

LEHRHAUS

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Miketz

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CONTENTS: Weinstein (Page 1); Alper (Page 8)

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Prometheus's Flood

Yaakov S. Weinstein is a physicist at the MITRE Corporation and is the author of the Torah from Narnia blog.

T*his one will provide relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the ground that God cursed. ([Genesis 5:29](#))*

Noah was heading for another sleepless night.

The magnitude of his dream, his brilliant idea, consumed him, not allowing him to rest. If it worked, he could transform the human condition—making life easier for all! But the idea itself violated God's will, he reasoned, so it must be wrong. Na'amah had urged him time and again

to approach Methuselah for advice. Of course, Noah always had some reason not to go, but Noah and Na'amah both knew they were just excuses. Really, he was scared. How would Methuselah react to his apparent blasphemy? True, Methuselah had always favored him, and it's not that Noah wanted to go against the word of God. After all, doesn't God want people to help others? And he could help everyone! Oy, this is why he can't sleep!

Though not even five hundred years old, Methuselah was the unquestioned spiritual guide of humanity. The son of the mysterious and mystical Enoch, Methuselah was the heir apparent to Adam, the first man, whom he had personally served for over two hundred years ([Seder Olam Rabbah 1](#)). The spiritual health of the world was

on his shoulders. Yet, he greeted Noah warmly and, perceiving Noah's reticence, urged him to speak openly. One could not refuse Methuselah, and Noah's idea came tumbling out. Noah explained that he had designed and developed a plan that would ease the toil of farming, yielding larger harvests with less work. People would no longer have to work the ground with their hands but could use tools of Noah's own invention. Noah's concern, however, was that making farming easier explicitly countered God's curse. Farming was meant to be hard; the land was supposed to be rebellious. This state of affairs arose due to God's curse after Adam's sin. Could Noah seek to undermine God's decree?

Hearing Noah's question, Methuselah smiled. "Proceed," he replied kindly. "God has selected you to relieve the burden of your brethren. Go forth, because God has called you and seared your name into this task. But never forget that it is God who rules the world, and as humanity's burden is eased, it becomes your burden to remind them of Him."

Before Noah's birth, humans did work with their hands. Once Noah was born, he fashioned for them plows and tools for work.

[\(Midrash Tanhuma, Genesis 11\)](#)

Marveling and feeling relieved at Methuselah's vote of confidence, Noah immediately set out to bring his dreams to reality. His first stop was his brothers-in-law, Yaval and Yuval. Yaval worked in

animal husbandry, domesticating animals such as the goat and the ox. Yuval, a musical genius, was experimenting with metal instruments, having taken an interest in blacksmithing and metallurgy after the death of their youngest brother, Tuval-Kayin. Noah showed them his designs for metal farming tools, plows, shovels, and pickaxes, and he shared new ideas of how domesticated animals could work the land. He spoke about the boon to productivity. He waxed poetic on relieving humanity's toil and increasing comfort in human life. How these advances would engender a new era!

They weren't impressed.

He spoke about how much money they would make—that got their attention.

Lemeh's Sons Incorporated soon opened as a three-way partnership between Noah, Yaval, and Yuval, quickly becoming a world-girdling corporation. Noah was right. Everyone wanted farming tools, and everyone wanted animals to work for them—plowing, threshing, and grinding. Inspired by his initial success, Noah went further. He invented looms and cotton gins that revolutionized the making of clothes, and waterwheels that used the power of rivers for a variety of purposes. Within a few decades, subsistence farming became ancient history. Lemeh's Sons Inc. prospered, and an industrial revolution was in full swing. Everyone strove to be an inventor; everyone was waiting for the next big

thing, and people found that—without the constant burden of cultivating food from the ground—they had time for new thoughts, new ideas, and new sorts of activities.

Lots of time. Maybe too much time...

Noah saw that the actions of humanity were deviant, so he hid himself in order not to be entrapped by their ways. He toiled in the service of God, with the books of Adam and the books of Enoch, and he learned how to serve God. ([Zohar Bereishit 1:58](#))

One day, Noah drove his horseless carriage (brand new, invented by Yuval's oldest son—that boy was quite a talent) to Lemech's Sons. It was early, so Noah pulled out his key and tried to open the door. He struggled to get the key in the lock—that was weird! He jiggled it a bit and got the key in, but it wouldn't turn. Strange; he was sure he had used the key just last week! Well, no matter—maybe Yuval had brought in a locksmith. "Security against industrial espionage is a big deal these days," he thought. One can never be too careful. Bit of a shame, as he really wanted to get working on his latest developments in viticulture, but for now he would just wait.

