

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Noach

1 Cheshvan, 5785 – November 2, 2024

Compiled from the works of
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn
North Miami Beach, FL

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Noach**

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית ו', י"ד: עָשָׂה לָךְ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי גֹפְרִית קִנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת הַתֵּבָה וְכִפַּרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר:

רש"י ד"ה עשה לך תבת: הרבה ריוח והצלה לפניו, ולמה הטריחו בבנין זה, כדי שיראוהו אנשי דור המבול עוסק בה מאה ועשרים שנה ושואלין אותו מה זאת לך, והוא אומר להם עתיד הקב"ה להביא מבול לעולם, אולי ישובו:

Bereishis 6:14: Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with compartments, and you shall caulk it both inside and outside with pitch.

Rashi Heading - Make for yourself an ark: There are many ways to bring relief and rescue available to Him. Why, then, did Hashem burden him with this construction? So that the people of the Generation of the Flood would see him occupying himself with it for one hundred twenty years and ask him, "Why do you need this?" He would tell them, "The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to flood the world." Perhaps they would repent.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Noach, Hashem commands Noach¹ to "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with compartments, and you shall caulk it both inside and outside with pitch." Using the words "make for yourself an ark," Rashi explains that G-d has many means to save Noach's family. He burdened Noach with building an ark for the benefit of the people of his generation. Watching him work at making this massive vessel for 120 years would cause them to ask what he was doing. Upon being told that G-d would bring a flood with which He would destroy the world, there was hope that they might repent.

However, there is an obvious question that Rashi does not address. Why did Noach spend 120 years building this ark? All Mitzvos must be done with the most remarkable alacrity possible. He could have brought people to do Teshuvah by building the ark immediately and publicly displaying it for the same 120 years!

The answer is quite simple. Since Hashem commanded Noach to "make for himself an ark," he had to construct it by himself, and it was his Mitzvah. Building a three-story vessel approximately 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet tall took that much time for one person to build.

1. Parshas Noach, Bereishis 6:14.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Noach, we are told that Hashem would bring a flood to destroy most of the world, and he would save Noach and his family, who were the only righteous people in the world, from whom He would repopulate the earth. He commanded Noach to build an ark. When the flood was to come, he, his three sons, his wife, his daughters-in-law, and (at least) two of each animal would enter the ark, thereby being saved from the flood.

Hashem tells Noach, "Make an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with compartments, and you shall caulk it both inside and outside with pitch." Rashi, citing the words "make for yourself an ark," comments that "there are many ways to bring relief and rescue available to Him; why, then, did He burden him with this construction? So that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him occupying himself with it for one hundred twenty years and ask him, 'For what do you need this?' He would tell them, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to flood the world.' Perhaps they would repent."

In other words, Rashi explains why Hashem commanded Noach to build an ark. He could have saved Noach and his family in many different ways. However, building an ark had the potential to bring people to do Teshuvah.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

There is one seeming difficulty that Rashi does not address. All Mitzvos must be fulfilled quickly and with enthusiasm. How much more so is this true regarding a Mitzvah which would save the world? How could Noach take 120 years to complete his Mitzvah of building the ark?

There is a disagreement in the Talmud², which Rashi cites, regarding how righteous Noach was. The Torah said Noach was a righteous man "in his generation"³. There are two opinions as to what this implies. One view is that this speaks in praise of Noach. He was righteous even in a generation of wicked people; how much more so would he have been righteous in a pious generation. Others, however, believe that this is a derogatory statement about Noach. He was considered righteous only because he lived in a wicked generation and would not have been considered of particular importance if he lived in an era of pious people. We may use this to answer our question. If we say that Noach was not particularly righteous, perhaps he did not fulfill his commandment of building the ark as quickly as he should have!

2. Sanhedrin 108, a.

3. Parshas Noach, Bereishis 6:9.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

However, this does not answer our question. After all of the commandments regarding the building of the ark⁴, "And Noach did; *according to all* that G-d had commanded him, so he did." We see that whatever the case was regarding his righteousness, he was perfectly righteous regarding the building of the ark. Again, why did Noach take so long to build the ark?

According to Rashi, we can also not answer that the fact that he took 120 years was not a lack of enthusiasm; instead, it added to and was a part of the Mitzvah. Rashi says that throughout the 120 years he built the ark, he tried to inspire people to do Teshuvah. As Rashi says, when people would ask him what he was doing, he would tell them, "'The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to bring a flood upon the world.' Perhaps they would repent."

This does not answer our question. Had Noach completed building the ark quickly and displayed it publicly, it would have accomplished the same thing. Everyone who saw it would have asked him what it was, and he would have had the same opportunity to attempt to bring them to repentance.

