Summary

It is now ten generations since the creation of the first man, Adam HaRishon. Adam’s descendents have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and Hashem resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth’s inhabitants except for Noach, the sole righteous man of his era, his family and sufficient animals to repopulate the earth. Hashem instructs Noach to build an Ark in which to escape the Flood. After forty days and nights, the flood covers the entire earth, even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days, the water begins to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the Ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends forth first a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. After seven more days, Noach once again sends out the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive branch in its beak. After another week later, Noach again sends out the dove, which returns... (Adapted from Rabbi Yoizil Horowitz)

Commentaries

“Noach was a righteous man — upright in his generation” (6:9).

There are those who say that the Torah is praising Noach here, and there are those who say it is denigrating him — that Noach was righteous only in comparison to the rest of his generation, but if he had lived in the time of Avraham Avinu, nobody would have thought anything of him.” (Rashi)

If the Torah itself praises Noach, why would one think to imply that it is belittling him?

Really, the idea is this: Noach recognized the depravity of his generation so clearly that he stinted no effort to distance himself from it in every possible way. Thus, he made himself into a tzadik. In the time of Avraham Avinu, however, there would have been no such motivation, since the people were on a much higher spiritual level. Consequently Noach would not have made the effort to perfect himself.

(Adapted from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein)

Just as water, wine and milk keep best in plain inexpensive containers, so Torah stays with one who is humble.

And G-d said to Noach

...Behold I am going to destroy the world...” (6:13).

Hashem first tells Noach that He is going to destroy all life, but doesn’t tell him that it will be by a Flood. Then Hashem instructs Noach to build an Ark, and only after that does Hashem inform Noach that He is going to flood the world. Why did Hashem wait to tell Noach that He was going to destroy the world with water until after He had commanded the building of the Ark?

The obvious answer is that Hashem wanted Noach to build the Ark to fulfill His command, and not for his own rescue. For, without knowing that a Flood was the chosen method of destruction, Noach could equally well have built himself a deep earth trench as a fallout shelter against lethal solar radiation. From this we can learn a lesson for all mitzvos — we should do them purely because they are the will of Hashem, even if we think we may know the reason...

(Adapted from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein)

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“Behold I am about to bring the Flood waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which there is a breath of life under the heavens” (6:17).
The prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah) refers to the Flood as the ‘waters of Noach’, implying that Noach bears at least partial responsibility for the Flood. For, if Noach had taught his generation to know Hashem by instructing them to emulate Hashem’s middos (character traits), they surely would have repented.

The Rambam (Maimonides) once had a dispute with a philosopher whether instinct or behavioral training governs the behavior of an animal. The philosopher held that an animal can be trained so completely that it can be made to do almost anything. To prove his point, he painstakingly trained a number of cats to stand upright, balance trays on their paws and serve as waiters. He dressed them for the part in white shirts with little black bow-ties, and conducted a banquet with the cats as the waiters. As these feline waiters were serving the soup, The Rambam, who had been invited to the banquet, released a mouse... The banquet room was turned to pandemonium as the cats, forgetting all their hundreds of hours of training, let their trays crash to the ground, rushing about on all fours after the mouse.

Without training, a person’s baser instincts and desires will drag him onto all fours. However, the human being is distinct from the animals by virtue of his ability to perfect his middos so that they control his baser instincts. One who has not yet worked on perfecting his middos will, like the trained cat, be able to put on a show of discipline for a time, but only so long as no ‘mice’ are released in his path... Only after a person has acquired good character traits, will the Torah reside in him, for even though only Torah can bring one’s middos to ultimate perfection, where there is no foundation of proper middos, the acquisition of Torah is impossible.

(Adapted from Shiurei Binah — Rabbi Zev Leff)

Haftorah:
Yeshayahu 54:1-55:5

“Come all who are thirsty...go to the water...get wine and milk” (55:1).

Just as water, wine and milk keep best in plain inexpensive containers, so Torah, which satisfies the thirst of all who learn it, stays with one who is humble. The revealed part of Torah is like water: Just as the human body cannot exist without water, so the Jewish People cannot survive spiritually without the revealed Torah. The secrets of the Torah are like wine: They must be imbided with care and are not equally tolerated by all. The Midrashim of the Torah are like milk and honey: They are sweet and nourishing, instilling love and fear of Hashem.

(Tiferes Zion)