Finally, someone else came, and Noah hurried to his office. He tried his office door. Locked! Since when did he lock his office door? "Probably security again," he thought as he fished out his office key. This key wasn't working either! What is going on here? He really would have to have a word with Yuval. Suddenly, he was surrounded by

security guards. Oh good, they must have realized the problem. He started to explain that Yuval must have changed the locks. But instead of listening, they firmly and without a word escorted him off the premises...

Sitting in court, Noah realized what had happened. Yaval and Yuval had engineered a takeover of the company, driving him out. Of course, he had not sold the stocks they now claimed to own, and he certainly did not act in the sort of degrading manner the witnesses swore to have seen. They must have been bribed, and, based on the uneven questioning of the judge, he must have been bribed as well.

Bribery, theft, promiscuity—there seemed to be a lot of that going around. And what was it that Yaval had said about the new building they had just put up? Something about entertainment. He thought it meant an orchestra, but he did remember seeing an order for a lot of playing cards; and the waitresses' attire was rather skimpy. Was that appropriate attire for concerts these days? What was happening? Since when did morality take such a dive? Turning his attention back to his case, Noah saw that his lawyer didn't seem to be doing too well. Was he in on it too?

Noah lost.

Without work, Noah spent his time sulking. Everyone seemed to have abandoned him—Noah! The one who had worked so hard to ease their pain! Clearly, it was time for something drastic. Well, this worked both ways. They had abandoned

him, and so he would abandon them. He knew of an estate he could buy way out in the valley. Despite Yuval's actions, he still had plenty of money. He would retire there. What was it Methuselah had said? To remember God! Admittedly he hadn't really done such a good job on that score, but now that would all change! He and Na'amah would isolate themselves and concentrate solely on God.

And so, having lost his share in the company and some luster of his reputation, Noah left.

For more than two centuries, Noah isolated himself studying the great works of Adam, Enoch, and Methuselah. The world around him advanced technologically by leaps and bounds, but it was only Na'amah who interacted with it. The house was furnished with electricity and then an internet connection. He paid scant attention. Na'amah had a telephone installed and then got him a smartphone; he refused to use either of them. The only time he went out was to accompany Na'amah to the fertility clinic and to visit Methuselah to discuss his studies. Na'amah constantly pointed out how helpful the doctors and nurses at the clinic were and how much they really cared for her. Noah heard her but paid little heed. And Methuselah was growing a bit spooky. He kept speaking of the end of the world and Noah's responsibility to humanity. "Well, good, let the world end!" he thought. "I already tried to take responsibility and look how they treated me! I will concentrate only on God."

And then one night, God spoke to Noah directly. "Noah," God said, "the time has come. Humanity has grown technologically but has regressed morally into thieving and murderous savages. In 120 years, I am going to destroy them and all of creation through Flood. Only you are righteous! Build an Ark for yourself, and gather animals and plants from every species, for only through you will life survive."

All one hundred and twenty years, Noah would plant cedars and chop them down (for timber). They said to him: "Why are you doing this?" He said to them: "So said the Master of the universe, that He is bringing a Flood upon the world." ([Genesis Rabbah 30:7](#))

Overwhelmed by God's immediate presence, Noah started building the Ark. Trees had to be planted and cultivated; designs and measurements needed to be drawn; lists had to be made and constantly checked and updated. For almost twenty years, everything went according to plan. Only Na'amah and Methuselah knew what Noah was doing, and Noah was not seeing anyone.

Then one day, Na'amah announced she was pregnant. Noah was surprised. For the past twenty years, he thought he had finally understood God's rationale for keeping her (and him) childless. He would have children eventually, he was sure. God had promised that humanity would survive through him. But that would be after the Flood, or so he thought. Having children before the Flood

would mean extra people on the Ark, or even worse, children who might perish along with the evil ones of the generation. He thought God was sparing him that potential pain. So, why would God grant him children now?

Though not understanding, Noah rejoiced with his wife and even went to personally thank Na'amah's doctors and nurses. Then Na'amah dropped the bomb: "We need to host a celebration."

"A celebration?" replied a bewildered Noah. "You mean a party? With guests? Here?"

