

Noah, The Great Preacher of Righteousness

Old Testament

Noah, The Great Preacher of Righteousness

By Joseph B. Romney

Truth restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith confirms and clarifies the biblical account of this remarkable prophet.

Noah's majestic importance as a major prophet of God is clearly noted in biblical text. He is, after all, the central figure in the account of a universal flood and was responsible for the continuation of humankind. Still, without the revelations of the Restoration we would miss so much more about Noah and his pivotal role both as a mortal and as a nonmortal.

While speaking in 1839 to members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and some Seventies prior to their leaving for missionary service, the Prophet Joseph Smith said: "Noah, who is Gabriel, ... stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood; he was called of God to this office, and was the father of all living in his day, and to him was given the dominion. These men held keys first on earth, and then in heaven."¹

To help us more fully understand this most significant place of Noah in the Lord's plan, let us look at events from his life as discussed in the Bible and then look at additional knowledge gained from latter-day revelation,² summarized in the accompanying chart.

Noah's Preeminence

The chart on page 24 helps us glimpse Noah's role as a leader next in priesthood authority to Adam. It suggests he would be among those whom the Lord showed to Abraham of those "organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; and God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers" (Abr. 3:22–23). "Michael or Adam was one of these. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter, James, and John, Joseph Smith, and many other 'noble and great' ones" certainly would have exercised priesthood authority in premortality and would have served in their significant priesthood callings prior to their mortal births.³

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that in mortality Noah would “have been baptized and ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of the hands.”⁴ His mortal ministry likely was characterized by much fervor on many issues because although the designation “preacher of righteousness” is given to other prophets as well, Peter specifically applied it to Noah (2 Pet. 2:5; see also Moses 6:23; Moses 8:16). The Prophet Joseph Smith said that Noah, this great preacher of righteousness, was taught by revelation how to construct the ark in “a pattern of heavenly things.”⁵ Thus, we can see that later prophets had great regard for Noah.

Scriptural text says that Noah “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” because he was “a just man, and perfect in his generation,” one who “walked with God,” as did Enoch (Moses 8:27; see also Moses 7:69; Gen. 5:24). The quality of perfection in these contexts is similar to that achieved by Abraham and Job, meaning that Noah righteously did all he was supposed to do in mortality and was “made perfect through Jesus the Mediator” and through the Atonement, not that Noah was exalted (see Gen. 17:1; Job 1:8; D&C 76:69).⁶

That Noah was “just” means he was a morally good person. Not only did he comply with formal laws and ordinances, but he did so possessing internal goodness. Later prophets such as Isaiah, Amos, and Micah vigorously called to repentance those who complied *only* with the formal requirements of the law but neglected what the Lord Jesus Christ called “the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matt. 23:23; see also Isa. 1:10–20; Amos 5:21–24; Micah 6:6–15).

The text about Noah’s walking with God clearly suggests a great similarity in mind and spirit between God and Noah. In talking about the closeness of God to his prophets, Amos asked, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “Jehovah ... talked with him [Noah] in a familiar and friendly manner, that He continued to him the keys, the covenants, the power and the glory, with which He blessed Adam at the beginning.”⁷

The import of this teaching about Noah walking with God is that Noah, as did Adam and Enoch before him, received the fulness of the priesthood with its sealing power.⁸ In fact, it is written that Enoch “walked with God,” as did his people, and he talked with God, “even as a man talketh one with another, face to face” (Gen. 5:24; Moses 7:4; see also D&C 84:19–24; D&C 107:49; Moses 6:39; Moses 7:20, 69). In the fulness of the priesthood, Enoch “and every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course; to put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band” and, most important, “to stand in the presence of God” (JST, Gen. 14:30–31). Obviously, Noah enjoyed those blessings.

Wickedness Begins to Abound

Of Noah's three sons, modern revelation says that Japheth was the oldest and indicates the age of Noah when each was born—450 at Japheth's birth, 492 at Shem's, and 500 at Ham's (see Moses 8:12). The fact that Shem, not the eldest, held a more prominent role in the priesthood is a situation shared by many other families in scripture. Further, modern revelation assures us that all three sons were righteous, something only implied in the Bible. The Lord declared that Noah's sons "hearkened unto the Lord, ... and they were called the sons of God" (Moses 8:13).

