

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 6 Mar Cheshvan 5787. Corresponding to October 17, 2026

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 25 Hz) (p. 34 S) (p. 34 Hi) (p. 30 AS)

NOACH

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1. When Hashem decided to destroy the world, the Torah offers good reason for the divine judgement. "The world was corrupt...and the land was filled with crime." (6:11). Commentaries, especially Rashi, attempt to define what sins developed in the world to lead God to conclude that He needed to clean house and start the world again with Noach's family as the new "Adam and Eve" in a new world. The corruption in the world indicated decadence, perversion, destruction, and damage. Rashi itemizes sexual immorality and idolatry. The crimes include violence, oppression, cruelty, and outrage. Rashi centers on theft. It would seem that Hashem was upset (and disappointed) with the way human beings treated each other. Hashem seemed to have more tolerance for sins against Him than seeing sins that people would commit against each other. The words of the prophets, later in TaNaCH would confirm this idea. In modern times, this theme is carried to a proper message. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter of the 19th century would say that the Ten Commandments are meaningful only if punctuated by the Eleventh commandment: Be a Mench!

2. The Torah states that the source of light in the Ark was "Tzohar." (9:16). Rashi offers two interpretations: it was a window, possibly a skylight, OR it was a luminous stone. There is a major difference between the two interpretations. When Lot fled Sodom, he was instructed not to look back. He was not "entitled" to see the people being divinely destroyed, since he was not being spared because he was righteous. He was being saved only because of his being Avraham's nephew. In this case, we can interpret in the same fashion. The interpretation that the Tzohar was a light-giving stone is of the opinion that Noach was not righteous enough to allow him to see the annihilation of the people. The one who says that there was a window is of the opinion that Noach was righteous and was permitted to see the sinners die.

3. On the other hand, if the only source of light was a window, the experience in the Ark must have been dreadful since there would have been many hours of darkness. There is a Midrash that relates that Avraham's servant Eliezer met Shem, the son of Noach, and asked Shem about life in the Ark. Shem replied: "It was very, very hard. Some animals would eat only by day, while others would feed in the middle of the night. In all twelve months that we were in the Ark, we never were able to close our eyes." Based on Shem's response, I assume that some light existed in the Ark during the night.

4. The dimensions given for the Ark are unusual in contrast to what we see in today's waters. The Ark had the shape of a box, and not that of a boat. As such, it was made to float, not to travel. When Rashi cites the Midrash (6:14), that people would approach Noach about the lengthy construction of the ark; maybe their curiosity is peaked by the shape of the Ark and not just the lengthy time of the project. It probably did appear odd to the people to see a "boat" being constructed that would not travel well in water. The Ramban would point out other oddities and resulting miracles that occurred. Some animals were very large, like elephants, and some smaller animals were quite numerous. Our Sages numbered 120 different non kosher birds in the east, all members of one species. Providing quarters and food in the Ark was an enormous task. In fact, it was a miraculous accomplishment. Noach was charged with a task to make the miracle appear as natural as possible. This way the people would relate to the event as it was being presented to them.

5. And Noach did all that Hashem commanded him (6:22). Rashi states that this refers to the construction of the Ark. Sometimes we are faced with a Mitzvah that we enjoy—we benefit physically from its performance. We might see a person perform the Mitzvah with great joy, but we are not sure that he performs the Mitzvah for the sake of Heaven as for his own pleasure. The Sefer, Oneg Shabbat, states that this is the reason that we refer to the third Shabbat meal of Seudah Shlishit as SHALASHUDOS—Shalosh Seudot—three Meals. The first two meals of Shabbat are eaten when we are hungry and might appear that we eat them for our own physical enjoyment. When he eats the third meal – when he is not hungry – he is demonstrating that he eats all three meals for the sake of Heaven. So, too, is this Midrash commentary on Noach's work. We might have thought that Noach's intentions in building the Ark was to save himself and his family. This verse in the Torah was to inform us that Noach's true intention was to fulfill God's command!

