

(9) These are the offspring of Noach. Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noach walked with God.

(10) And Noach fathered three sons: (תָּאָ) Shem, (חָאָם) Cham, and (יָפֶת) Yefes.



(13) Elohim said to Noach, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth has become filled with robbery because of them. Now I will destroy them from the earth.

(14) “Make for yourself an Ark of gopher wood; make the Ark with separate compartments and cover (וְכִפַּרְתָּ) it inside and out with pitch (בַּכָּפֹר).”

## HOW RIGHTEOUS WAS NOACH?

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the *parashah* begin, *These are the offspring of Noach*, but then does not immediately state their names? Furthermore, when they are mentioned in the next verse, they are introduced with the phrase, “**And** Noach fathered three sons,” which suggests that these children were additions to the previously-mentioned *offspring of Noach*. What is the explanation?
2. Why do we need to be told that Noach fathered *three sons*? Surely we can work out the number for ourselves!
3. Why is each son’s name punctuated by the word תָּאָ? This word could have been left out without changing the meaning. Also, why is Cham mentioned before Yefes, when he was the youngest?
4. Why does God tell Noach, “*Make for yourself* (לָךְ) *an Ark*”? The words “*for yourself*” seem redundant.

(ט) אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ אִישׁ צְדִיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים  
הִתְהַלְק־נֹחַ.

(י) וַיּוֹלֶד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יֶפֶת.



(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַח כָּל־בֶּשֶׁר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס  
מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מְשַׁחִיתָם אֶת הָאָרֶץ.

(יד) עֲשֵׂה לָּךְ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי־גֹפֶר קַנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְכִפַּרְתָּ אֹתָהּ  
מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ בַּכָּפָר.

5. Why did God choose such a complex and demanding method of salvation for Noach? Couldn't He have just told Noach to take refuge on top of a high mountain and left it uncovered by the flood waters?
6. Why was the Ark covered on the inside with pitch, when our Sages<sup>1</sup> have told us that pitch has a foul smell? Also, why is pitch called כָּפָר here rather than the more usual word, זָפֶת?

In order to answer our questions, we need to make the following introduction. In a certain sense we can say that a righteous person has the ability to produce three different types of “offspring” — two of them spiritual and one of them physical. Some righteous people perfect themselves to the extent that they are able to produce all three types. Others produce only two, and still others only one. What are the three types? The first of the two spiritual “offspring” are the mitzvos and good deeds that a righteous person performs in his lifetime. Each mitzvah produces a spiritual entity that acts as a person’s defender,<sup>2</sup> and there

1. *Sotah* 12a.

2. See *Avos* 4:11.

is no greater “offspring” than this. The second type of spiritual offspring are all the people he has influenced to do *teshuvah* and all the people he has taught Torah, as these are his true “children.” The third type of offspring are the physical children he brings into the world with his wife.

Our *parashah* begins, *These are the offspring of Noach*, and then tells us that *Noach was a righteous man... Noach walked with God*, without stating his children’s names. The Torah is thereby hinting to us which of the three types of “offspring” Noach possessed: By repeating Noach’s name and describing his righteousness solely in terms of himself and not in terms of his interaction with others, the Torah is telling us that he possessed only the first type of offspring but not the second: He performed good deeds, but he did so in isolation from the rest of the world. *Noach walked with God* — but he did not bring others into his sphere of action; he did not help others do *teshuvah*.<sup>3</sup> The second verse in the *parashah* then speaks about the third type of “offspring” mentioned above, viz., physical children, by stating, **And** *Noach fathered three sons: נֹחַ Shem, נֹחַ Cham and יֶפֶת Yefes*. [The word *And* hints that these offspring were additions, in a way, to the *offspring* mentioned in the previous verse.] [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to  
Question 1

Now, Noach’s sons were not all on the same level. To help us understand their interrelationship, let us look at what our Sages tell us about the mitzvah of taking the four species — *lulav*, *esrog*, *hadassim*, and *aravos* — during the festival of Succos. The Midrash states:<sup>4</sup>

There are four species. The *esrog* has fragrance and taste; the *lulav* (date palm) has taste but no fragrance; the *hadas* (myrtle branch) has fragrance but no taste; and the *aravah* (willow branch) has

3. At the end of his comments on our passage, the Alshich writes that we can also see a hint to this when God tells Noach in verse 7:1 to enter the Ark “*since I have identified you as being righteous before Me in this generation.*” By this God means that Noach has only been righteous “before Me,” but not in connection with other people.

