



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת נח

SERIES 2: ISSUE 2

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

Chapter 6

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

ט אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורתו אָתָּה
הַאֲלָקִים הַתְּהִלָּךְ נָתָּה.

10) And Noach fathered three sons, Shem, Cham and Yafes.

ו וַיּוֹלֶד נָחַ שֶׁלֶשׁ בָּנִים אֶת שֵׁם אֶת חָם וְאֶת יָפֵת.

Consider the following questions:

1. The fact that Noach had these children was already mentioned in 5:32 (*Noach ... fathered Shem, Cham, and Yafes*). Why then does the Torah repeat in verse 10, *These are the offspring of Noach... Shem, Cham, and Yafes?*
2. Why does the Torah state Noach's name twice in the beginning of verse 9?
3. The word *man* (אִישׁ) is seemingly redundant, as the Torah could have simply said, *Noach was righteous, perfect in his generations*.
4. What does the Torah mean by stating that *Noach walked with God*?

How were Noach's children saved from the flood? Let us look at *Bereishis Rabbah* 30:1 to answer this question:

These are the offspring of Noach. Noach was a righteous man. This is what is written: *When the storm passes the wicked are no more and the righteous one is the foundation of the world* (*Mishlei* 10:25). "When the storm passes the wicked are no more" refers to the generation of the Flood; "and the righteous one is the foundation of the world" refers to Noach.

[Another verse states,] *The wicked are overturned and are no more and the house of the righteous ones will stand firm* (*Mishlei* 12:7). "The wicked are overturned and are no more" refers to the generation of the Flood; "and the house of the righteous ones will stand firm" refers to Noach, as it is written, ... *these are the offspring of Noach*.

Seemingly, both these verses from *Mishlei* are explained in the Midrash in exactly the same way. What does the second verse add?

The Sages of the Midrash were bothered by the fact that we have already been told about the offspring of Noach at the end of the last *parashah*. Why mention them again here? They explained that when the *parashah* begins with "These are the offspring of Noach," it is not coming to list who Noach's children are. It is coming, rather, to tell us in what merit Noach's children were also saved from the Flood, as will now be explained.

If we look carefully at the Midrash, we can see that the *Mishlei* verse cited first uses the singular form, *the righteous*

"one" is the foundation of the world, while the second verse uses the plural form, the house of the righteous "ones." The first verse therefore refers only to Noach and his merit to be saved, as he was "the righteous one." The second verse is brought to show why Noach's offspring deserved to be saved: because they are called "the righteous ones," i.e., they were saved in their own merit.

To make it clear that the second verse refers to Noach's sons, the Midrash concludes with the words "these are the offspring of Noach."

Do not be surprised at the fact that Noach's sons were considered righteous. In fact, *Bereishis Rabbah* 29:5 states that the reason Noach found favor in the eyes of God (the last verse of *Parashas Bereishis*) is that these are the offspring of Noach (the first verse of *Parashas Noach*), i.e., it was because of his offspring. However, the Sages of the Midrash we cited above understood differently, viz., that Noach was saved in his own merit, and his offspring was saved in their own merit, interpreting these verses as follows: Noach found favor in the eyes of God — i.e., God personally searched for enough merit for Noach to be saved. But if Noach's being saved required God to search for merit, in what merit were his children saved? To this the Torah states, *These are the offspring of Noach* — meaning they were fit to be called the offspring of Noach because they were similar to him in righteousness. **[This answers Question 1.]**

Once the Torah had indicated that Noach's offspring were similar to him by saying, "These are the offspring of Noach," it became necessary to clarify what Noach was actually like, for otherwise the statement that they were like Noach would not tell us why they merited to be saved. The verse therefore continues, "Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations." The musical cantillation on this repetition of the name "Noach" is a *revi'i*, as if God is saying with a raised voice, "Noach, whose children I have just compared to him — you should know he was righteous and a tzaddik." **[This answers Question 2.]** Therefore, his children were also saved from the Flood.

We asked why the Torah calls Noach an איש צדיק (a righteous man) when in Hebrew the word איש would generally be omitted from this phrase. We can answer this question based on a Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 19a), which comments on another verse where the word איש seems to be redundant. *Tehillim* 112:1 states, *Fortunate is the man [איש] who fears God*. The Gemara explains that this means, "Fortunate is the man who fears God from the very first moment he became a man [i.e., when he became Bar Mitzvah]." In our verse as well, the Torah is saying that Noach was righteous and perfect from when he first became a man. **[This answers Question 3.]**

Having now been told of Noach's great righteousness, it might be difficult to understand why his merit was not sufficient by itself to save his children and why they had to be saved in their own merit. The Torah therefore states (verse 9), *Noach walked with God* — meaning that all of Noach's righteousness was only in his own relationship with God, within his own four walls. He did not go out to bring others close to God as Avraham did. Someone who strives to bring merit to others by bringing them to serve God gains merit that can save others as well as himself. Thus we see that Avraham's merit saved Lot from the destruction of Sodom, as it says, *God remembered Avraham, so He sent Lot from amidst the upheaval, etc.* (*Bereishis* 19:29). But Noach, whose righteousness was focused only on his own relationship with God, had only sufficient merit to save himself. **[This answers Question 4.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 - 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKodosh" (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.