

## Fleeing the City of Destruction

### Heroes, Part 5

#### *Hebrews 11:7*

John Bunyan was a Baptist pastor in England during the difficult days of Charles II when independent meeting houses were closed and services were only allowed within the Anglican church of England.

As a result of his unwillingness to conform and his persistence in preaching without a government license, John ended up spending several years in the Bedford prison – for what he called, “conscience sake.”

At one point he was promised to be released if he would stop preaching; his famous response was given, “If you let me out today, I will be preaching tomorrow.”

God had a greater plan for Bunyan’s influence; for it would be while serving two different prison sentences that he would write his classic work entitled, *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

If you haven’t read it, you really need to.

His book opens and let me read a couple opening paragraphs to whet your appetite, In my dream I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked and saw him open the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and he broke out with a lamentable cry, saying, “What shall I do?” In this plight, therefore, he went home, and restrained himself as long as he could, that his wife and children should not perceive his distress; but he could not be silent long. Wherefore at length he revealed his mind to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them: “O, my dear wife,” said he, “and you the children of my heart, I am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth heavy upon me; moreover, I am certainly informed that this

our city will be burned with fire from heaven; in which both myself, with you my wife, and you my sweet children shall miserably come to ruin, unless some way of escape can be found whereby we may be delivered.” His family was amazed; not because they believed what he had said to them was true, but because they thought that some distemper had gotten into his head; as night was drawing near, they hoped that sleep might settle his brains, and with all haste got him to bed. When the morning came, he told them, “I am worse and worse:” And he also set to talking to them again; but they began to be hardened. They also tried to drive away his thoughts by harsh and ugly treatment toward to him; sometimes they would deride him, sometimes they would chide him, and sometimes they would neglect him. He would walk alone in the fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying: and thus for some days he spent his time.

One day, when he was walking in the fields, reading in his book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, “What shall I do to be saved?” I saw a man named Evangelist coming to him, and he asked, “Why are you crying?” He answered, “Sir, I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment. I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave. Then said Evangelist, “If this be thy condition, why stand still?” He answered, “Because I don’t know where to go.” Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field; “Do you see that gate?” The man said, “No.” “Do you see yonder shining light?” He said, “I think I do.”

Then said Evangelist, “Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly, and you will see the gate; and when you knock, it shall be told thee what to do.” So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now he had not run far from his own door when his family began to shout for him to return; the neighbors also came out to see him run, and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life! Life! Eternal life!”<sup>i</sup>

And he kept running. John Bunyan goes on to describe two neighbors running after him to catch him and bring him back by force . . . but instead, Christian – which was the name of this Pilgrim – told them, and I quote – “You are dwelling in the city of Destruction . . . be content, good neighbors, and come along with me.”

Eventually, following one adventure after another, Christian escapes the City of Destruction and safely enters the Celestial City of God.

Little wonder that this book was owned by nearly everyone in England and America for more than 300 years.

This is the story of a man whose life and message announced coming judgment as well as an invitation to join him and escape the wrath to come.

In *Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 7* we happen to see something strikingly similar.

Here is a man who effectively puts his fingers in his ears and ignores the culture of ridicule and anger and rejection and sin and temptation around him – and for more than 120 years he builds an ark and tells his world around him, “Judgment is coming . . . come along with me . . . this is the way to life . . . to life . . . to life!

Most often, the Heroes of the Bible are known for primarily one thing.

When think of Daniel and the lion’s den; of Jonah and the whale; and of Noah and the ark.

Frankly, we should more quickly think of Noah and his faith.

He is the only hero listed in Hebrews 11 whose biography begins and ends with a reference to his faith.

So as we begin, let me give you the first of two principles that come directly from the life and testimony of Noah.

First of all, Noah will demonstrate to us the principle that:

## **1. Faith is personal profession in the midst of unbelief**

So often, we rush to the dramatic moment of the story and miss the setting of the story.

The writer of *Hebrews 11 opens verse 7 by recording, “By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not seen.”*

And one of those unseen things is the coming judgment of God upon an incredibly wicked world.

