

# By Faith - Noah

by G.W. North

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*Noah's faith and obedience were tested daily as he built the ark for 100 years, a symbol of God's mercy and grace, but also a threat to unbelievers.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 6:9, Hebrews 11:7

**Topics:** "Faith", "Perseverance"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes Noah's extraordinary faith and perseverance in a corrupt world, where he alone was tasked with building an ark amidst mockery and disbelief. Unlike Abel and Enoch, Noah faced the daunting challenge of warning humanity of impending destruction while laboring for a century on the ark, often feeling isolated in his mission. His fear stemmed not only from the enormity of the task but also from concern for his family's belief and safety. Despite the overwhelming odds, Noah's obedience and faithfulness led to the salvation of his household, showcasing the profound impact of unwavering faith in God. Ultimately, Noah's journey reflects the essence of being a faithful servant in a world that often rejects divine truth.

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## Transcript

Noah is the person next selected by the Spirit for honourable mention, together with his famous forebears of faith. This man did not lay down his life in a moment of time through a brother's murderous hate, neither was he whisked away from earth by God and translated into eternal bliss so that he should not see death. Noah had to live on through a dying age filled with violence and corruption, and fight daily to keep his family pure while watching others being engulfed in sin and forever ruined. He was destined to announce and testify to men of God's intention to make an end of all flesh; his message was unimaginable. Would God do that? The destruction of an entire civilisation and a whole world of creatures? No one would believe him. Compared with Noah's task Abel's and Enoch's tasks were far far easier. They did not have to toil away ceaselessly from dawn to dusk for a seemingly never-ending succession of days as did this man. He was on his own, day after day, week after week, month after month, year

after year, decade after decade for a hundred years of his life, building an ark that no one else but he and his family wanted. It may be correct to assume that his family helped him; it is certainly charitable to believe that, but there is no textual evidence to support the view. Indeed the circumstantial evidence seems rather to point the other way, for in other instances when men of faith became involved in works of faith and others joined with them their names are mentioned -- Sarah with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob

for instance. It may therefore be safest to assume that Noah's family did not assist him in the mammoth task of building the ark; perhaps that was the reason why it took him a hundred years to build it. We cannot be sure, but if Noah's sons did help him we are not told so and their names are not mentioned until they went in with Noah into the ark. They partook of the benefits of his labours, but that does not prove that they believed in and approved of them or of their father's works while they were in process.

When God warned Noah of the impending disaster Noah was moved by fear. Why? Was it because God spoke 'of things not seen as yet' -- an ark for instance and a flood -- or was it the result of his reaction to the thought of the wholesale slaughter of lives which the flood must inflict? Or was it just the fact that God had spoken to him that caused him such great fear? Of what was there to be afraid -- death? Was he afraid of being drowned? Surely not; he could not have been afraid of that, for he was building an ark for his own safety. Probably what moved him most was a mixture of many things, including fear for his own family. Would they believe him at last and go with him into the ark, or would they refuse? Who knows? He was not a man of the same calibre as Paul, who, upon receiving a word from God that he was going to be caught and bound and carried away to Rome and to ultimate death, said, 'none of these things move me (Acts 20.24 -- to the elders of Ephesus) I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (21 v.13. -- after the prophecy of Agabus)'; and in the end did just that: but Paul was a single man. The enormity of Noah's task was beyond comprehension. Without God's help he could never have accomplished it. Beyond building the ark he had to fill it with pairs of animals and birds (and reptiles it seems); stocking in stores of food for an unstated period of time; contemplate catching them, living with them, tending them. Sanitation would have been an insoluble problem, surely insurmountable, and keeping natural enemies apart! However was he going to do that? Poor man, without God's help he surely could never have done it. God must have done unrecorded miracles upon miracles for months on end for him.

Poor Noah! Yet so blessed. What an exciting and far more exacting task was this man's than either Abel's or Enoch's. Neither of those two men were forewarned by God of what was going to happen to them; Abel was suddenly struck down and Enoch would have been translated in the twinkling of an eye; neither had any warning; theirs was instantaneous bliss. Not so with poor Noah though; he had to live with his fears as well as his faith, his mind filled with foreknowledge of all that impending doom. Noah was one lonely man living in a world of hostility and mockery and unbelief. Just about everybody else in the world would have held him in derision. He was the one man who appeared to be against everybody, yet he was building for everybody. He must at times have wondered whether he was the only man on earth who believed God. This man condemned the world, says the writer, who perhaps himself felt a bit like him at times, for he himself had some stern warnings to administer to men. Right at the beginning of this section he had censured those who draw back to perdition rather than believe to the saving of the soul. All men chosen by God to be His witnesses to an age under condemnation have this consolation, although they must condemn the world by their testimony, it is not they but God who has passed judgement upon it. Noah built in love as well as in faith; the ark proclaimed mercy and grace, but unbelief would have none of it; the ark, although a promise to Noah, was a threat to unbelievers and in the end the waters that eventually bore up the ark destroyed them. Could Noah's thankfulness and joy have been unmixed with sadness when at last he floated out of the darkness and the downpour into sunshine? Because the window of the ark was set in the roof he had not been able to view the disastrous end which overtook his fellow-creatures, but he knew it had happened. O how beautiful must the sun have appeared after months of rain and gloom that had blotted out sun and moon and stars in a seemingly endless blur of cascading water. And when it was all over! What joy and awe to step out into a newly-washed Earth.