4. *Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12. The Alshich’s version of the Midrash differs slightly from ours.

neither taste nor fragrance.<sup>5</sup> So too among the Jewish people, there are some who have Torah and good deeds; some who have Torah but not good deeds; some who have good deeds but not Torah; and some who have neither. God commanded, “Let all the groups be joined together,” and in this way those who are worthy will give protection to those who are unworthy.

So too with Noach’s children: Cham was not worthy. We see this from his actions after the Flood, when Cham sinned greatly after finding his father drunk and exposed in his tent. Some of our Sages say that he emasculated him, and some say that he defiled him.<sup>6</sup> Although he had not yet sinned when the Flood began, still, this indicates that his basic personality was flawed. Meanwhile, Yefes was on an intermediate level, and Shem was properly righteous. In order to ensure that the merits of each brother should protect the other, God combined them into one group by calling them “*three sons*” (all together). That is why the Torah tells us that there were three sons even though we can perfectly well work out the number for ourselves. It is telling us that they were not all worthy and righteous and therefore had to be bundled together so that they all would be saved. [This answers Question 2.]

Nevertheless, to show that they were not all on the same level and of equal worth, the Torah separates between each one with the word *וְ*.<sup>7</sup> In order to protect the unworthy son in the most efficient way, Cham was placed in the middle of the “bundle,” even though he was the youngest of the three. Therefore, the Torah lists them as Shem, Cham, and Yefes, with Cham sandwiched between his two more worthy brothers so that their merit would shield him and he would be saved. [This answers Question 3.]

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5. The Midrash equates taste with Torah, and fragrance with mitzvos.

6. *Sanhedrin* 70a.

7. Our Sages (*Bava Kamma* 65b) tell us that sometimes the word *וְ* comes to divide between one thing and another.

Let us now look at the following Midrash,<sup>8</sup> which will help us answer our remaining questions.

*Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations* (verse 9). R' Yehudah and R' Nechemiah [argued about the interpretation of this verse]. R' Yehudah said: He was [considered] righteous only in his generations. If he had been in the generation of Moshe or the generation of Shmuel, he would not have been considered righteous. [After all,] in a street [full] of blind people, they call someone who has limited eyesight, "the one with good sight." This can be compared to [a king] who had a wine cellar. He opened one barrel and found that the wine had turned to vinegar; he opened a second barrel and it was the same; a third barrel and he found that it was turning sour. [The cellar-keepers] said to him, "It is turning sour." He asked them, "Is there anything better than this here [in the wine cellar]?" They answered, "No." In the same way, only in his generations was Noach [considered] righteous. If he had been in the generation of Moshe or the generation of Shmuel, he would not have been [considered] righteous.

R' Nechemiah said: Since he was righteous [even] *in his generations*, how much more so [would he have been righteous] had he been in the generation of Moshe or Shmuel. This can be compared to a sealed flask of balsam oil<sup>9</sup> that was lying among graves [which have a bad smell], and its fragrance [nevertheless] wafted out. If it had been away from the graves, how much more so [would its fragrance have been noticeable]. This can also be compared to a pure girl who lived on a street of harlots, yet maintained her reputation. If she had lived on a street of modest women, how much more so [would she have maintained her reputation]. In the same way,

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8. *Bereishis Rabbah* 30:9.

9. A type of perfume.

since he was righteous [even] *in his generations*, how much more so [would he have been righteous] had he been in the generation of Moshe or Shmuel.

Let us first ask some questions on the Midrash:

7. Why did R' Yehudah choose to interpret the phrase "*in his generations*" in a negative way, with its implicit criticism of Noach? Surely if there is an equally valid interpretation that interprets the phrase favorably, this would be preferable; why criticize someone whom the Torah calls righteous and perfect? Furthermore, R' Nechemiah's positive interpretation seems more logical, for if someone remains virtuous when surrounded by wicked people, surely he would be virtuous if surrounded by righteous people.
8. Why does the Midrash specifically pick out the generations of Moshe and Shmuel as a contrast to Noach's generation?
9. What does the analogy of the wine cellar add to our understanding? R' Yehudah's example seems clear enough without the need for an analogy.
10. Similarly, why did R' Nechemiah need to offer the analogy of the balsam oil? And why did he then offer a second comparison with the street of harlots?

We learned above that Noach concentrated only on his own service of God (*Noach walked with God*) and did not try to get others do *teshuvah*. Furthermore, the Torah stated in the last verse of *Parashas Bereishis* that *Noach found* [מָצָא] *favor in the eyes of Hashem*, which implies that Noach was not so worthy of being rescued<sup>10</sup> but was saved דָּרַךְ מְצִיָּאָה, as one finds something

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10. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 31:1.

on the street (i.e., through good fortune). The Torah's having thus informed us that Noach's righteousness was not complete, served as the background that led R' Yehudah to interpret the words *in his generations* in a negative light, i.e., Noach was righteous only compared to the low level of the rest of his generation. [This answers Question 7.]