Demon possessed men were corrupting the godly line of Seth with occult driven, sexually obsessed, violent and wicked men.

The heroes of Noah’s generation were admired because of their strength and their power and their wicked domination of others.

The testimony of Noah’s generation is given to us in *Genesis chapter 6 and verse 5 where we read, “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

Just how bad was it?

If you put together the different references to world conditions before the flood as well as before the yet future coming judgment of fire – you find these similarities:

- A preoccupation with temporary matters (Luke 17:27)
- A rapid advancement in technology (Genesis 4:22)
- Interests bound up only in materialism (Luke 17:28)
- There’s an inordinate devotion to pleasure and comfort (Genesis 4:21)
- No concern for God in either belief or conduct (2 Peter 2:5)
- A total disregard for the marriage covenant (Genesis 4:19)
- A rejection of the authority of God’s word (1 Peter 3:19)
- A population explosion (Genesis 6:1)
- Widespread violence and the value of human life degenerates (Genesis 4:23)
- Evil runs rampant throughout society (Genesis 6:5)
- Immorality, vice and corruption are the normal patterns within human relationships (Genesis 6:12)<sup>ii</sup>

These are the days of Noah.

More and more are they like our own day.

You've probably noticed in the newspapers and magazines that a new show has broken new ground – at least that's how they describe it. It's a television series whose plot revolves around a homosexual couple who, NBC advertises, is a committed, loving partnership that has everything but one thing – a baby. So the plot revolves around using a single mom as a surrogate mother so they can have their baby.

And the media world is all a flutter with praise and accolades – predicting Emmy awards in future days.

It's no secret that our world at large is eager and ready to applaud anyone who "breaks new ground," which is really synonymous with breaking up the ground instituted by Creator God.

Which makes it all the more remarkable when you discover the days of Noah; because right in the middle of all of this kind of debauchery and evil is this incredible testimony – Moses records *in the middle of Genesis 6:9 – Noah walked with God . . .* which means he virtually walked alone.

Like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, he's the only man willing to believe that sin will face the coming judgment of God unless you have escaped through the wicker gate and up the hill to the cross.

In the middle of this dark night of debauchery and wickedness is this flickering candle of one solitary man who has been living, so to speak, with his fingers in his ears.

### **Faith is personal profession in the midst of unbelief**

Noah's generation had their list of heroes – men of renowned – Emmy award winners (Genesis 6:4) – and Noah wasn't one of them.

So early on, you discover in Noah that living faith is more interested in the approval of God than in the applause of men.

You want to talk about a man walking to the beat of a different drummer . . . <sup>iii</sup>

Noah's the man.

## **2. Secondly, faith is personal piety in the midst of uncertainty.**

*Hebrews 11 and verse 7* goes on to give us Noah's response of faith – *By faith, Noah being warned by God about things not yet seen – now notice, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.*

The word for reverence can be translated "holy fear." This isn't a word that means Noah was afraid of God; it means instead, as one author wrote, he had sweet reverence and devotional awe of God's word . . . he had a reverent heart in a dark world.<sup>iv</sup>

Keep in mind this staggering fact: the number of people who were actually following the standard of God for marriage and morality and relationships and family and integrity has actually dwindled down to *one family*.<sup>v</sup>

And that's it . . . one family will get on that ark; even the whole world is invited.

That was it!

Not like today where there are millions of believers in this country alone who are following wholeheartedly God's design for marriage, morality and relationships – even brave enough to communicate the gospel truth of sin and salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

Not in this generation.

Noah is about to begin 120 years of preaching and not one family beyond his own immediate family will buy it.

In the days of Noah there is only one man is available to hear from God. And the writer of Hebrews informs us that Noah was indeed, *warned by God of things not yet seen.*

Once you begin digging into the passages of scripture surrounding this hero of our faith, you discover that Noah was not only given the disclosure of God's judgment, he's also given the details of God's judgment.

*Genesis chapter 6* fills in the details . . . so let me invite you to turn there together.

Genesis chapter 6, verses 14 through 22 represent 120 years of Noah's life.

And the reason I've entitled this principle of faith, piety in the midst of uncertainty, is simply because everything God was about to command Noah to accomplish was entirely unknown to him.

