

The Story of Noah

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[English - إنجليزي]

www.islamreligion.com website

موقع دين الإسلام

2013 - 1434

IslamHouse.com



The accounts of the flood in the Jewish and Christian traditions acknowledge Noah as being a righteous man in a world crushed under the weight of sin and disbelief. The Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, teach us that Prophet Noah was a beacon of hope among the descendants of Adam in an era where sin and lawlessness had overtaken the people.

Mankind had been one community believing in the Oneness of God, but confusion and deviation had crept in. Noah was a calm, patient man who called his people to return to the worship of the One True God. He was an exceptional speaker, enjoining those around him to leave the worship of idols, and to hear his warning of a terrible punishment for those who venerated idols and statues.

“And indeed We sent Noah to his people and he said O my people! Worship God! You have no other god but Him.” (Quran 23:23)

Noah narrated stories about the mysteries of life and the wonders of the universe. He described how the day, which gives sunlight and activity, followed the night that gives coolness and rest. He spoke of God, the Divine Creator Who owned heaven and

earth, and he pointed out the wideness and beauty of the earth. Noah explained that the creation of the world was for the well being of mankind; but that man also had an obligation to understand this and direct his worship to God, not false deities. When Noah began to speak of the punishment that awaited idolaters, his people became resentful and angry.¹

How Idolatry Began

Prophet Muhammad informed us that there were ten generations between Prophets Adam and Noah.² We know that this was a very large period of time, as Noah himself lived over a century, and people before lived even longer.

In those years, between Adam and Noah there were generations of people that remembered the laws taught by Adam and worshipped God correctly. The years passed and the people forgot; at times, the righteous men amongst them reminded the people of their obligations to God. As time continued to move on, the righteous men began to die, and Satan came whispering to the people who had looked up to them, putting thoughts into their minds in his sly, cunning way.

Satan inspired the good people to make statues of the righteous men. In this way, Satan said, they would remember the righteous people and thus remember to worship God. The good people built statues in their meeting places and their homes, and Satan left them alone until everyone had forgotten the reason the statues existed. Many years later, the devious Satan appeared amongst the people again, this time suggesting that they worship the idols directly.

An authentic narration of Prophet Muhammad sums up the beginning of idolatry in the following way. Ibn Abbass, a close companion of the Prophet Muhammad said:

1 Based on the work of Al Imam ibn Katheer, The Stories of the Prophets.

2 Saheeh MuhammadAl-Bukhari.

“The names (of the idols) formerly belonged to some pious men of the people of Noah, and when they died Satan inspired their people to prepare and place idols at the places where they used to sit, and to call those idols by their names. The people did so, but the idols were not worshipped till those people (who initiated them) had died and the origin of the idols had become obscure, whereupon people began worshipping them.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Noah’s Call

The word Prophet (*Nabi* in Arabic) is derived from the word *Naba*, meaning news. Revelation is given by God and, in turn, the Prophet spreads the news amongst his people. A Messenger, on the other hand, is sent with a specific mission, usually to convey a new ordainment from God. Every Messenger is a Prophet, but every Prophet is not a Messenger.³ Since this was mankind’s first deviation from the correct worship of God as taught by Prophet Adam, God, in his infinite Kindness and Mercy, fulfilled His promise to Adam to send messengers as guidance for mankind. God sent Noah, the first of His Messengers.⁴ Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet Muhammad said:

“On the day of Judgement, the people will come to Noah and say ‘Oh Noah, you are the first of the Messengers sent to earth, and God called you a thankful slave.’”(*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Worshipping anything other than God has grave consequences, the least of which is a lack of freedom; for Satan enslaves man, destroys his mind and renders him unable to distinguish between right and wrong. When Noah warned his people of the torment that awaited them if they did not give up their idolatry, his warning fell mostly on deaf ears. Noah explained Satan’s deceit, but his

3 Al Ashqar, U. (2003). The Messengers and the Messages. Islamic Creed Series. International Islamic Publishing House: Riyadh.

4 Al Ashqar, U. (2003). Belief in Allah. Islamic Creed Series. International Islamic Publishing House: Riyadh.

people turned away and refused to listen. Noah warned them day and night; he announced his message in public and he spoke quietly to people privately; yet all, but a few, denied his words. Noah cried out to God.

“He said: ‘O my Lord! Verily, I have called my people night and day (secretly and openly to accept the doctrine of Islamic Monotheism), but all my calling added nothing but to their flight from the truth. Verily! Every time I called unto them that You might forgive them, they thrust their fingers into their ears, covered themselves up with their garments, and persisted (in their refusal), and magnified themselves in pride.’” (Quran 71:5-7)

Those who responded to Noah’s call were the weakest and poorest of his people; the leaders and those with power responded arrogantly and rejected the call. They said:

“Verily we see you in plain error” (Quran 7:60)

Noah continued to appeal to his people, day after day and year after year. For 950 years he endured their taunts and mockery.