Based on this, we can understand why the Midrash specifically compares Noach's generation to those of Moshe and Shmuel. There are two ways that a person can exert his influence to bring others to serve God. One way is that they all come to him from wherever they live and he explains to them the right way to serve Him. The other way is that he goes to the people's communities and explains to them God's laws. Moshe represents the first way, for the people came to him and asked about the ways of God, as the verse says (*Shemos 18:13*), *Moshe sat down to judge the people and they stood before Moshe from morning to night*. Shmuel represents the second way, for Shmuel would travel from city to city in Eretz Yisrael to judge the people and instruct them where they dwelled.<sup>11</sup> The Midrash chose these generations to illustrate that Noach did neither of these two things: He did not have people come to him and he did not go from place to place to find them. Thus R' Yehudah said, "If he had been in the generation of Moshe," who reprimanded the multitudes and taught them the ways of God, "he would not have been considered righteous."

Now, perhaps you will say, "But in Noach's generation they would not have come to him as they came to Moshe, for they knew that he wanted to guide them, and they did not want to be rebuked!" The Midrash therefore continues, "or the generation of Shmuel" — Noach should have gone from place to place to instruct people just as Shmuel did. But he did not do this.<sup>12</sup> Thus R' Yehudah said, "If

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11. See *Shmuel I 7:17*, as interpreted in *Nedarim 38a*.

12. The Alshich writes that if the people had not come to Moshe, Moshe would certainly have gone to find them and instruct them, as Shmuel did.

Noach had been in the generation of Shmuel he would not have been considered righteous.” [This answers Question 8.]

Furthermore, R’ Yehudah understood that Noach’s righteousness consisted entirely of the fact that he did not commit any of the sins of the generation in which he found himself. But he lacked the performance of positive mitzvos. This is what R’ Yehudah meant by his comparison to the wine cellar. They found one barrel that was beginning to turn sour. It was not fine wine; its whole merit was that it was not vinegar. Likewise, Noach’s whole merit was that he was not wicked like the rest of the generation — but he had not inculcated the finer qualities and character into his inner being.

From where did R’ Yehudah learn this? From verse 8, which states, *Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem* [י-ה-ו-ה] — i.e., he found favor in the Name representing *Middas HaRachamim* (God’s Attribute of Mercy), but not in the eyes of *Middas HaDin* (His Attribute of Strict Justice), and certainly not in the eyes of the angels of destruction (God’s agents of punishment). But if Noach was completely righteous, why shouldn’t he find favor in the eyes of *Middas HaDin*? Someone who has not sinned and has performed even one mitzvah is worthy of being saved (even according to *Middas HaDin*), as the Mishnah tells us:<sup>13</sup> “Whoever performs one mitzvah, they bestow goodness on him and they lengthen his days and he inherits the World [to Come].” The fact that this Mishnah uses the plural form, “they bestow goodness ... they lengthen...,” demonstrates that in such a case both *Middas HaDin* and *Middas HaRachamim* agree with the favorable judgment. It follows that in Noach’s case, if he found favor only through *Middas HaRachamim* it must be that he did not have the merit of having performed positive mitzvos.

R’ Yehudah thus concluded that Noach’s righteousness was

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13. *Kiddushin* 39b.



only that he did not sin like the rest of his generation; he was like the wine that was turning sour which was acceptable only because it was not vinegar like the other barrels.

We see in the Midrash that the king who owned the wine cellar asks, “Is there anything better than this [wine that is turning sour]?” and his servants answer, “No.” The Midrash implies that the king accepted the sour wine because there was nothing better, while the cellar-keepers were not satisfied. Likewise, Noach found favor in the eyes of Hashem, who is the King of the world; but His servants, the accusing forces, claimed that his only merit was that he had not sinned like the others and this was not sufficient merit to be saved. This is the deeper meaning of the Midrash. [\[This begins to answer Question 9.\]](#)

Answer to  
Question 9

There is another profound point contained within the words, “Is there anything better than this [wine which is turning sour]?” If, according to R’ Yehudah, Noach’s merit was only that he did not commit the sins of his generation, why was he allowed to survive? Since this was a time of Divine anger, and Noach was but a single individual among a whole generation of wicked sinners, he should have been swept along in the general destruction, especially since he bore responsibility for not having tried to bring others to do *teshuvah*.<sup>14</sup> We can find the answer to this, too, in the analogy of the wine cellar. If the owner of the wine cellar had found that every single barrel in it had turned to vinegar, there would have been no reason to continue maintaining the cellar. What is the point of having a wine cellar if it doesn’t hold any wine? So too, God’s “wine-cellar” is the world, and the wine consists of the Divine service of the righteous, which gives Him pleasure. If there is no Divine service, what would be the point of the existence of the world? Therefore, even though Noach’s service of God was comparable only to wine that was turning sour,

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14. See *Yechezkel* 3:19 (cited by the Alshich).

since there was nothing better than this God allowed Noah to survive, for otherwise the world would have ceased to exist.