"Yes, here," enthused Na'amah. "When was the last time we had anyone over? We'll invite all the staff from the fertility center; Methuselah; and the rest of our families—well, not Yaval and Yuval, of course, but everyone else—and maybe some friends. You know Methuselah is going to want to name the baby."

"Of course, of course," admitted Noah hurriedly. "We can't hold back that honor from Methuselah, but do we really need everyone else?" She gave him a look. That answered the question.

The day came. And Methuselah held Noah's firstborn son up to the crowd and pronounced his name: Yefet—for the beauty of God would manifest in the world through him. After the ceremony, the crowd gathered for refreshments, and people noticed Noah's skeleton of an Ark. "Noah, what are you doing?" they asked. And now Noah was forced to reveal his prophecy: "God will

bring a Flood to destroy this world now filled with theft, murder, promiscuity, and moral decay. Repent now, and you can join me on the Ark and survive the Flood."

As word of Noah's project spread, people started coming to see the Ark. Trying to balance his desire to be alone and the ability to warn people of impending doom, Noah neither encouraged nor discouraged these visits. Instead, he would always repeat the same thing: "God will bring a Flood to destroy the world—the time to repent is now."

Two additional sons followed Yefet in quick succession, Shem and Cham. And again, Na'amah insisted on having parties and inviting everyone over. Noah continued to proclaim his message. While people respected Noah, Yaval and Yuval's treachery had by this point become well established; no one really took it seriously. After all, Noah himself, though building an Ark, didn't really seem to want to get the message out. It was probably just a stunt to get people to repent. Clever, really, but there was no Flood actually coming. In fact, someone started a website, RepentNow.org, which followed Noah's progress in building the Ark. But even the website admitted that it was not supported by Noah himself (though they did make a mint on advertising scuba gear).

People sought to overturn the Ark, but God surrounded it with lions so they would not touch it. ([Genesis Rabbah 32:8](#))

Finally, the day came. Noah had attended

Methuselah's funeral the week before and had given a rousing eulogy, remarking on Methuselah's link to Adam the first man, his moral stature, spiritual greatness, and his incredible caring and kindness. Noah urged the people to follow in Methuselah's footsteps to be moral and upright. It was almost like the old days, when Noah interacted with people. But it was too late for that. Now was not the time to start again.

A great adventure was at hand.

With Noah's Ark complete, RepentNow.org had special features on all aspects of the vehicle. In great detail, it described its design and the building materials used. There was even a live video feed of all the animals going onboard. People came from all over to see Noah board the Ark, and the question on everyone's lips was the same. How far was Noah really going to carry this charade? Everyone knew that Noah was just using an impending Flood as a tool to get people to think a bit about God. It was his way of scaring the populace who had, admittedly, not given him the honor he deserved for sparking the industrial revolution that had driven human progress over the past half-millennium. But an actual Flood that would destroy everything? No one believed that.

Noah emerged from his house with Na'amah at his side and his three sons and their wives behind them. The animals, food, and plants had already been put on the Ark. Noah looked around, apparently surprised to see a crowd. He paused for a moment as if he wanted to say something but

then realized he had nothing to say. So, silently, he and his family entered the Ark.

A murmur went through the crowd. No one had really thought Noah would take this whole thing that far. They assumed he would just give a speech.

Then a rumble of thunder was heard—it smelled like rain. The crowd grew restless. A drizzle started to fall, and people started to rethink doubting Noah. The rain grew stronger—a booming clap of thunder echoed through the valley. The crowd became hysterical and rushed the Ark seeking to stop it, to overturn it, to do something, anything that could save them. But God closed the door of the Ark, and lions appeared to hold the crowd back. It was then the people realized...

It was too late...

R. Levi said: Neither Noah nor his sons were able to sleep during the entire twelve months (in the Ark) because they were obliged to feed the animals, the beasts, and the birds... Some of the animals had to be fed at the second hour in the night and others at the third hour of the night. ([Midrash Tanhuma, Noah 9](#))

Life on the Ark was a nightmare. There was no time to rest, no time to read, no time to contemplate.

"It's worth it," thought Noah. "A new world awaits us on the other side."

And eventually, the Ark landed on the mountains of Ararat.

Once again, God appeared to Noah and now told him the time had come for him, his family, and all the animals to leave the Ark. They were to be fruitful and multiply and build a new world.

They did, and Noah, seeing a fresh, new world, was filled with gratitude toward God. He immediately built an altar and brought sacrifices upon it, as he learned to do from the books of Adam. God rejoiced in Noah's service, blessed him and his children, and formed a covenant between God and humanity to never again destroy the world by means of the waters of a Flood.

