

Parsha Ponders

Noach | October 7, 2021 | 1 Marcheshvan 5782

*Noach in a fur coat*¹

אלא תולדת נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו את-האלקים התהלך-נח

These are the chronicles of Noach. Noach was a perfectly righteous individual in his generations²; Noach walked with Hashem³

One of the more famous comments by Rashi is at the beginning of *parshas Noach*. He is bothered⁴ by the Torah's qualification that Noach was perfectly righteous *in his generations*. What is the message being conveyed? He says that some understand it to be in his praise. Noach was so righteous in such a wicked generation. Just imagine how great he would have been had he lived amongst a generation of other righteous individuals! Others say that it's stated to his detriment. He was only righteous because of the generation that he found himself in. Had he been in the generation of Avraham, Noach wouldn't have been considered so special.

We can ask two basic questions on the opinion which read the verse to Noach's detriment. Noach was clearly a very special individual. The Torah itself testifies⁵ that Noach found favor in Hashem's eyes. Humanity was saved because of him. If we have the ability to read the verse positively, why would anyone read it negatively? Isn't there an injunction to judge every person positively⁶? Furthermore, the opinion which reads the verse positively discusses if Noach was in a generation of righteous individuals. Why did the opinion which reads the verse negatively emphasize if Noach was specifically in *Avraham's* generation⁷?

What's the difference between Noach and Avraham? Avraham, when he heard that Hashem intended to destroy a city, immediately inquired to know which city⁸. It was the city of Sodom. He wanted to know why it was sentenced to be destroyed. He asked if there's any way to undo the decree. He prayed and prayed and prayed to see if Hashem would reconsider. He didn't take it lying down that this city, even though it was filled with the most wicked of people, should be destroyed. Noach, when he heard that Hashem intended to destroy not just a city, but the entire world, what did he do? He asked what was his job. He was told to build an ark. However, he didn't do anything to stop the decree. He didn't pray.

¹ Based on a *sicha* by [Rav Asher Weiss](#), recorded in his *Minchas Asher Sichos Al HaTorah parshas Noach # 1* and delivered via video at <https://minchasasher.com/shiur/ווארט-על-הפרשה/a-short-idea-for-parshas-noach-5782/>

² [Meshech Chochmah](#) *ad. loc.* explains that the plural generations is referring to his life before the flood, and after surviving it

³ [Genesis](#) 6:9

⁴ *Ad. loc.*, seemingly based on a combination of [Tanchuma Yasham Noach](#) § 6 and [Midrash Tanchuma Noach](#) § 6. These two opinions also appear somewhat differently in [Sanhedrin](#) 108a and [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 30:9. See note 7

⁵ [Genesis](#) 6:8

⁶ [Avos](#) 1:6

⁷ This question is exclusively on [Midrash Tanchuma](#) *loc. cit.*, whose text [Rashi](#) *loc. cit.* uses, which mentions Avraham. [Tanchuma Yasham](#) and [Sanhedrin](#) *loc. cit.* simply mention if Noach would be righteous in דורות אחרים. [Midrash Tanchuma](#) does say דורות אחרים for the disparaging opinion, instead of what [Rashi](#) says which is "a generation of righteous individuals". Interestingly, both opinions in [Bereishis Rabbah](#) *loc. cit.* contrast Noach with the generations of Moshe and Shmuel. This could work with the end of what [Rav Asher Weiss](#) says, when he contrasts Noach to Moshe. See [Torah Sheleimah](#) Chapter 6 § 138, who brings other sources, and also points out that Avraham overlapped with Noach 58 years. It's interesting then to say "if he had lived in Avraham's generation"

⁸ [Genesis](#) 18:17-33

Everyone agrees that Noach was a huge *tzaddik*. He was an immensely righteous individual. There's no dispute about that. The opinion that understands the verse is describing Noach disparagingly is simply pointing out that compared to Avraham, Noach was lacking. He should have prayed for his generation. This idea is clear from the *Zohar HaKadosh*⁹. The prophet Isaiah, in the *haftarah* for *parshas Noach*, describes¹⁰ the flood as מי נח, the waters of Noach. It's clearly not a positive thing to have one's name associated with a catastrophic flood which destroyed the whole world. The reason it's referred to this way is to point out that Noach had a hand in the flood. He could have prevented it had he prayed sufficiently. Had he been like Avraham, the flood wouldn't have happened.

The Kotzker Rebbe once described Noach as a *tzaddik in peltz*, a righteous person in a fur coat. When it's cold outside, you have two options. You can either increase the flame of the fire, or you can put on a fur coat. The difference between the two is when you put on the fur coat, you're the only beneficiary. When you increase the flame of the fire, everyone benefits. Noach worked for a hundred and twenty years to build the ark. That was his putting on the fur coat. Sure, he saved his entire family, but the rest of humanity didn't benefit.

Many years later, when the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem threatened to wipe them out¹¹. Similar to Noach, Hashem offered to continue the Jewish people through Moshe alone. How did Moshe respond? More intensely than Avraham did. Not only did he pray for Hashem to reconsider, but Moshe even demanded that if Hashem would continue the decree, that *מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת*, erase me from Your book that You have written! The Arizal points out¹² that Moshe was a reincarnation of Noach. He also points out that the word Moshe chose, *מחני*, erase me has the same letters spell מי נח, the waters of Noach. In truth, this episode was the very rectification of Noach's sin.

We are not here for ourselves, whether it be in spiritual matters or in physical matters. We are here for each other. We are here to care for others. We should pray for each other. For abundance. For livelihood. For fear of Heaven. It is in *this* area that there are some who read the Torah as describing Noach negatively. If he had been in the generation of Avraham, he wouldn't have been considered so great.

Good Shabbos

⁹ [Zohar I parshas Noach](#) p. 67b

¹⁰ [Isaiah](#) 54:9

¹¹ [Exodus](#) Chapter 32

¹² [Likkutei Torah](#) to [Exodus](#) 32:32