To summarize, R' Yehudah's analogy of the wine cellar teaches us three points: First, that Noah's righteousness consisted only of the fact that he did not sin like the rest of his generation.<sup>15</sup> Second, it teaches us what caused R' Yehudah to minimize Noah's level of righteousness.<sup>16</sup> Third, it teaches us why Noah was saved even though he did not try to help others and even though he did not perform positive mitzvos.<sup>17</sup> [This completes the answer to Question 9.]

Answer to  
Question 9

But R' Nechemiah interpreted Noah's level of righteousness more favorably than did R' Yehudah. He disagreed with R' Yehudah in two main ways. (1) He did not agree that Noah was at fault for not attempting to bring others to do *teshuvah*. (2) He felt that Noah's Divine service consisted of far more than merely abstaining from the sins of his generation. To show how his opinion differed from R' Yehudah, he brought two different analogies.

R' Nechemiah said: "This can be compared to a sealed flask of balsam oil that was lying among graves [which have a bad smell], and its fragrance [nevertheless] wafted out. If the flask of balsam oil had not been sealed but had been left open among the graves, its fine scent would have been overpowered by the putrid smell of the graves and would have been lost altogether. By remaining closed, on the other hand, it was able to maintain its fine smell within the protective walls of the flask. In such a situation, the choice to remain sealed is to be looked at positively."

The generation of the Flood was like the graves. The odor of their evil deeds was foul and harmful. Anyone who came close to

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15. Just as the sour wine in the analogy was of value only in comparison to the other barrels that had turned into vinegar.

16. Namely, the fact that only God's *Middas HaRachamim* found favor with Noah, but not His *Middas HaDin* or the angels of destruction (just as only the king, but not the servants, accepted the wine that was turning sour).

17. Namely, the fact that the world without Noah would serve no purpose (just as the cellar had no purpose without wine).

them would be adversely affected and would be drawn after their ways. Noach was like the sealed flask of perfume. If he had opened his mouth to chastise the generation and help them do *teshuvah*, he would not have been able to withstand their outraged reaction. His good intentions would have been overpowered by his contemporaries, who would have forced him to go along with their evil ways. The only chance he had to maintain his principles was to keep quiet and not to open himself up to those around him — like the sealed flask. In such a situation, his decision to preserve his morality by keeping separate and failing to reprimand others is to be considered a source of merit. This removes any criticism against Noach for failing to educate his generation as Moshe and Shmuel did in their generations. According to R' Nechemiah, in Noach's situation keeping quiet was the best option.

To answer R' Yehudah's second criticism of Noach — that his only merit was refraining from the sins of his generation — R' Nechemiah brought his second analogy: “This can also be compared to a pure girl who lived on a street of harlots, yet maintained her reputation.” The fact that the girl remained pure and did not learn from her immoral neighbors is considered an act of great virtue, even though all she did was refrain from imitating the actions of those around her. In such circumstances her lack of sinful action can be considered like the performance of positive mitzvos. So too with Noach. To be surrounded by evil sinners and to refrain from being drawn into their immorality was an act of great merit. In other words, his lack of action can be considered the equivalent of the performance of positive mitzvos. Furthermore, the fact that the girl in the parable was a virgin rather than a woman who had acted immorally and then done *teshuvah* corresponds to the fact that from the time Noach first became a man (Bar Mitzvah), he never sinned.<sup>18</sup> [This answers Question 10.]

Answer to  
Question 10

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18. As explained in the Alshich below, 6:9–13, in the answer to Question 3.

In conclusion, according to both R' Yehudah and R' Nechemiah, Noach was not completely righteous. Even according to R' Nechemiah, who praised Noach for rising above the degradation of his generation, he was still not a perfect *tzaddik*. Only if he had been born in the generation of Moshe or Shmuel would he have been able to perfect himself fully. Accordingly, he did not have enough merit on his own to be saved.

