slaves needed to gain an appreciation and a respect, if not a belief in the validity of the story which is offered as the foundation for all that is (was) to come after in light of the all-important covenantal agreement made between the L-rd and Father Abraham.

Every single word of the story related by the Torah is there (here) to help drive relentlessly forward towards creating a way to live in a way that will be in compliance with that covenantal agreement. All who do so, that is, those who choose to live their lives in accordance with the covenant that was struck between the L-rd and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, will reap the benefits as

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

© 2018 Drew Kopf

Page 45 of 52

outlined in the Shema Yisroel, and living their lives in that way they will, at the same time, serve as a virtual light unto the other nations of the World.

A sky view summary may also help us here. The World was created and everything was judged by G-d to be good, good, good. "Mankind" was created and "Mankind" was judged by G-d to be very good. "Mankind," over ten generations yielded one man, Noah, who was seen to "walk with G-d" and who could serve as a way for G-d to restart "Mankind" in hopes of achieving a better result than the ten prior generations, which had been judged, save for Noah, to be completely unworthy. The Flood was G-d's way of doing that. "Mankind" evolved after the Flood with certain flaws and was doing what it thought would be a safe way to live in light of what the earlier generations had experienced. G-d saw the way "Mankind" was living was unproductive; stagnant, and took actions to "shake things up" for "Mankind" in a non-violent and non-destructive way, but, instead, by confounding the one single language of "Mankind," which resulted in the formation of separate communities of people who migrated to the various other areas across the earth and began to explore the world that G-d had created for "Mankind" in and on which to live to the fullest extent of "Mankind's" own and unique abilities. One man, Abraham, reasoned that there was something, some force, someone, some power, or some creator of the world and, therefore, of "Mankind," and, in doing so, got to know and dialogue with G-d. From this dialogue evolved a covenant that established guidelines by which "Man" could choose to live and, thereby, be in harmony with what the L-rd had intended, and still intends for "Man" to be in a kind of honor code. Abraham and his offspring committed to the covenant and others, who were not of Abraham's family, joined Abraham's emerging covenantal community. This covenantal community eventually became known as the Jewish People and, eventually, the offspring of the forefathers served 400 years as slaves in Egypt until they were finally freed by the L-rd through the use of the leadership skills of Moses, who, with the Torah to provide the then, current day Jewish People with a written text to help them do what the earlier Jews – the Avos – Fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - had done – the way they had lived - without the benefit of or the need for a written guide of any kind. The Jewish People has been living with the Torah as a kind of recipe book for living and as a source of balance, in a sense, ever since. The other nations of the world have benefited from having the Jewish People as their neighbors on earth through which those other people could see more clearly the way G-d had intended for "Mankind" to live on earth and "to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth."

The Sedrah of Noah allows us an opportunity to look at the world created by the L-rd for us and to see almost exactly how and where we, each of us, fits in to His, G-d's, plan. The Torah uses what seems like a wide angled lens to let us look back at "Adam Ha Reshon," Adam, the First Man, and Eve, the ten generations leading up to the generation of Noah, a close up view of Noah, a certain amount of knowledge of Noah's three sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, a cursory

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 46 of 52

knowledge of the generations born after the Flood and how they lived and, finally, a mention of the family tree descending from Noah's son Shem leading up to, finally, the man, Abraham, who would become the founder of the covenantal community later to be known as the Jewish People.

We learn how disappointed G-d was in the way our initial ancestors, the generations before the Flood, used the opportunities they had as the first human beings. We see how G-d chose to correct things with the Flood and start over with Noah and Noah's family. We observe how the generations following the Flood chose to live in very limited circumstances rather than to bring their special gifts as men and women with freedom of will to the fore and create as only "Mankind" can do. We again witness how G-d weighs in, but this time in a non-violent way, to shake things up for "Mankind," which results in the reshaping of "Mankind" as a community and results in the newly "tweaked" "Mankind" getting back on track to finally fulfilling G-d's commandment to the original man and woman, i.e. "Peru or voo ve meeloo as ha-arretz" Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

Reading the story presented in the Sedrah of Noah we have, in virtually one "click," G-d's objective in creating the world and then in creating "Mankind" and in placing "Mankind" in that world. We see how much G-d is concerned with giving "Mankind" absolutely every chance to reach its full potential by having taken certain necessary steps to help direct "Man's" appreciation of the life that G-d gave and continues to give reach and every one of us.