With that done, and a safe future guaranteed, the time came to actually rebuild. Noah was at first inspired. He and his sons had built small cabins, and he was all set to go back to farming. He even had a couple of tools that he had fortunately brought onto the Ark. Maybe he would work on that viticulture project he was so excited about before Yuval had him thrown out of Lemech's Sons. Yes, that would be fun! He sat down to draw up some plans... But he was almost immediately interrupted by a knock on his door. It was Yefet, looking rather lost.

"Yefet, my son, isn't this new world wonderful?"

"Uh... yes, of course, father," answered Yefet tentatively, "but, uh, what am I supposed to do?"

"Do?" asked Noah. "What do you mean? We need to farm the land, plant crops, and produce food!"

"Umm—I don't know how to do that," replied Yefet timidly. "I paint, I sculpt, I use graphic design. I try to show God's beauty imbued in the world. But I have no materials to paint or sculpt, and surely there are no computers left... Are you going to teach me to farm?"

And suddenly, it dawned on Noah that though he was prepared to return to basic farming techniques, his sons and their wives had barely ever seen a farm, much less worked on one. What were they to do? He had some farming tools, but he never thought to bring enough for everyone. For now they would have to use their hands...

Then Na'amah walked in looking shaken. "Are you OK?" Noah asked. "You look troubled."

"I know I shouldn't complain; God spared our lives and is enabling us to rebuild. So I know I shouldn't live in the past and think about the people I used to meet at the market and when I was out buying food and supplies. I didn't really know them. But what about the people who helped us so much when we were childless? God killed them, so they must have deserved it, but they had so much goodness in them—why didn't it blossom into real repentance so they too could have been saved?"

"Well, they should have been different, but they weren't," Noah replied unsteadily. "Who are we to

question the will of God?”

Noah returned to his plans, but he couldn't concentrate. He got up to take a walk outside...

He was heading for another sleepless night. Ever since that conversation with Na'amah, he couldn't stop reliving it. And now he could no longer approach Methuselah with his troubles. His great inventions, the new world after the industrial revolution, and the evil it spawned were wiped away by the Flood. But was it all evil? Didn't he himself rejoice in those doctors and nurses who helped him and his wife? Of course, he didn't know what they did in their spare time, but Na'amah was certainly correct. They showed they had a spark, more than a spark, of goodness in them. Could he have blown that spark into a flame?

Even worse, if there were others who were purely evil, wasn't he, Noah, the ultimate cause? Weren't his inventions the ones that sparked the technological advances in the first place and enabled the leisure time that humanity had used so poorly?

Suddenly, he remembered clearly what Methuselah had warned him of all those years ago: "As humanity's burden is eased, it becomes your burden to remind them of God." Did he do that? He tried. Well, okay, he didn't really try too hard, but he was busy working on different projects. He would have reminded them after those were done, if not for those treacherous

leeches, Yaval and Yuval. It's their fault.

But as he lay there awake, he realized it wasn't so simple. God gave him further chances: the success in having children, the parties Na'amah insisted on having. He had cut himself off and had not reminded them of God. But God arranged that they should come to him so he could remind them. And he did, a little... But did he really care? Did he really try?

Is it really my fault?

"Maybe I should work on the viticulture project some more," he thought. "I need a drink."

Heaven-Bound

Julian Alper writes poetry and is the president of Voices Israel Group of Poets in English (<https://voicesisrael.com/>).

The straps looked old and weary, wearing thin in places, little tears here and there, no longer as black as they once were. The boxes weren't perfectly square; the paint on them was flaking, rendering them completely unfit for ritual use. They needed a good overhaul, a complete refurbishment, and though I was somewhat embarrassed, I grasped my fear by the arm and took them to the *tefillin* repair man.

He meticulously scrutinized the straps and said,
“You know where these will go?”
I bowed my head, my shame burning fiercely on
my face.

“They’ll go straight to Heaven
and will testify in your defense
before the Heavenly Tribunal.”

Now
it’s no longer a bind
to put on my renovated *tefillin*
knowing that they too will be Heaven-bound.
I hope I’ll be deemed fit to meet them there
im yirtzeh Hashem
... but not just yet.

Im yirtzeh Hashem—if it’s G-d’s will.

Happy Hanukkah!

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Please contact us at editors@thelehrhaus.com