Based on our study of this Midrash, we can answer our remaining questions. We asked (Question 4) why God told Noach, “Make ‘for yourself’ (לך) an Ark,” as the words “for yourself” seem redundant. God was telling Noach, “You did not go out into the world to save those around you, to bring them back to the ways of God; you closed yourself off within your house. Therefore, you too will be closed off inside the Ark.”<sup>19</sup> This is a fitting *middah keneged middah* (measure for measure), and it is hinted to in the words “for yourself”: because you acted for yourself alone.<sup>20</sup> [This answers Question 4.] Noach did not have enough merit to be allowed to simply take refuge on a mountain peak that would remain uncovered by the flood waters. [This answers Question 5.]

Another approach to Questions 4 and 5 is as follows: Noach did not really have sufficient merit to be saved from the Flood. But God wanted to save him, since there was no one more righteous than he, and without some remnant of the human race the world would have no reason to exist. God therefore told him,

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19. The Alshich notes that this is what our Sages meant (*Bereishis Rabbah* 34:1) when they compared Noach’s existence in the ark to that of a person who has been imprisoned and who cries out before God, “Bring my soul out of its captivity!” (*Tehillim* 142:8).

20. Earlier in his comments, the Alshich adds: “You did not shepherd and tend the human flock around you, spending sleepless nights in your efforts to save them. Now you will tend to the animals in the Ark, spending sleepless nights tending to their needs.” According to R' Yehudah’s view, this was a punishment. However, R' Nechemiah’s opinion is that Noach acted properly in keeping quiet, for otherwise he would have been overpowered by his generation’s evil ways. Thus, the *middah keneged middah* in his view is not a punishment; rather, it reflects Noach’s limited level of righteousness, based on the situation.

Chapter  
**6**

(9) These are the offspring of Noach. Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noach walked with God.

(10) And Noach fathered three sons: (תֶּכֶם) Shem, (תֶּכַח) Cham and (תֶּכָּנִי) Yefes.

(11) The earth became corrupted before God and the earth was filled with robbery.

(12) God saw the earth and it had become corrupted since all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.

(13) God said to Noach, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth has become filled with robbery because of them. Now I will destroy them from the earth.”

Another  
Answer to  
Question 4

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“You must work hard to make an Ark. There, you will spend twelve months toiling night and day to feed the animals. This will provide you with sufficient merit to justify your being saved. In this sense, the making of the Ark will be *for yourself* — for your own benefit.” [This another answer to Question 4.] This also explains why God chose such a complex method of salvation for Noach and did not just let him take refuge on a mountain peak: Noach needed to work and struggle in the Ark for those twelve months to increase his merits. This can be compared to the atonement of the wicked in Gehinnom for twelve months.<sup>21</sup> Noach’s lack of merit was atoned for through his suffering in service of Hashem. [This is another answer to Question 5.]

Another  
Answer to  
Question 5

Based on what we have written we can explain as well why the Ark had pitch (which has a bad smell) both on the inside and outside (verse 14), while the basket in which Moshe had been hidden in the Reed Sea had pitch on the outside and clay on the inside (see *Shemos* 2:3). Our Sages<sup>22</sup> explain that the reason the inside of Moshe’s basket was covered in clay and not pitch was

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21. See Mishnah *Eduyos* 2:10.

22. *Sotah* 12a.

(ט) אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלְקֵר־נֹחַ.

(י) וַיּוֹלֶד נֹחַ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָּנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יֶפֶת.

(יא) וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס.

(יב) וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי־הִשְׁחִית כָּל־בֶּשֶׁר אֶת־דַּרְכּוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ.

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַח כָּל־בֶּשֶׁר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי מִשְׁחִיתֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ.

so that the righteous Moshe would not have to inhale the bad smell of pitch. This seems puzzling, for since the Torah describes Noach as *a righteous man, perfect in his generations*, he should also have been protected from the bad smell of the pitch. But now we can understand. Since Noach was lacking in merit, it was appropriate that he should have to endure the bad smell of the pitch to help him gain atonement. This also explains why the Torah did not use the normal word for “pitch” here, which is זָפֶת; instead it used the word כֶּפֶר, which shares the same root as the Hebrew word for “atonement” (as in כְּפֹר). The Torah is coming to tell us that the covering of pitch inside the Ark served as an atonement (כֶּפֶר) for Noach. [This answers Question 6.]

Answer to  
Question 6

## IN WHAT MERIT WERE NOACH'S SONS SAVED FROM THE FLOOD?

Consider the following questions:

1. The fact that Noach had these children was already mentioned in 5:32 (*Noach... fathered Shem, Cham, and Yefes*). Why then does the Torah repeat here, *These are the offspring of Noach... Shem, Cham, and Yefes*?