Daughters of these "sons of God," or followers of God, became wives of the "sons of men," meaning that Noah's righteous sons had daughters who married the unrighteous. Thereafter, the unrighteous sons-in-law boasted of their accomplishments rather than repenting as they were urged to do (see Moses 8:14–22).⁹ Presumably, these unrighteous descendants of Noah perished in the Flood.

The biblical account of the Flood focuses on Noah and his family, with little said about the wicked, who were destroyed. Without additional revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith, God's action toward the wicked seems confusing in light of the qualities of love and mercy which we know are his. In the Bible we read that the people were wicked, providing some justification for their destruction. Yet information about their wickedness, so serious that it merited a universal flood, is limited. Moreover, information about a major effort to bring people to repentance—which would be expected of a loving God, something equally commensurate to the depth of the people's wickedness—is not discussed in the biblical account. However, both of these matters are included in modern revelation.

The Bible says that the wickedness of man during Noah's time "was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," that all of the earth "was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:5, 11). These sins caused Noah (see Moses 8:25–26), rather than the Lord as stated in Genesis (see Gen. 6:6), to repent or cry bitterly over the creation of mankind on the earth. It is likely impossible to imagine the great hurt and pain of soul Noah experienced as a result of the entire impact of the Flood.

The extent to which this corruption had truly defiled the earth was described by Enoch and was also revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Enoch was shown that Satan held the earth in the chains of his power. In fact, the entire earth was veiled in darkness insomuch that Satan laughed and his angels rejoiced (see Moses 7:26). In contrast, in his eternal majesty the Lord wept (see Moses 7:28). Seeing this, Enoch could not understand how such a mighty being could be so moved. The Lord then explained that out of his love he had given mankind their knowledge and agency and had commanded them that "they should love one another" and that they should choose "their Father," but in exercising their agency, mankind had chosen to be without affection toward their Eternal Father—"they are without affection, and they hate their own blood" (Moses 7:32–33).

The extent of their corruption was such that the Lord said, "The fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them" (Moses 7:34).

Indeed, the Lord told Enoch that among all of the creations of God, “There has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren” (Moses 7:36). The misery of the Flood that they were to experience would cause “the whole heavens [to] weep over them ... , seeing these shall suffer” (Moses 7:37). Thus, while Satan and his angels rejoiced, the Lord wept with compassion for those who had misused their agency despite all he had done (see Moses 7:36–40).

Yet revelation to Enoch showed that for even those people who had so blatantly rejected their Heavenly Father and who would perish in the Flood, all was not lost. At a future time they could be blessed in a spirit prison through the preaching of the gospel and through the Atonement of Christ and his intercession to the Father in their behalf if they would repent (see Moses 7:38–39; 1 Pet. 3:18–20; D&C 138:20–22, 57–59). Thus, modern revelation teaches that God indeed suffered great sorrow over the Flood, which served as the baptism of the earth, and that he did all he could to prevent the destruction of his children—including giving the people one of his greatest preachers of righteousness to try to get them to change—and then, when the people failed to respond, he mercifully provided an opportunity for their redemption after their deaths.

Noah’s Preaching

Risking his life to preach to such a people, Noah prayerfully taught the gospel “as it was in the beginning” (Moses 8:16). For a long 120 years he specifically called people—which included many extended family members—to repentance and urged them to be baptized so that they might receive the Holy Ghost to guide them in paths of righteousness (see Moses 8:17, 24). Again and again, he warned them—likely with deep feelings—that failure to repent would bring the floods upon them. But “they hearkened not” (Moses 8:20; see also Moses 8:23–24; D&C 138:41). Indeed there were those who “sought Noah to take away his life; but the Lord was with Noah, and the power of the Lord was upon him” (Moses 8:18).

Even if Noah’s preaching were to be unheeded by everyone except for his wife and three sons and their wives,¹⁰ his personal efforts are not dimmed any more than those of Abinadi, who appears to have had only Alma respond to his powerful ministry (see Mosiah 17:2). But a statement in Moses that prior to the Flood “the Holy Ghost fell on many, and they were caught up by the powers of heaven into Zion” (Moses 7:27) suggests that apparently many people received the gospel as a result of Noah and others. Thus, we are gratified to learn that many souls were saved through Noah’s ministry.