Noah continued to appeal to his people and they became divided into two groups. His words spoke to the heart of the weak, poor, and oppressed, but the wealthy influential people distrusted those words and could think only of the possible erosion of their power and status. A war of words began between Noah and the disbelievers. They accused Noah of being nothing but any other human, of being nothing special. Noah agreed with this observation and said that, indeed, he was only a human being, but one who brought a clear warning. And God, the Almighty told us:

“Indeed We sent Noah to his people (he said): ‘I have come to you as a plain Warner that you worship none but God, surely, I fear for you the torment of a painful Day.’ The chiefs of the

disbelievers among his people said: ‘We see you but a man like ourselves, nor do we see any follow you but the meanest among us and they too followed you without thinking. And we do not see in you any merit above us in fact we think you are liars.’” (Quran 11:25-27)

Noah explained to his rebellious people that they would receive benefits by turning to God and begging His forgiveness. He (God) would bestow rain on them, as well as children and wealth, He would grant them bounteous gardens and flowing rivers. However, the disbelievers rebuffed his words; they felt secure in their arrogance and pride.

The Conflict Intensified

Those against Noah and his call began to bargain with him. They told him, that these two diverse groups, the meek and poor and the rich and powerful, could not exist together in the same faith. Although continuously taunted and bullied by the disbelievers, Noah reacted in a kind gentle manner. He explained that he would never turn away the humble and weak believers who had heeded his call. These people, he would inform them, were the guests of God. Noah appealed to his people. He tried to reason with them and make them see the reality of their situation. Without personal gain and with a humble but heavy heart Noah refuted their arguments.

“O my people! I ask of you no wealth for it; my reward is from none but God. I am not going to drive away those who have believed. Surely, they are going to meet their Lord, but I see that you are a people that are ignorant. O my people! Who will help me against God if I drove them away? Will you not then give a thought? And I do not say to you that the Treasures of God are (only) with me or that I know the unseen, nor do I say I am an angel; and I do not say that God will not bestow any good on those whom your eyes look down upon. God knows what is in their

inner selves (in regard to Belief). In that case, I would indeed be among the unjust.” (Quran 11:29-31)

The disagreements continued until the disbelievers had run out of arguments. They mocked Noah and the believers, but Noah continued to deliver his message. Finally, he could bear no more and turned to God with heartfelt supplication. Noah did not run out of patience; he remained a patient, kind and gentle man. But he had come to realise that the disbelievers would do nothing but spread corruption and disbelief throughout the land. They would mislead and corrupt the believers and deliver a legacy of disbelief to their children. Noah prayed to God. He said:

“My Lord! Leave not one of the disbelievers on the earth. If you leave them, they will mislead Your slaves and they will beget none but wicked disbelievers.” (Quran 71:27)

So God accepted Noah’s prayer.

The Ark

God instructed Noah to build the ark and passed judgement on the disbelievers in the form of a flood.

“And construct the ship under Our Eyes and with Our Inspiration and address Me not on behalf of those who did wrong; they are surely to be drowned.” (Quran11:37)

Noah chose a place outside the city and far away from the sea to build his ark. The disbelievers mocked and laughed, making comments about the ship’s location, far from any water source. The disbelievers had no comprehension of the power and magnificence of God, so they could not understand why Noah would build a ship, on the top of a hill, far away from the ocean. They called him crazy and laughed out loud. The ship began to take shape and when it was finished, Noah patiently waited for the command from God.

“Until when Our Command came and the lowlands gushed forth, overflowing, We said: ‘Load it with two of each kind of animal (male and female), and embark your family, except against whom the Word has already gone forth, and those who believe.’ And none believed him except a few.” (Quran 11:40)

When the water started to gush from the earth and fall from the sky, God instructed Noah to enter the ark with his family and the believers. God also commanded Noah to take a pair (male and female) of every animal, bird and insect with him. The disbelievers watched him incredulously, asking what he intended to do with all the animals.

Noah’s wife did not join him, for she had never believed in the message that Noah had been preaching; nor did his oldest son, who preferred to flee to a high mountain. The scholars of Islam hold different opinions about the number of people on the ark, but the highest estimate is 80. As the believers and animals entered the ark, the water gushed from every crack in the earth, and the rain fell from the sky in quantities never seen before. Hour after hour the water levels rose, and the seas and rivers invaded the land.

The believers entered the ark in the name of God, just as Muslims today begin everything they do, in the name of God.