6. In chapter 9 Hashem lays down the new law of the land. Man will exercise his dominion of Hashem's creatures in the world. He is allowed to eat the meat of the animal world, but the license to kill is limited. Man is not permitted to commit suicide. Judaism views suicide as a worse form of murder. For every sin, man has the ability to repent, to do Teshuvah, and help repair his standing in God's eyes. When a person commits suicide, he eliminates any ability to repent and improve himself in the presence of the Almighty. [This refers to the "rational" suicide that Socrates committed. We would view a suicide that resulted from an emotional and mental health issue in a more lenient fashion.] In 9:6, Hashem prohibits murder. In the Talmud (Sanhedrin), our Sages parse the sentence in an insightful way: "Whoever sheds the blood of a man in a man, shall his blood be shed..." What is the killing of a man inside a man? Abortion. Our Sages view the performance of an abortion by a non-Jew as a capital offense! These verses in chapter 9 limit man's dominion in the world. And these verses are addressed to Noach and his sons, meaning they are addressed to Bnei Noach, to universal man.

7. It is not difficult to assess the veracity of the prophetic words of Noach when it comes to his descendants. Which of the descendants of each of his sons is the most populous of the world? Current estimates are as follows: Shem is 3% of today's world; Cham is the most numerous (58% of the world's population); and Yeffet is 39%. Per Capita Income Cham is about \$200. Shem makes about \$4,000 and Yeffet is \$5,000. Literacy Rate: Yeffet 66%; Cham 36%; Shem 50%.

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT NOACH 5787

I. From the Text

1. How many generations were there from Adam to Noach?
2. How many levels were on the Ark? (6:16)
3. How long did it rain? (7:4)
4. What was the first thing that Noach did upon leaving the Ark after the Flood? (8:20)
5. What was the first Mitzvah given to Noach after the Flood? (9:1)

II. From Rashi

6. For what sin did that generation deserve to be destroyed? (6:13)
7. Why did Hashem require Noach to construct the Ark over a 120 year period? (6:14)
8. What light was there in the Ark? (6:16)
9. Which two generations does Rashi cite that did not need a rainbow since they were so righteous? (9:12)
10. At the time of the Tower of Bavel, the whole world spoke one language. What was that language? (11:1)

III. From the Rabbis

11. Why is the Great Flood referred to as "the waters of Noach" (Isaiah 54:9)? (Zohar)
12. What Covenant did Hashem proclaim after the Flood? (Seforno)
13. What temperature were the waters of the Flood? (Sanhedrin 108b)

IV. Midrash

14. According to the Midrash, Og, the giant king of Bashan, hung on to the Ark from the outside and survived the Flood. What deal did he make with Noach for permission to hang on?

V. Haftarah

15. For how long does Hashem's promise not to destroy the world via a flood last?

VI. Relationships

16.
 - a) Na'amah - Yefet
 - b) Noach - Mitzrayim
 - c) Cush - Canaan
 - d) Yavan (Greece) - Ashkenaz (Germany)
 - e) Cham - Plishtim (Philistine)

ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT NOACH 5787

1. Ten
2. Three (The top level was for humans. The middle level was for animals. The lower level was for waste.)
3. Forty days and forty nights.
4. He built an Altar and offered sacrifices to Hashem.
5. To be fruitful and multiply.
6. Theft
7. Maybe the generation would see the Ark being built and would repent.
8. Rashi offers two opinions. One that there was a window. Two that there was a light giving gem.
9. The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai because they were so righteous.
10. Hebrew.
11. Because Noach never tried to influence his generation.
12. That Hashem would never destroy the world again through a flood.
13. The water was scalding hot.
14. That Og would become the eternal servant of Noach.
15. Forever
16.
 - a) Mother Na'amah
 - b) Grandfather Noach
 - c) Brothers (sons of Cham)
 - d) Uncle Yavan
 - e) Great Grandfather Cham