Like the Lord Jesus Himself, who centuries afterwards had to bear the contradiction of sinners against Himself, Noah, by his obedience and patient continuance in well-doing, appeared to his generation to be condemning them to annihilation. By patience and perseverance, and in single-minded devotion to God against all odds, Noah applied himself to do the work of God, and like Christ became heir of the righteousness which is by faith; each in his own way saved his house. Although it is not written of him as it was of his more illustrious descendant, Abraham, that he obeyed God, he did so none the less. Noah's was a work of patient endurance and single-minded obedience, and in somewhat similar words to those used of Abraham, it could have been written of him that he obeyed God, for without knowing whither it would all lead or how or where it would all end, Noah set out to build an ark. It was a unique work, begun and ended in faith -- Noah had his reward on earth, but he shall receive a greater reward in heaven.

With the introduction of Abraham the writer brought in the name which, to every Hebrew was above all other names, whether of angels or men. Abraham was the most revered of all names for he was the founding father of the race. Through this man the writer brought to the Hebrews the basic emphasis of the message he was bringing to them from God. In the life of Abraham -- how he responded to the call of God, what he became, and what he did -- the real reason for the letter to the Hebrews is brought out with purpose; it is this: by faith the people of God are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Although not emphasised so clearly, this is what comes through in the seven preceding verses of the chapter. Abel was certainly a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth -- a pioneer of the lonely way of righteousness. How old he was when he was martyred for his faith we do not know, but in terms of the near millennium of years men lived then he was a mere beginner. Of Enoch it could be said that he just did not belong on the earth at all, he simply disappeared from it -- what an example of pilgrimage -- God took him away and home, he was a stranger here. Noah lived a stranger on the earth too; he was not a martyr, he did not die early, neither was he translated to heaven, but what a path of pilgrimage he trod. He was the man who deliberately went against the trend of society; everyone would have thought that he was anti-social, singular, eccentric, and most probably would have considered him to be mentally unbalanced. Bearing the contradiction of sinners against himself until the final day set by God he both contradicted and condemned the whole generation of men in which he was born. When at last he walked with his wife and family into the ark and into salvation from the earth, his labours for men were ended and his witness to men finished.

As is shown in these selected incidents, these three elders of faith exemplified the truth of the writer's words, 'here we have no continuing city'; doing so they prepared the way for Abraham whose life showed this the more plainly. True men of faith do not achieve fame because they intend to do so or because they desire it, but simply because they are faithful men. God sovereignly chooses men who will do what He wants done at the time He wants it done. He chooses the 'when' and 'why' and 'how' of everything in His kingdom of grace and faith. Reflecting on the order of this revelation of faith being unfolded in this chapter, we cannot fail to notice that: (1) before any particular man's name is mentioned the person of God is introduced; (2) then the fact of His word is declared; (3) following that the ages are mentioned; (4) then man is introduced. To the writer this is the natural and therefore the proper order he says. This he states for faith's understanding so that we should approach the truth in the right attitude of mind and heart. If we do this we shall have no favourites among the select company of people he introduces in the chapter. We must not fall into the trap into which many have fallen and exalt one name in this chapter above another. God chooses both the time-period in which He will do certain things and the one through whom He will do them.

Considering this in closer detail let us observe that, although reference has been made to Noah and his hundred years of lonely labour, it would be folly to believe that he was, in any degree, greater than either of the two men who preceded him or any that followed him in the line of faith. God could not be constantly flooding out His creation; indeed He has promised never to do it again. Abel could not have built an ark for the salvation of the righteous family; there wasn't one. There is no ground or reason for comparing or contrasting Abel with Noah and Enoch with Abraham; these men lived in different times and were chosen to do different works. The commendation of any man is that he does God's will perfectly according to God's instructions and desires, and pleases Him: that is all that matters. To place Abraham first in the honours list is utterly wrong; all he did was to obey God -- so did Abel and Enoch and Noah and Moses. It should be assumed that, had he been asked, each one of these would have done exactly the same as Abraham. As far as we know, Abel did not have a son; quite possibly -- almost certainly -- he did not even marry, so how could he have offered an Isaac on Moriah? Let each one of us see to it that we are as true to our understanding of God's mind as they, and obey God in our age as they did in theirs: they did as God said, whatever it was, and so must we. Ages can be made to fit together by the word of God in our lifetime if He will; what He is looking for is a man to stand in the gap which may be created as our age passes into another. Each of these four men in their day did exactly that, finding grace from God to do so in a most wonderful way worthy of recording in scripture.

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