

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

What Skeptics and Believers Can Learn From Noah

Most people are familiar with the Torah's story of Noah and the ark.

Whether skeptic or believer, it is interesting to know that many cultures have flood stories. One account inscribed in Sumerian on clay tablets dates back to the late third millennium B.C.E.

Dozens of movies portray the story of Noah's Ark, and some explorers claim they discovered remains of the ark in present-day Turkey.

There is even a **\$100 million** Christian theme park in Kentucky with a full-scale replica of the ark nearly a football field in length—510 feet long, 85 feet wide, and 51 feet high. Although the theme park fundamentalist perspective is controversial, it attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

Although Christians often focus on God's wrath and the flood's devastating destruction, Judaism takes a different approach.

This week's Torah portion, Noah (Genesis 6:9–11:32), highlights Noah's righteousness, the moral decline of the world that led to the flood, and one of the most essential and spiritual principles for human beings.

Despite the corruption that filled the earth, the merciful God gave humanity a second chance and promised: *"there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth"* (Genesis 9:11). Furthermore, God established an *"everlasting covenant between God and every living creature"* (Genesis 9:16).

Since God established this covenant specifically with Noah and his descendants, this moral code is known as the "Noahide Covenant."

Established on a belief in God and the Torah, the Noahide Covenant consists of seven universal precepts derived from various passages in the Torah. The "Seven Laws of Noah" require mankind to 1) not worship idolatry, 2) not curse God, 3) not murder, 4) not commit adultery, 5) not steal, 6) establish courts of law, and 7) not be cruel to animals, especially the barbaric practice of eating a limb from a living animal.

Remarkably, God placed a “rainbow in the clouds to be a sign of the covenant” (Genesis 9:13), and the seven colors of a rainbow allude to the seven universal commandments.

The Noahide covenant is a powerful refutation to other religions that claim that their religion is the “only way” to reach God. Christian missionaries, for example, quote Jesus as saying, “no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Judaism rejects this claim and teaches that there are two ways to one God. Jews follow the Sinai Covenant with its 613 commandments [mitzvot] that connect us to God,¹ and non-Jews are required to follow the seven laws of Noah. These two paths offer each human being a way to experience a personal relationship with God.

The long history of persecution against the Jews made it nearly impossible to promote the Noahide covenant. However, in recent years the Noahide covenant has become better known, and many non-Jews are discovering that it is a positive alternative to the dogmatic faith in which they were raised.

As reported by the Associated Press, an entire Baptist church, located in Athens, Tennessee, “abandoned its fundamentalist heritage” and now consider themselves B’nai Noach - or Children of Noah.

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The existence of the Noahide covenant is one of the reasons Judaism does not seek converts actively. However, it is our responsibility and privilege to share this beautiful path to God with our non-Jewish neighbors.

Together we can strive to make the world a moral and spiritual place based on our mutual love and awe of God. So then, as the prophet Isaiah says, “*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore*” (Isaiah 2:4).

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

¹ The word mitzvah is related to the word tzavta-צווה which means a connection.