The Explanation

According to Peshat, since Hashem told Noach, "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood," Noach had to make it from beginning to end. He had to do everything and could not delegate any part of the job. Similarly, in the realm of Halachah, the Rogotchover Gaon writes that whenever the Torah uses the word "make," the Mitzvah consists of making the object itself.

There is a rule in Jewish law that if one appoints an emissary to do something for him, it is as if he had done it. However, not everyone agrees that this would apply in such an instance, and it would certainly not apply to a non-Jew before the giving of the Torah.

The question is not why Noach took so long to build the ark. Instead, the question is how he could build such a massive structure entirely on his own, with no help whatsoever, in 120 years. He made a three-story sea-worthy ship approximately 450 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet tall. Additionally, it had living quarters for all the people aboard and every type of animal.

The Rogotchover Gaon explains two possible perspectives of the building of the ark. One is that the ark must exist. G-d commanded that there must be an ark. The other is that Noach must *build* the ark. This distinction is related to the purpose the ark was meant to serve. Suppose the ark was meant to save the survivors; then it is irrelevant who built it or how it was built. All that matters is that there is an ark. However, if the ark's point is to inspire people to Teshuvah, then the building of the ark is of primary importance.

4. Parshas Noach, Bereishis 6:22.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

According to Peshat, the point of the ark is the latter. Therefore, Rashi states his comments at such length. "There are many ways to bring relief and rescue available to Him; why did He burden him with this construction? So that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him occupying himself with it for one hundred twenty years and ask him, 'For what do you need this?' He would tell them, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to flood the world.' Perhaps they would repent." According to Peshat, the fact that Hashem could have saved Noach and his family any way He chose, but He decided to save them with an ark, is not much of a question. Saving a group of people and animals from a flood by placing them in a ship is perhaps the most natural way. It is keeping closest to the laws of nature. Rashi is not bothered by Hashem's use of an ark. Rashi explains why Hashem burdened him with this construction for 120 years.

Rashi's commentary on the Talmud differs from the Torah's, although both are geared toward explaining the "simple" meaning. This is because the target audience for each is different. Under ideal circumstances, a young child begins the study of the Torah; however, he does not begin the study of the Talmud until he is somewhat older. Therefore, the "simple" meaning of the Torah, Peshat, differs from the simple meaning of the Talmud. Hence, even if there is an apparent contradiction between what Rashi says in his commentary on the Torah and what he says in his commentary on the Talmud, it is not a problem. His explanation of each comes from a different approach.

In the Talmud, Rashi says that Noach's son Shem helped him build the ark. The Rogotchover uses this as proof that the point of the ark is that it must exist. How can we explain the difference between Rashi's explanation of the Torah and the Talmud? Based on the simple meaning of the verses, there is no reason to say that anyone helped Noach build the ark. On the contrary. The Torah says⁵, "And *Noach* did; according to all G-d had commanded him, so he did."

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Zohar⁶ distinguishes between the Divine service of Noach and that of the Tzaddikim who came after him. Noach did not pray on behalf of the rest of the world. Therefore, the flood waters are called "the waters of Noach⁷." As the Zohar says, "the flood resulted from the fact that he did not pray on behalf of his generation." Therefore, it is called by his name. This contrasts with Moshe, who prayed for all Jewish people. Not only that, but he was prepared to sacrifice himself on their behalf. We find that while beseeching the Almighty to forgive

5. Parshas Noach, Bereishis 6:22.

6. Zohar Volume 1, pp 67, b and 254, b. Volume 3, 14, b.

7. Yeshaya 54:9.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

the Jews for the sin of the golden calf, Moshe said⁸, "If you do not forgive them, please erase me from the book which You have written (the Torah)."

The Zohar's statement is quite puzzling. We see clearly from Rashi that Noach rebuked the people of his generation. He went out of his way to warn them that if they did not repent, G-d would bring a flood and destroy the world. He cared about them; why did he not pray on their behalf?

The difference between Noach and Moshe is quite clear. Noach did not rebuke those of his generation to sacrifice himself on their behalf; instead, he was concerned with fulfilling Hashem's command. Therefore, it is written in the works of Chassidus⁹ that Noach "did not pay heed to whether his words of rebuke and warning would affect those with whom he spoke and awaken them to do Teshuvah." Therefore, "he did not pray (with the same self-sacrifice as Moshe) on behalf of his generation."

Conversely, Moshe did not tend to the Jewish people merely to fulfill Hashem's command, and he truly loved and cared for each Jew in the same manner he cared about himself. Therefore, he was prepared to sacrifice himself on behalf of the Jewish Nation.

(Adapted from a talk given on the First Day of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5736)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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8. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:32.

9. See Sefer Hamaamorim 5700 Page 29.

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