“Embark therein; in the Name of God will be its course and its anchorage. Surely, my Lord is Oft Forgiving, most Merciful. So it sailed with them amidst waves like mountains...” (Quran 11:41)

Noah had built the ark according to God’s instructions, from planks and nails, and it kept the believers safe from the deluge of rain and from the water gushing out of the earth. Then the earth’s interior moved in unusual ways, and the bottom of the oceans rose in sudden bursts causing waves to flood the earth. These waves, as big as mountains, submerged everything; they lifted up the ark, making it appear as fragile as a matchbox tossed in the ocean.

This construction, made of wood, became a ship of safety and security, for its passengers had true belief and trust in God.

From his secure place on the ark, Noah could see one of his sons overwhelmed by the water. Noah cried out to his son, imploring him to come aboard the ark and to leave the non-believers to their fate. The son, however, was thinking in terms of this world, and not with heartfelt trust in God. He replied that he would take himself to a mountain, never imagining that waves could swallow a mountain. Noah pleaded with his son saying “nothing can save you on this day except the mercy of God”. The son refused, and he drowned.

“And Noah called out to his son, who had separated himself (apart), ‘O my son! Embark with us and be not with the disbelievers.’ The son replied, ‘I will betake myself to a mountain; it will save me from the water.’ Noah said: ‘This day there is no saviour from the Decree of God except him on whom He has mercy.’ And a wave came in between them so he (the son) was among the drowned.” (Quran 11:42-43)

The Flood Ends

“O Earth! Swallow up your water, and O sky! Withhold (your rain).’ The water was diminished (made to subside) and the Decree (of God) was fulfilled (the destruction of the people of Noah). And it (the ship) rested on Mount Judi, and it was said: ‘Away with the people who are wrongdoing.’” (Quran 11:44)

Unlike Christian and Jewish traditions Islam, does not mention Noah sending a bird (neither a dove nor raven) to search for dry land. Rather, at God’s command, the rain stopped and the water ceased to gush from all the cracks in the earth. Calm returned and the sun began to shine. The flood had cleansed the earth of idolatry and disbelievers. Not a single person who had disbelieved in God remained on the earth. The earth swallowed up the water

and the ark rested upon Mt. Judi (what is believed to be in present day Turkey).

Noah was a Prophet and leader of men, but he was also a father. He turned to God with sadness and cried,

“O my Lord! Verily my son is of my family! And certainly your promise is true and you are the Most Just of the judges.”
(Quran 11:45)

Noah remembered that God had promised to save his family. Noah did not doubt the word or promises of God, but he wanted to understand. Thus God taught Noah a lesson.

As human beings we use words to mean certain things, but God can often give them new, more comprehensive meanings. For instance, the word prayer originally meant making supplication to God, but Islam came and gave it new meaning – it became the ritual prayer preformed five times a day. When we use the word family, we think of blood ties and relationships, and Noah was imploring God that his son was of his family. God told Noah that his son was definitely **not** part of his family because he was unrighteous. True family are the righteous believers in God.

“He said: ‘Oh Noah! Surely, he is not of your family; verily, his work is unrighteous, so ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge! I admonish you, lest you be one of the ignorants.’”
(Quran 11:46)

Noah understood. He said;

“O my Lord! I seek refuge with You from asking from You that of which I have no knowledge. And unless You forgive me and have Mercy on me, I would indeed be one of the losers.”
(Quran 11:47)

Noah released the animals, the birds and the insects and they scattered over the earth. Noah and his family (the believers) disembarked, whereupon Noah touched his head to the ground in

prostration. At this point the Quran and the narrations of Prophet Muhammad leave the story of Noah. We do not know how his affairs with his people continued, nor do we know what happened to his family. All we can ascertain is that on his death bed Noah drew his sons close to him and called on them to worship One God: The Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

Prophet Muhammad said:

“When the death of the Messenger of God, Noah, approached, he admonished his sons: ‘Indeed I would give you far reaching advice, commanding you to do two things, and warning you against doing two things as well. I charge you to believe that there is no god but God and that if the seven heavens and the seven earths were put on one side of a scale and the words “there is no god but God” were put on the other, the latter would outweigh the former. I warn you against associating partners with God and against pride.’” (*Sahih al Bukhari*)

Most of Noah's people rejected his message, but the message survives in the hearts and minds of Muslims to this day. The comforting words, and the hopes of salvation Noah conveyed to his sons while on his death bed, remain part of a Muslim's belief and confirm his attitude towards God. For the Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, also told us that God undertakes a covenant with the believers: If we do not worship other gods beside God, then He will not refuse us **heaven**.