

April 25, 2010

BY FAITH NOAH...

Jeffery D. Woodhams

Hebrews 11 is sometimes called “The Hall of Faith” because the men listed in it appear to us as great heroes of the faith. However, the men listed in that chapter are people just like you and me. It is their faith that sets them apart; and the writer of Hebrews lists these men as examples to be imitated, not as some sort of untouchable holy men. *Their* faith informs and inspires *our* faith. But what is faith? Let’s look for a moment at Hebrews 11:1-2:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Faith is not a blind belief, according to these verses; rather, it is a believing response to propositional truth. It is the *substance*—the firm belief—of things “hoped for,” which is to say, things promised by God, and seeing those things as being equally real as our present experience. What is the basis for such belief? Propositional truth given by God.

Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, which has been made into a song, “God said it; I believe it; that settles it for me!” That really is faith in the simplest of terms. It is the faith of a child, and it should grow as we do. Faith must be sustained by reason as we mature. There is a warning here, though: don’t use that little saying as a cop out for knowing why you believe what you believe! Peter advises us, “[B]e ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (I Peter 3:15). Accept faith as a little child does, but then let that faith grow by studying the Word and the world around us.

I find it interesting that the first item of faith is belief in the hand of God in the creation of the universe:

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear (Hebrews 11:3).

I want to mention here that Darwinian evolutionists also hold beliefs in things that they cannot see; but for this sermon I will mention only one. In the evolutionary cosmogony, the universe began with a Big Bang, and the Big Bang began with a tiny speck which contained all the matter which is now scattered across the universe. Let me share with you a quote from an article in *Scientific American*, a magazine which totally rejects biblical creationism:

Big bang cosmology is probably as widely believed as has been any theory of the universe in the history of Western civilization. It rests, however, on many untested, and in some cases untestable, assumptions. Indeed, big bang cosmology has become a bandwagon of thought that reflects faith as much as objective truth.¹

Mark my words: *all men* live according to faith of one sort or another, not just Christians.

1 G. Burbidge, “Why Only One Big Bang?” *Scientific American*, 266(2):96.

Hebrews 11 continues by explaining how faith was demonstrated in real life by real men such as you and I, as recorded in Scripture. These men are not put forth to us as mythological figures, but as historical figures from whom we can learn. After discussing Abel and Enoch, the writer of Hebrews brings Noah into his catalog. Let's look at Hebrews 11:7:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Noah had faith—faith in *specific propositional truth* from God! God gave Noah specific instructions and specific prophecy regarding the future, and we find that Noah showed that he believed by his actions. We will see, as we continue to study this remarkable man, that more than once it is recorded that he did all that God told him. He responded to propositional truth; and that, my friends, is faith. Let's examine together the account given to us in Genesis 6, starting in verse 11:

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

We see here that God prepared a means of escape from the coming judgment. That means of escape was provided not just for Noah and his children, but for *anyone* who would believe God's revelation. As we discussed before, God must punish wickedness because He is a moral Being; but He withholds that judgment until every attempt at reconciliation has been rejected. Do not confuse God's merciful patience as a sign of acceptance of your wicked ways! That is what the people of Noah's day did. God is not the kindly grandfather who sits on the front porch and winks at you when you're naughty, as He is sometimes portrayed in our culture (most notably in the country music genre). We've discussed this patience at length in previous sermons.

God turns to Noah and gives him specific propositional truth: He will judge the entire world, but Noah and others will escape the Flood by following God's specific directions.

Why Noah? Remember, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. As we mentioned before,

This suggests to me that (1) he was looking for it and (2) he was in a position to receive it. Noah did not deserve to be saved from God's judgment. He did not earn God's grace; rather, he found God's grace. You see, *grace* means that *we receive a favor we don't deserve*. Noah received

God's grace in that he was spared from the promised—but delayed—judgment.²

I truly believe that if God had approached most of the people living at the time to build an ark, they would have rejected Him. God knew that Noah, though imperfect as we are, was willing to obey Him up to that point in his life. As Jesus said, "*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much*" (Luke 16:10). Noah was ready for the assignment when it came.

It is fitting to discuss the ark itself at this point. We don't know exactly how long a cubit was in Noah's day. In ancient times, but within recorded history, the length of a cubit varied according to the time and place. Cubits were generally about eighteen inches, but were as short as 17.5 inches and as long as 27 inches. The account of Noah is preserved from an even earlier time, and so its possible that the cubit was longer or even shorter. The rule of thumb for a cubit is the length from the elbow to the finger tips, and this fact causes the cubit to be viewed slightly differently in various cultures. Let us take the shortest cubit, 17.5 inches, and use it to consider the size of the ark, keeping in mind that it was probably larger. With this *short* cubit, the dimensions of the ark translate to 438 feet in length, 72.9 feet in width, and 43.8 feet in height. The ark's capacity would be 1.4 million cubic feet, or the equivalent of 522 standard livestock railroad cars.³ The ark is the largest boat built in recorded history up until about one hundred fifty years ago. In fact, it is nearly the same dimensions as the *SS Great Eastern*, which laid the first functioning transatlantic cable in 1866.⁴

The size is important because God had commanded that Noah take representatives of each land animal kind on board for protection. That is not to say two of each species! No, there was no need to take two polar bears *and* two brown bears *and* two Kodiak bears *and* two Asian Black Bears *and* two American Black Bears; instead, Noah only needed to take two bears, and from those two descended all the variations we see today. The same holds true for dogs, cats, and all the other *kinds* of animals. Furthermore, it is logical to assume that the animals would have been juveniles in many cases, so that they would be of prime age to reproduce after the flood. There is no need to think that fully grown animals would have been needed; besides, very few animals grow large anyway. The average size of all adult land animals is the size of a sheep. Even though, for example, a Tyrannosaurus Rex had a head the size of a small car, a baby version was the size of a chicken! Speaking of which, we have no reason to doubt that dinosaurs were included in the menagerie; but that may be a subject for another day!