Following the Flood, Noah and his three sons and their wives received a calling much like that given to Adam and Eve. They were commanded to “multiply and replenish the earth,” which would fulfill a prophecy made by Methuselah “that from [Noah’s] loins should spring all the kingdoms of the earth” (Moses 8:3). As the Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “Noah was born to save seed of everything, when the earth was washed of its wickedness by the flood.”¹¹ Noah fulfilled his

specific calling just as Adam and Eve did in opening earth life and as the Savior did in redeeming earth life.

In addition, following the Flood, Noah and his family were given—as were Adam and Eve—dominion over all that lived. They could eat of all living things but they were not to eat of their blood (JST, Gen. 9:10). The law of Moses later taught that blood was to be shed on the altar and was to “make an atonement for your souls” (Lev. 17:11), prefiguring the Lord’s Atonement. Further, in light of the great violence and oaths of murder among the pre-Flood peoples, Noah and his sons were specifically instructed that murder was forbidden. All of this was established within the same covenant that the Lord had made with Noah’s great-grandfather Enoch. Thus, Noah and his family were given commandments on how to implement the plan of salvation through their posterity, just as Adam and Eve had done (see Gen. 9:1–11; JST, Gen. 9:8–14; D&C 89:7–17; *History of the Church*, 3:386).¹²

After his death, Noah continued his role as a great preacher of righteousness. In his role as the angel Gabriel, he visited Zacharias to announce the birth of John, called the Baptist, and to Mary to announce her calling as mother of the Savior (see Luke 1:18–19, 26–27). Less well known is Noah’s appearance to Daniel to instruct him about the coming of the Messiah in the last days (see Dan. 8:15–19; Dan. 9:21–23).¹³ Later, Noah was surely among the “noble and great” preachers the Savior prepared to “carry the message of redemption” to those who because of their rebelliousness did not see the Savior in his postmortal spirit world ministry (see D&C 138:21–22, 37–38, 41).

Today—as in the Days of Noah

Speaking to his Twelve Apostles in his famous discourse about the future, the Lord Jesus Christ said that “as the days of Noe [Noah] were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:37; see also JS—M 1:41). What degree of wickedness will be present before the Lord’s coming? What responses will be given by humanity and by Church members to the preachers of righteousness who will call for repentance? Where will we, our families, and our descendants be listed? Will we or they be among the sons and daughters of God or among the sons and daughters of men? Thus, the real question is, will we live in order to be on the ark of the gospel which has been prepared for our day to avoid death in the flood of evil that surrounds us? This is the practical significance of the story of the great prophet Noah to you and to me.

A Latter-day Saint View of Noah

The left column lists the Bible’s teachings about Noah; the right column lists additional information restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith.

What the Bible Teaches	What Latter-day Revelation Adds
<i>Premortality</i>	<i>Premortality</i>
[no items]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Befitting his important priesthood relationship to Adam,¹ Noah would have been one of the noble and great ones in pre-earth life selected to be one of the Lord's rulers in mortality (see Abr. 3:22–23). • Enoch foresaw Noah and his posterity (see Moses 7:42) and that all kingdoms on earth were to come through Noah (see Moses 8:3).
<i>Mortality</i>	<i>Mortality</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noah, son of Lamech, was a great-grandson of Enoch and an ancestor of Jesus Christ (see Gen. 5:21, 25, 28–29; Luke 3:23–36). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Noah was ten years old when he was ordained [to the priesthood] under the hand of Methuselah” (D&C 107:52).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth (see Gen. 5:32). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His sons—the eldest of whom was Japheth—hearkened to the Lord (see Moses 8:12–13).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was a preacher of righteousness (see 2 Pet. 2:5). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He preached the fulness of the gospel, including the first principles, as did Adam and Enoch (see Moses 8:16, 24).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was a just man, perfect in his generation, and he walked with God (see Gen. 6:9). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He learned that God would destroy the wicked (see Gen. 6:13). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For 120 years he called the people to repentance, warning them of the Flood that would occur if they did not repent, but he was rejected (see Moses 8:16–17, 20, 23–24).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People tried to kill Noah (see Moses 8:18).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He built the ark, gathered his family and the animals, and entered (see Gen. 6:14–22; Gen. 7:2–16; Heb. 11:7). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noah built the ark after a “pattern of heavenly things.”²
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Flood covered the whole earth (see Gen. 7:19–23). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the Flood, the ark again rested on the earth (see Gen. 8:1–14). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He offered sacrifice to the Lord (see Gen. 8:20–22). 	

