

THE LIGHTHOUSE FELLOWSHIP

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Synopsis

Last week's Torah portion (*Bereshit*) showed how the Fall of Adam and Eve caused humanity to plunge into idolatrous chaos. The wicked generations of Cain (and the ungodly mixture of the human and the demonic through the "nephilim") caused the world to be entirely steeped in anarchy and bloodlust, so that "every intention of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." After nine generations, the LORD "had enough" and was ready to wipe humanity from the face of the earth. However, God recognized Noah (from the godly line of Seth) as a *tzaddik*, a righteous man, and graciously made provision to save him from the wrath to come. Noah's name comes from the Hebrew verb *nacham* (נָחַם) meaning "to rest." He was named by his father Lamech who said, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us *relief* (i.e., *zeh ye'nachamenu*: זֶה יְנַחֵמֵנוּ) from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Gen. 5:29). As such, Noah is a type of Messiah who saves the world and gives lasting comfort and rest...

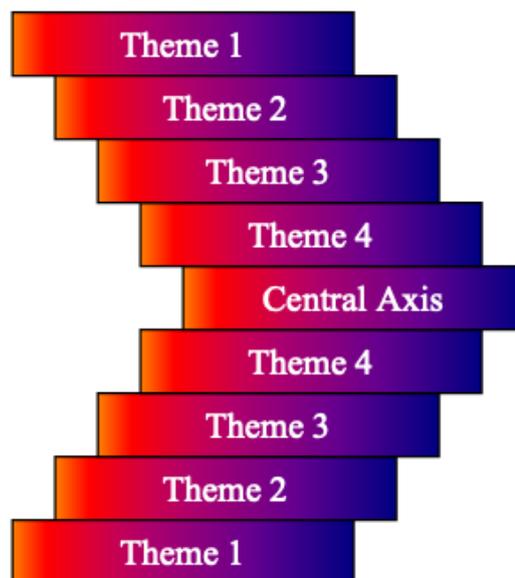
In our reading, God revealed to Noah his intention of destroying all the inhabitants of the earth with a great flood (*mabbul*), and therefore instructed him to build a 450 foot long, three-tiered wooden *teivah* ("ark") coated within and without with pitch. Noah took his wife, his three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) and their wives, and two (male and female) of every sort of unclean animal (and seven of every clean) into the ark to be sheltered from the coming deluge.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month (Cheshvan), on the 17th day of the month, all the "fountains of the great deep" burst forth, and the rain began to fall for 40 days and nights. The waters eventually covered the entire earth, overwhelming even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days, the water began to recede, and on the 17th day of the 7th month, the *teivah* came to rest on Mount Ararat. From its perch, Noah dispatched a raven, and then a series of doves, "to see if the waters were abated from the face of the earth." In the six hundred and first year of Noah's life, in second month, on the 27th day of the month, after a stay of 1 year and 11 days (i.e., a complete solar year), the ground was finally dry.

Noah then removed the ark's covering and built an altar to offer sacrifices to God. The LORD then made covenant with Noah and his descendants never to destroy the earth with a flood, and gave the rainbow as its sign.

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Many Bible critics think the Scriptures are simply a hodge-podge of stories hooked together. However, they couldn't be further from the truth. The Scriptures (and the Torah in particular) are a highly organized and structured document. In fact, it's so well organized that once you understand how to *uncover* its organization principles you will definitely fall on your knees and give glory to Adonai, knowing that only an all knowing, all powerful Elohim (God) could have developed such highly structured stories. In Parashat Bereishit we saw that we must endeavor to understand *the literary techniques of the Torah* if we want to get the most from it. Therefore, let's learn about a new literary unit called a **chiastic structure**. A chiastic structure is essentially a **thematic method of organizing the narratives** of the Torah. A chiastic structure is a pattern organized as follows—a story is divided into two halves and the themes of the first half of the story are repeated in the second half of the story *in reverse order*. Furthermore, both halves of the story point to the central axis, the most important element in the narrative.



This will be more easily understood once you see a picture of the chiastic structure in Genesis 11:1-9.

Read Genesis 11:1-9. Let's begin by writing a general outline of the flow of events in these verses.

- Genesis 11:1—Unity of language
- Genesis 11:2—Migration of humanity to one place
- Genesis 11:3-4b—The plan for and the building of the city and tower
- Genesis 11:5-7—Adonai's response toward the building of the city and tower
- Genesis 11:8—Dispersion of humanity throughout the earth
- Genesis 11:9—Confusion of the language

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Can you see any pattern as you analyze this outline? Note how the themes of the first half of the outline seem to be repeated in the second half in reverse order! For example, the first bullet speaks of the unity of language, whereas the last bullet describes the confusion of the languages. This outline has allowed us to see that this passage is chiasmically related. Please note the elements of the chiasmic structure below.

- A) Genesis 11:1—Unity of language and purpose of humanity
- B) Genesis 11:2—Migration of humanity to one geographical location
- C) Genesis 11:3—The plan to build a city and tower
- D) Genesis 11:4a—Construction of the city and a tower
- E) Genesis 11:4b—Purpose for building the city and tower
- D1) Genesis 11:5-6—The Holy One examines the City and Tower
- C1) Genesis 11:7—Adonai's descent to foil the plans for the city and tower
- B1) Genesis 11:8—Dispersion of humanity throughout the earth
- A1) Genesis 11:9—Confusion of humanity with multiple language

Questions about the Bible Reading:

1. What does the name Noah mean? (Gen. 5:29)
2. Why did God want to destroy the world with a flood?
3. How does the Torah describe Noah? (Gen. 6:9)
4. What did Noah “find” in God’s eyes? (Gen. 6:8)
5. What did God ask Noah to build?
6. What were the basic dimensions of the ark?
7. How many floors or levels (or decks) did the ark contain?
8. How long did it take to build the ark, and why did it take so long?
9. What people did Noah take with him onto the ark?
10. How many of each living thing was Noah to take on the ark?
11. How long did it rain?
12. How long was the earth completely submerged under water?

Answers:

1. Noah means “comfort” or “relief,” from the root word nu’ach (rest).

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2. God saw that every intention of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5-7).
3. Noah is called ish tzaddik a righteous man, blameless in his generation; one who walked with God.
4. Noah found "grace" in God's eyes. The word grace means "favor" or "kindness"
5. freely bestowed upon another, not gained through a sense of obligation.
6. A teivah or a "box" or "ark."
7. 300 amot long (450 feet) by 50 amot wide (75 feet) by 30 amot high (45 feet).
8. Three: the top was for people; the middle for animals; and the bottom for storage and garbage...
9. It took 120 years to build the ark, which was time for the people of earth to repent and turn to God (Gen. 6:3).
10. His three sons and their wives along with his wife.
11. Two of everything except the clean [kosher] beasts (seven pairs of each) and fowl (also seven pairs).
12. 40 days and 40 nights (Gen. 7:4,12).
13. 150 days (five months).