In other words, Noah will be asked by God to do things he has absolutely no experience in doing.

God's going to use a farmer to build the largest boat known to mankind.

It's going to weigh more than 18,000 tons and sit somewhere in his pasture somewhere.

Notice *Genesis 6 verse 13. Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them, and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. 14. Make for yourself an ark of gopher*

*wood, you shall make the ark with rooms, but shall cover it inside and out with pitch . . . then God provides the dimensions . . . skip down to **verse 17. Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish.***

Based on the face value of God's instructions to Noah, the flood is going to cover the earth, kill everything that breathes – which lets us know marine life will survive outside the ark.

And according to the dimensions, this ark is going to be 450 feet long, about 75 feet wide and 45 five feet high.

Since this is football season, think of it these terms. It's almost two football fields long; nearly a football-field wide and tall enough to almost reach the nose-bleed section.

The total deck area would have been almost 96,000 square feet and the total volume within the three decks would have been 1.3 million cubic feet.

Naval engineers have studied this design believe it to be one of the most stable ship designs known.<sup>vi</sup>

But keep in mind that it wouldn't have looked like the Queen Mary or the Titanic.

It was actually more like a flat-bottomed barge. It wasn't designed to move through the water, but simply float on top of it.<sup>vii</sup>

It was a gigantic barge with thousands of built in compartments sufficient to carry two of every species of air-breathing animal in the world.<sup>viii</sup>

In fact, based on measurements given and the number of land species catalogued today, half the deck space would not even have been needed – which means there was room on the ark for several thousand people.

People that Noah fully expected to come on board and join him as they escaped the City of Destruction and the coming wrath of God.

One more comment on the design specs of this barge – you'll find no reference to oars, sails, an anchor, a captain's wheel or even a rudder.

God would be in charge of all of that . . . He would do the driving, so to speak. He was the Captain of this vessel.

Someone might object, since there are more than a million insect species. Well, if they all came on board, there would have plenty of room in these compartments, given the small spaces they would have required. However, in **chapter 7** we're told

that the animals on board were land animals who breathed through nasal passages.

Several creationists have pointed out that insects do not breathe through nostrils but through tiny pores or tracheae in their exterior skeleton. They would have been able to survive on mats of vegetation, floating in the water, just as they've been seen to do during times of flooding.<sup>ix</sup>

Well supposing you can get all 35,000 species of land, air breathing animals on board – in pairs, so make that 70,000 animals – how in the world do you take care of them for a year – which is exactly how long Noah and his family floated in that ark.

A key word appears in Genesis 6 that informs us that each deck was to be subdivided into rooms (**verse 14**). In the Hebrew language, you could translate that word, "nests". In other words, Noah made nests throughout the ark for the animals.

While we're not told what happened during this year long cruise, but is it too much to imagine that God, as one author suggested, supernaturally imposed on the animals a year-long hibernation.

Although we're not told, since it seems more than likely that Noah and his family would not have been able to feed all these animals much less be able to keep that elephant from stampeding during a flood or taking off at the sight of a mouse.

It seems very likely to me that God may very well have put them into a restful sleep.

If we believe other passages of scripture at face value, we can observe:

- He supernaturally shut the mouths of hungry lions so they weren't able eat Daniel in that lion's den (Daniel 6)
- He commanded birds to deliver bread to Elijah (1 Kings 17)
- He commissioned a whale to swallow Jonah and then to lose his appetite 3 days later (Jonah 1:17)
- He had a fish keep a coin in its mouth for Peter to use to pay his taxes – which makes me want to go fishing! (Matthew 17:27)
- God even changed the mental and vocal capacities of a donkey, allowing it to carry on a conversation with a rather slow prophet (Numbers 22:28)

If God can cause animals to deliver food and carry on a conversation, can He not cause animals to sleep?

There's another piece of evidence that animals were acting somewhat differently during this year on the board. It would be only after the animals left the ark that God would command the animals to breed and multiply (8:17). We have every indication that they entered the ark in pairs and left in pairs.

In other words, two rabbits didn't get on the ark and leave with another 300 the following year.