What the Bible Teaches	What Latter-day Revelation Adds
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He and his family received commandments as well as a covenant that the Lord will not again destroy all flesh by a flood (see Gen. 9:1–17). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord renewed with Noah the great covenant he had made with Enoch—that when righteousness comes again on earth, “Zion should again come on the earth, the city of Enoch” (see JST, Gen. 9:21).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He became a husbandman (see Gen. 9:20). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He cursed Canaan, the son of Ham, and gave blessings to Shem and Japheth (see Gen. 9:25–27). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His descendants filled the earth (see Gen. 9:19). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He died at 950 years of age (see Gen. 9:28–29). 	
<i>Postmortality</i>	<i>Postmortality</i>
[no items]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noah, known as the angel Gabriel, visited Daniel, Zacharias, and Mary (see <i>History of the Church</i>, 3:386; Dan. 8:16; Dan. 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26–27).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was “among the great and mighty ones who were assembled” in the spirit world whom the Savior instructed and prepared as messengers to “carry the message of redemption” to those in prison to whom the Savior did “not go personally, because of their rebellion and transgression” (D&C 138:37–38, 41; see also D&C 128:22).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He visited with the Prophet Joseph Smith during the prophet’s latter-day ministry (see D&C 128:21).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In company with other righteous prophets, Noah will partake of the sacrament on the earth and with the Lord at a yet future gathering of the righteous (see D&C 27:5–7, 14; see also Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Elias,” and <i>History of the Church</i>, 3:386).

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 3:386.
2. Several noncanonical sources dealing directly with Noah may be useful: Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Noah”; Mark E. Petersen, *Noah and the Flood* (1982); Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), 3:1016–17; Alan K. Parrish, “The Days of Noah,” in Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Studies in Scripture, Volume Two: The Pearl of Great Price*

- (1985), 145–59; Norman L. Heap, *Adam, Enoch, and Noah* (1992).
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (1973), 3:194; *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (1966), 169.
 4. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 264.
 5. *Teachings*, 251.
 6. See Russell M. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 86–88.
 7. *Teachings*, 171.
 8. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 3:83; see also *Teachings*, 308, 337–39.
 9. See discussions in Parrish, “The Days of Noah,” 150–52; Petersen, *Noah*, 25–31; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. (1957–66), 1:135–37.
 10. See Milton R. Hunter, *Pearl of Great Price Commentary* (1951), 195; Petersen, *Noah*, 24.
 11. *Teachings*, 12.
 12. Grouping these diverse commandments within a few verses suggests that having children, properly using and respecting animals and human life, and respecting the Atonement are all significant parts of the plan of salvation. For instruction to avoid wanton killing of animal life, see Spencer W. Kimball, “Fundamental Principles to Ponder and Live,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 43–46, and Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (1939), 265–66.
 13. Some leaders have suggested that in some instances Elias is the name of a specific person, not just a “forerunner” (see Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Elias”), who appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple (see D&C 110:12) and that this person is Noah. The Prophet Joseph Smith did reveal that “the voice of Gabriel” had been among those in the Restoration “declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood” (D&C 128:21) and that Elias is he who appeared to Zacharias (see D&C 27:5–7). Joseph Fielding Smith has summarized the argument for Noah being this Elias as follows: “Joseph Smith revealed that Gabriel was Noah; Luke declared that it was the angel Gabriel who appeared to Zacharias and Mary, and the Lord has declared that Elias appeared to Zacharias and Joseph Smith. Therefore, Elias is Noah” (Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 3:141).
 14. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 157.

15. *Teachings*, 251.

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