The ark was also to have three stories within, as well as a window, most likely around the top edge. The three floors allowed for better storage capacity, obviously, and the window was necessary for proper ventilation. Again, these details give the ring of authenticity to the account. The word "rooms" here is better translated as "nests," but to us "nests" convey the idea of birds only. However, the intention in this passage is simply to say that appropriate lodging be constructed suitable to different animal types. The pitch sealant was probably obtained from trees.

Another consideration is the proportions of the ark. While almost every culture around the world has retained some form of the flood legend, most of them have distorted the story to a greater or lesser extent, especially in regard to the type of boat that was built. In the Babylonian version, for instance, the ark was fashioned in the shape of a cube—and of course cubes are possibly the worst design choice

2 Jeff Woodhams, "Noah Found Grace." Sermon delivered at Waverly Hall Baptist Church, March 21, 2010.

3 Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 181.

4 Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 130.

for anyone wishing to survive a global flood, or even float on calm water. The biblical ark, though, has the proportions most appropriate scientifically for carrying cargo and for maintaining upright attitude in turbulent waters. It was not intended for racing, but for carrying cargo in rough seas; and the proportions perfectly support this function.

We've discussed the size of the ark and the proportions of the ark, but we would miss everything if we failed to talk about the purpose of the ark. As God looked down at the earth, He saw mankind hurting and exploiting mankind. The earth was filled with violence. We know that His Spirit strove with men, desiring to bring them to repentance and peace; and we know that He had withheld His judgment all through the lifetime of Methuselah, the longest-lived human on record. But the day was coming when His judgment must be poured out in full; the cries of the victims, though fully guilty themselves, must be answered. The ark was to be the vessel within which a remnant of humanity and beasts will be spared.

Turn again to Genesis 6 and begin reading at verse 16:

And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female.

Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.

And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.

We find that God has given Noah very specific directions in light of the propositional truth that a flood was coming. Keep in mind that Noah had never even seen rain! Remember, according to Genesis 2:5, no rain had fallen on the earth, but instead a mist came up during the night and watered the earth. The hydrological cycle was different before the Flood. What was Noah's response?

Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

By faith, Noah obeyed! His obedience to God shone brightly in a world that was very, very dark with crime and all manner of violence.

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Hebrews 11:7).

It must have seemed like a crazy idea to build a huge, huge vessel out on dry land in preparation for a Flood, especially when the world had never even seen rain! Yet Noah obeyed; and every ring of his hammer, every tree that was felled, every laborer that was hired must have been a testimony to Noah's determination to follow the whole counsel of God.

Let's put this in modern-day terms. You know, I heard this week that we should plan to have three

spouses over the course of a lifetime. The average couple married today will separate after seven years and divorce after eight years. In fact, I heard that a legislator in Germany has introduced legislation there that will automatically dissolve a marriage after seven years so that no one has to go through the hassle of a divorce. Under that legislation, every seven years you could renew the marriage for seven more years, or just let it expire. What a sad day it is when marriage is treated so lightly! Against this worldly, selfish mindset stands God's propositional truth—that marriage is the uniting of a man and a woman for life. Those who get married for the puppy love and quit after a few years when things start to get rough miss the great blessings that God has in store for those who will commit themselves to their spouses. The world is happy for those who make marriages last a lifetime, to be sure; but the moment we insist that God's definition of marriage is *the* definition, we are declared to be ignorant, homophobic, backwards, and altogether intolerable people.

The world around us, and sadly much of the Church, has been swept along with the current of modern thought, not just on marriage, but on everything. The things God's Word condemns, the world exalts—*and woe to those who stand by God's Word!* This extends even to the propositional truth that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, as He Himself plainly said on many occasions. The world around us embraces those who say that Jesus is *a* way to Heaven among other ways; but when we declare Him to be *the* Way, *the* Truth, and *the* Life, as He said in John 14:6, we are labeled as intolerant—*and therefore we are not tolerated!*

This brings us to the very last detail about the ark of Noah: God told him to build the ark with just one door. Everyone who entered that ark went in through that one door; and everyone who went through that door was safe from the wrath to come. What a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture (John 10:9).

Noah built the ark. We'll see shortly that it took him about one hundred twenty years to do so; and in the New Testament, we find that he was a preacher of righteousness. He preached of coming judgment and of salvation through the one door. That is propositional truth. Our message today is much the same, but now we understand the meaning behind the symbols. Will you come to Jesus today? God's propositional truth to you is that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Are you trusting in your own goodness or some other "doorway" to Heaven? You'll be disappointed if you do! Come to Jesus, the true Door, and be saved. Respond in faith to God's propositional truth.