We can choose to read the story of Noah and let it blow right by us as the children's story so many of us were taught and keep the picture of Noah's Ark and the pairs of animals saved on the Ark as our memory of the Sedrah. Or, we can open our eyes and all of our G-d given capabilities to see that we, each and every man and woman who will ever walk on the face of the earth, faces the exact same choices every single day that the people following the Flood faced. Are we going to pigeon whole ourselves leading lives of minimal growth and next to zero creativity; just getting through life and leaving little, if anything, for the generations to come to know that we were here and here is what we did with the amazing life permitted; gifted; entrusted to us by Almighty G-d? Or, will we do nothing?

The Sedrah of Noah is a clarion call to each of us to realize that when G-d confounded the language of "Mankind" He caused "Mankind" to become fractionated into linguistic affinity groups which resulted in the migration of those groups to various locations all over the earth which was G-d's way of setting the scene for our own arrival on earth and setting before us the very same challenge to "peru or vu ve meel-oo as ha-aretz" to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" with our creations.

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 47 of 52

May each of us be able to accept that fabulous challenge and bring our G-d given talents and abilities to the task at hand for good.

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Haftara Noach

Isaiah Chapter 54 to Chapter 55 Verse 5

The observation that the Haftara includes a direct reference at Isaiah Chapter 54 Verse 9 to “the waters of Noah” could serve as the “connection” between the Sedrah and the Haftara. But, there are other ways that the Haftara can be looked at to further bolster the message of the Sedrah for us.

First, let us focus more fully on the direct reference to Noah. The Prophet Isaiah says in Chapter 54 Verses 7 through 10 that (7) “For a small moment I have forsaken thee; but with great compassion will I gather thee.” The Prophet is asking the Jewish People of that day, who were exiled in Babylonia, to recall the great and long history that the Jewish People enjoyed in the Holy Land until the year 587/586 BCE when the Kingdom of Judah was overrun by the Babylonians, who carried away many of the Jews into exile. For some reason, the Prophet does not go into any detail at all as to why the Kingdom of Judah was apparently so ripe for such a take over. But, the actual reason seems to have been that the Kingdom of Judah had been allowed to degrade with little fidelity being demonstrated to the L-rd and where intermarriage with heathens was becoming acceptable if not out right commonplace even at the level of the royal place, which became a direct and blatant rejection of the covenantal agreement between the Jewish People and the Almighty. Thou shalt take no other god (small “g”) before Me. The heathen’s worship of other gods (small “g”) will have its effect on marginally observant Jews. One of the downside risks of not living according to the tenants of the covenant put in place by Abraham our Father is not living in the Land; the Holy Land, which was demonstrated in the downfall of the Kingdom of Judah and the resulting Babylon exile that followed.

The Prophet Isaiah continues in Verse 8 “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but, with everlasting kindness will I have compassion on thee, saith the L-rd thy redeemer.” The preaching and predictions of Isaiah to the Jewish People that the L-rd will be bringing about the release of those then in bondage in Babylonia served as great encouragement to the Jewish People then and can help us see that what are, for us, long periods of time are, to the L-rd, relatively brief ones. For us, today, it might help bring the entire long range or long distance view of what can and did and might again transpire with regard to the on going relationship between the Jewish People at any point in time along the vast continuum and the L-rd, is still happening.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 48 of 52

Clearly, living in the Land of Israel, the Promised Land, to the Jews of the time of the Egyptian enslavement and perhaps even the Promised Land to us today who are living in “galos,” i.e. outside the Land of Israel, even while there does, today exist the State of Israel, the idea that there could ever be a Land of Israel with a third Holy Temple is, as yet, still to be realized but something for which we sincerely pray will happen. The Prophet predicts that it surely will happen.