God evidently removed His supernatural restriction over their normal instincts which would have caused these animals to mate and multiply if they had been awake and fully functioning.<sup>x</sup>

One commentator pointed out that although Noah was told to bring food into the ark for the all the animals in *chapter 6 and verse 21*, this food may very well have been used at the end of the journey to give them one good meal as they awakened and departed to find their way down the mountain.

Here's what we also know from the text.

God definitely altered the normal patterns of thousands of animals so that they did what? They all left their natural habitat and did something against their natural instincts and not only walked together in pairs, eventually toward a huge imposing structure, but they actually walked up the gangplank in pairs and then followed orders, perhaps, unspoken Divinely appointed direction to their own compartment.

I mean, something was happening here to get all these animals to cooperate. I can't get my one dog to sit . . . and stay . . . she doesn't listen to me – and she knows me. In fact, the only way to get her into her backyard fence sometimes is to bribe her with a piece of cheese.

God is obviously doing some rather miraculous things here to not only make the animals arrive, but to behave around people they don't know and then take their place in one of thousands of compartments.

I read an illustration of this very issue recently as a film producer in Italy was attempting to depict the story of the animals and the Ark. Much time and effort were expended in training a few zoo animals to walk two by two up a ramp into a model of the ark. When the time came for the filming, a water buffalo got spooked and charged up the gangway, crashed through the side of the ark and running away.<sup>xi</sup>

Now *that's* what animals normally do.

Can you imagine the challenges facing Noah? He's been building an ark for more than 100 years;

he's been told that the animals are coming so he needed to build nests for every land creature.

Don't just assume he's thinking, "Hey, no big deal. . ." I would imagine that Noah is thinking instead, "What do I know about elephants?!"

God is asking Noah to believe Him and obey Him in spite of a thousand obstacles he must have had – and his own doubts about his own abilities that must have flooded his mind and heart.

That remarkable principle of faith operated not only in his heart, but it controlled his life – faith is

- **Faith is personal profession in the midst of unbelief**
- **Faith is personal piety in the midst of uncertainty.**

And he presses on.

Now let me address some objections about the flood that came, according to God's promise to Noah, more than century earlier.

If you'll notice in *Genesis chapter 7 and verse 17, we're told that the flood came upon the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth. 18. The water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth and the ark floated on the surface of the water. The water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered. 20. The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. 21. All flesh that moved on the earth perished.*

I am frankly amazed that even as clear as this language is to understand, there are many even within the church who believe this was a local flood and not global.

There are many even within the church who take the story of Noah and the flood and turn it into a folk-tale that God evidently just wanted Moses to create to encourage the people of Israel.

As if they needed a good story to pump up morale.

The trouble with any view that discounts the historicity and authenticity of this event is the statements in the Bible by others. Such as Isaiah the prophet who refers to a global flood (Isaiah 54:9); Ezekiel mentions Noah specifically, twice, as a righteous man; Luke includes Noah in the official genealogy of Christ; the Apostle Peter uses the events of Noah and a global flood as an illustration of the coming global firestorm of God's wrath that is still in the future;

and last but not least, Jesus Christ Himself used the flood as a reference to His global judgment that is yet to come when He returns to earth. (Matthew 24:37-39).”

God has also left us a wonderful fossil record, revealing on even the high mountains of today, fossils of sea creatures.

As one creationist geologist noted, even at the uppermost parts of Mount Everest, there are fossil layers that have been deposited by water.<sup>xii</sup>

Many believing scientists are taking a closer look at the implication of passages like Psalm 104 that indicate that only after the flood, God raised the mountains higher and sank the valleys between them. I would agree that the Hebrew language speaks of a sudden intervention by God as the topography of earth changed during the flood.

We have enough record from volcanic eruptions and modern day flooding to reveal the power of natural forces to erode and to carve formations out of solid rock.