So, again, Chapter 54 Verse 9, Isaiah explains to the Jewish People of his time, waiting, and hoping for redemption and return to the Holy Land, that (9) “For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.”

The Prophet reaches back to our Sedrah at Genesis Chapter 8 Verse 21 where we are told “... and the L-rd said in His heart: “neither will I again smite any more every thing living as I have done.” And, at Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 11 “And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of Flood, neither shall there any more be a Flood to destroy the earth.” And further in Genesis Chapter 9 Verse 14 through 18 “... and the waters shall no more become a Flood to destroy all flesh.”

Isaiah, perhaps with a better understanding of what happened at the time of the Flood and in its immediate aftermath, and perhaps also being a true “cheerleader” for G-d, adds to what we were told in the Sedrah. Isaiah says that G-d said, with regard to “Mankind” following the Flood going forward, “... so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.” To our knowledge, the Torah does not make such a statement as that. How are we supposed to interpret or understand what Isaiah is about in “embellishing” in this way what the L-rd had told Noah following the Flood?

If what Isaiah did add, that “the L-rd would not be wroth with nor rebuke thee,” is true, then how are we to understand G-d’s interaction with “Mankind” at the end of the Sedrah with regard to the way “Mankind” after the Flood did what it could to stay together by speaking one language, by living in one limited area, coincidentally in what is Babylon, and with regard to their building a Tower for whatever reason they may have been doing so?

With that in mind, let us remember that G-d confounded the language of “Mankind,” which caused the people to break up into what amounted to “language affinity groups” and those “groups” migrated to locations all over the earth. Now, was there a mention or a sign in the Torah that the Lord was “wroth” with or “rebuked” “Mankind” by Him having confounded the language of “Mankind?” Not really.

So, perhaps Isaiah, in adding to or broadening his report about what had transpired back at the time of the Flood or, rather, soon there after, was being accurate; even if there is no exact mention of Isaiah's word in the text of the Torah.

What the Jewish People, in the time of Isaiah could have learned from this is that they could well be the beneficiaries of the same promises that the L-rd made to Noah way back when and, in a similar way, to the covenant the L-rd had established with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, if, of course, the Jewish People of the day, even in our day today, would keep their (our) part of the covenantal agreement. (See the Shama Yisroael for details).

Deuteronomy Chapter 6 Verses 4 through 9  
Deuteronomy Chapter 11 Verses 13 through 21  
Numbers Chapter 15 Verses 37 through 41

Isaiah continues in our Haftara by describing an amazingly beautiful gem studded local and a way of life that will belong to those who are "on board" with the observance of the covenantal agreement that was put in place by Abraham. And, Abraham is introduced to us at the end of our Sedrah, so, including this section in Isaiah that alludes to the covenantal community and the agreement that serves as its foundation goes a long way to, again, tie the Haftara to our Sedrah.

If our rabbis ended the Haftara at this juncture, we could see that such a decision would make perfect sense. Actually, the Sephardim conclude the Haftara at the end of Isaiah Chapter 54 Verse 10. The Ashkenazim include the verses to the end of Chapter 54 and the next five verses, Isaiah Chapter 55 Verses 1 through 5, in which Isaiah changes his course trajectory which may need some explaining and may need to be illuminated in terms of why the Ashkenazi rabbis chose to include this part of the Book of Isaiah as part of the Haftara for the Sedrah of Noah.

In this section of Isaiah, Chapter 55 Verses 1 through 5, what might be termed a clarion call urging that the return of the Jewish People to Zion, the Land of Israel, from exile in Babylonia should be, at the same time, a return to G-d.

Isaiah is certainly right in distinguishing one from the other. After all, one has nothing to do with the other. There are staunch Zionists who are what might be referred to as "secular Jews." A "secular Jew" is one who may regard Jewish religious observances as historical commemorations or as celebrations of annual natural or seasonal occurrences. Even the various life cycle events such as marriages, burials, births, and mourning practices serve more, if not strictly, as ceremonial practices to secular Jews than being done out of a level of religious or spiritual conviction.

"Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before"

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Page 50 of 52

Were there “secular Jews” in the time of Isaiah? If Isaiah was concerned about Jews returning to the Land of Israel from having lived in exile in Babylonia that they might end up living in the Holy Land but not living a life of holiness, then we can safely say, “You’re darn tootin’ there were!”

There have been Jews who spoke out against traditional Judaism, certainly in modern history, and apparently way way back even into the time of the Prophet Isaiah. Baruch Spinoza (1632 to 1677) was a Dutch philosopher of Sephardic Portuguese origin who laid the groundwork for the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Enlightenment and Modern biblical criticism.

The population of the State of Israel is mainly made up of “secular Jews.”

The Jewish population in the United States includes a small number of Orthodox Jews, both Modern and Ultra Orthodox Jews, but is mostly comprised of culturally oriented or “secular Jews.” The “two-day-a-year” variety; those who maintain a membership or some kind of affiliation with a synagogue, but who attend religious services on the High Holy Days; i.e. Rosh HaShanah (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) and at times of personal or family lifecycle events such as at the Bar or Bat Mitzvah of a relative’s youngster, or at a funeral. That is more the norm than anything else in the Jewish community these days.

There are Jewish communal organizations, such as the Young Men and Young Women Hebrew Associations and Jewish Community Centers that serve the various segments of the Jewish and general community with programs from nursery school all the way to senior citizen clubs, but these organizations are social group work in orientation and, even if they keep Kosher and if they observe certain Sabbath related practices, they would not be considered Jewish religious organizations.

Here, at the end of the Haftara, we can see a few subtle but important connections to our Sedrah and, perhaps, why the Ashkenazi rabbis chose to include these five verses in the Haftara of the Sedrah of Noah. Isaiah preaches in Chapter 55 Verse 3, “Incline your ear, and come unto Me (the L-rd); hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” The leader of the returning exiles from Babylonia was Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of King David. That connection also can be followed back to Abraham, which connects again, to the last moments of our Sedrah. Zerubbabel was the one who laid the foundation for the Second Holy Temple through his position as the leader or governor of the Persian Province of Yehud Medinata and the grandson of Jehoiachin, who was the penultimate King of Judah.

“Noah Like We Have Never Known Him Before”

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Page 51 of 52

The last verse of the Haftara, Isaiah Chapter 55 Verse 5, says, "Behold, Thou shalt call (exercise an influence on) a nation that thou knowest not; and many a nation that knew not thee shall run unto thee; because the L-rd thy G-d, and for the Holy One of Israel, for He hath glorified thee."

So, the mission is pointed out again. Isaiah reminds his people that they, through their association with the L-rd as keepers of their part of the covenantal agreement established by the L-rd and Abraham, will be noticed by other nations upon whom they may call and, also, by other nations still, who, for whatever reasons, may call upon or come in contact with them. The way the Jewish People live and conduct themselves, with the covenantal precepts providing a constant structure, makes them stand out as a veritable light to all those other nations as mentioned in the last verse of the Haftara, and, again serves to make one last connection to the message of the Sedrah of Noah for us to ponder over and retain.

Simply put, "Mankind" had been on a downward path that ended in its being a nearly total disappointment to the L-rd, who had created "Mankind" and the earth on which "Mankind" was to dwell. One man, Noah, demonstrated a sufficient amount of promise in the way he lived and acted in the World that the L-rd chose to save him and his family; i.e. Noah's wife, their three sons and their sons' wives, and to destroy everyone else among "Mankind" in the Flood. One man and the way he lived his life was what was needed to allow G-d to start over again. Our overarching lesson can be as simple as to know that each person has the potential to be as significant as Noah was and, therefore, each of us has the moment-by-moment choice to live our own lives in righteousness and in an effort to create in a worthwhile way and to help others, who may be less able than we might be, to do so as well. May we follow in the footsteps of Noah and walk with G-d for the benefit of all "Mankind." Amen.