I read of one flood where flood waters and waves tossed 7,000 pound boulders over a breakwater wall and moved 65,000 pound concrete blocks nearly the distance of a football field. And that was just one little flood in one town.<sup>xiii</sup>

One brief and local flood near Los Angeles eroded and re-deposited 100,000 cubic yards of debris earth and rock. Another flood caused an avalanche in the Andes where enough water, rocks and mud, literally buried two entire cities.<sup>xiv</sup>

The topography of our earth was completely changed. Canyons carved out by walls of raging water carrying rock, mud and timber – raging over the earth, by the way, for a year.

It not only changed earth, but it aged earth. What seems to have taken millions of years could have happened in 1 year.

The Grand Canyon, for instance, didn't need millions of years of erosion by the Colorado River; it only needed the designing handiwork of a global upheaval as God erupted the fountains of the deep and covered the earth with a massive raging flood.

By the way, it is not unusual to find even unbelieving scientists and geologists and evolutionists explaining what they're discovering in terms of some kind of cataclysmic event. I remember when our sons were in second grade. They were attending a nearby magnate school and one afternoon a local professor from one of the nearby universities had brought over some fossils

and even some dinosaur bones to discuss the world of millions of years ago with this elementary school. I decided to attend, without my sons knowing, I didn't want to make them nervous, I just wanted to be to talk to them later after school about this evolutionary presentation.

As I stood in the back of the auditorium, this professor neared the end of his presentation and then made the comment that the disappearance of dinosaurs has always been something of a mystery – although there may have been some disaster that occurred on the planet.

To my amazement, I saw one of my sons raise his hand. I thought, “Oh no, is he falling for this stuff . . . is he going over to the dark side . . . what's he going to say in front of the entire elementary student body?” The professor noticed his hand and said, “Yes, young man?” And my son said, “It was the flood.”

After that, he became my favorite child.

But didn't dinosaur's live millions of years ago?

Let me read from one account that will not be in your child's science text book any time soon. It clearly indicates that dinosaur bones are not as old as we're being told by the evolutionists. Around 20 years ago, scientists from the University of Montana found T-Rex bones that were not entirely fossilized.

In fact, some sections of the bones were considered fresh. Of course, if these bones were millions of years old, the blood cells would have already disintegrated. A report by one of these scientists recorded, “The lab was filled with murmurs of excitement for I had focused on something inside the vessels that none of us had ever noticed before: tiny round objects, translucent red with a dark center . . . they were indeed fragments of red blood cells. Blood cells are mostly water and couldn't possibly have stayed preserved in the 65-million-old- tyrannosaur.<sup>xv</sup>”

Little more was said about this incredible find. The implications were simply too enormous to consider.

At least two lessons are immediately obvious in our introduction to Noah, this man of faith.

First, faith is obedience despite the presence of obstacles.

Can you imagine the obstacles? There are no pickup trucks, chain saws or cranes . . . and yet Noah believes the word of God and builds a boat larger than his wildest imagination.

Secondly, faith is obedience despite the lack of experience.

God didn't choose Noah because he knew how to build boats and tend elephants.

The only qualification Noah possessed was that Noah walked with God. And God would prepare him for everything else.

Which happens to be the same story of faith in the life of every believer who is willing to walk with God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/7/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, PDF posted on Logos.com
  - ii Adapted from Henry Morris, The Genesis Record (Baker Book House, 1976), p. 174
  - iii Charles R. Swindoll, The Practical Life of Faith: A Study of Hebrews 11-13 (Insight for Living, 1989), p. 12
  - iv R. Kent Hughes, Hebrews: Volume 2 (Crossway, 1993), p. 88
  - v The Life Application Bible: Hebrews (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 181
  - vi John MacArthur, Hebrews (Moody, 1983), p. 320
  - vii John Whitcomb, The World that Perished (Baker, 1988), p. 25
  - viii Ibid, p. 24
  - ix Don Batten, Ken Ham, Jonathan Sarfati & Carl Wieland, The Answers Book (Master Books, 1990), p. 180
  - x Adapted from John Whitcomb, p. 34
  - xi John Whitcomb, p. 26
  - xii Ham, p. 176
  - xiii Whitcomb, p. 70.
  - xiv Ibid, p. 69
  - xv Ken Ham, The Great Dinosaur Mystery Solved (Master Books, 2000), p. 18