

## **We Too Can Build An Ark And Survive The Flood**

As a boy, and like most other children, I enjoyed stories of heroic rescue and of people finding the means of escape from situations which otherwise looked completely hopeless. I'm sure you would agree, these are all the ingredients which good children's stories continue to be made today. And the Bible is not without its share of them.

The story of Samson - just by way of an example - is one of these. There was one occasion when Samson's enemies came and surrounded the town of Gaza in which he was staying overnight and, while it doesn't spell this out, it is obvious that they locked the town gates against him, thinking to keep him in. But it didn't work. "Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron." (Judges 16:3).

But the first of such stories of escape or rescue in the Bible is the story of Noah's ark and the Flood. Warned of a terrifying flood, which no one, indeed nothing, would survive, Noah was instructed by God to build an Ark. And that Ark would be a refuge in which he, his wife, his sons, and their wives, as well as two of every living creature, animals and birds, could be safe until the flood subsided. It would be their means of escape.

As you are almost certainly aware, this is another of those stories from the early chapters of the Book of Genesis around which controversy has raged as to whether it actually happened. From within the Church there has been stout resistance to the idea that the whole thing is an impossibility. And we know of expeditions in years gone past to try to find what would be the remains of the Ark in order to prove the correctness of the Bible record. There has been this fear that if the Bible record should be shown to be incorrect, or if its facts established as being wrong, all would be lost. But this misses the point that the Bible doesn't in fact stand or fall on the basis of its factual or literal accuracy. Its importance, its worth, its relevance, its correctness, is instead to be measured against our own lives and the extent that it both highlights and identifies experiences we can expect to face, or have already done so.

In this regard there is absolutely no question as to its correctness and accuracy. We can so easily overlook the fact that the Bible is a Divine book and that through its pages, its histories; its retelling of ancient events; and all the rest; God is talking to us about ourselves. In the Bible, from Genesis through to Revelation, God speaks to us about spiritual life and progress. After all, this is where God's chief interests and concerns lie, that we should grow and change and develop spiritually. This is why the Divine caused us to be born into this world. And this is where the Divine is working with us all the time.

Therefore it follows that in the Bible, or "Word of God", this is going to be the principle indeed, the only topic. Jesus said "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life". (John 6:63). They are not boring genealogies or dry histories. They are spirit and they are life. It is in and through the Bible that the Lord talks to us of living things and of issues that confront us in our relationships with others and the world in general today. Here again, it was the apostle Paul who warned that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6). We have got to get to the heart, to the essential meaning and message, to the Spirit which lies within the letter.

More than one hundred years before the science versus religion debate erupted and the factual accuracy of the Bible began to be seriously questioned, Emanuel Swedenborg wrote, concerning the early chapters of Genesis, that they consisted of 'made-up' histories. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1403). He went on to show that the importance of these stories, or histories, lies in the deeper, spiritual meaning, they contain. They are to be looked upon, like all the different stories and histories in the Word, as parables. The Lord has used these stories as vehicles for conveying truth and teaching which touches upon every person's spiritual growth and development.

The story of the Flood is a parable. It is a story which, though 'made up', the Lord caused to be included in our Bible because by means of it He would talk to us, and teach us, about what is one of our most frequent experiences. Time and again we stand in danger of being 'swept away' by our baser desires and unregenerate feelings and attitudes. Thoughts and ideas can come swirling into our minds, like muddy flood waters. You know what it's like to start brooding on an imagined insult. Dark and resentful thoughts start tumbling into our minds. What starts as a trickle soon becomes a flood. And those thoughts, just like flood waters, at last come to cover everything.

The thing is whether we go under and allow ourselves to be swept away by these, or whether, as with Noah, we are somehow able to rise above them and hold out against them. And this is really where the story is so important to us. Here the Lord is saying to us that while unregenerate feelings and thoughts will come rushing into our minds from time to time, there is a way we can avoid being carried away by them.

In the new King James Version of the Bible, Psalm 69 is described as "An Urgent Plea for Help in Trouble". It begins: "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters where the floods overflow me." And in verses 14 and 15, it continues: "Deliver me out of the mire. And let me not sink. Let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the floodwater overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up." Clearly, the writer of the Psalm, said to be David wasn't talking about waters and floods such as people have known in parts of Queensland and New South Wales. He was referring to thoughts and ideas and unregenerate feelings. These were what had come up to his neck and it was into these that he feared to sink further.

"There is no Flood or inundation" wrote Swedenborg, "except that of falsities." (*Arcana Caelestia* 787). Such an inundation is excited or triggered by the evil spirits present with a person. They flow in with the persuasions and principles of falsity in which they are and excite, or awaken, the same things in the person they are with. When a person is beset by such an inundation he or she is indignant, becomes angry, thinks restlessly, and falsely, and desires vehemently. (see also *Arcana Caelestia* 705<sup>5</sup> and 5725).

One of the most impressive, or memorable, things about the Flood was that it covered everything. Hills and even mountains were at last submerged (see Ch. 7: 19-20). And how true this is when we see the meaning here as applied to ourselves! When we are feeling resentful towards someone, that resentment can come to 'cover everything'. In the end there's no good thought left in our minds about them. Even their best points are eventually covered over. We no longer see these. The fact is, of course, that we don't want to see them. And if, as we are thinking about them, they come to mind, we soon lose sight of them as our resentment grows deeper.

In the previous talk, you may well recall the true story, told of an African, who was mistakenly given too much change by a white store keeper. As he dithered, in confusion, as to what he should do, his conscience tugging at him, a "flood" of thoughts would have swept into his mind urging him to take the money and giving him a dozen reasons to justify doing so. As we saw, he didn't succumb. He could so easily have done so. But he didn't. He managed to survive that flood when others, similarly placed, wouldn't have done.

The principle point in the story is that by careful preparation and by following the Lord's instructions, we are able - as Noah was - to survive these floods. And this brings us to what is meant by the Ark. The easy and lazy thing to do is to do nothing. That's precisely what Noah's countrymen did. They did nothing. And if we do nothing, if we ignore the spiritual side of life, if we simply refuse to take to heart what the Lord teaches us and apply it to life, then we're going to get carried away, just as all those people are said to have been. We've made no preparation. We've got nothing which can provide a refuge for us.

Although it sounds at first 'technical' to speak of it in this way, the Ark is the 'Church', the Lord's Church or His 'kingdom', in our hearts and minds and it is something which is only built up over a long period of time. It comes into being in the first place, by learning what the Lord desires and requires of us, and from putting this into practice in our lives. And it is this which provides a refuge for us and which enables us to withstand the floods of unregenerate thoughts and feelings which are going to sweep across our lives.

As Noah was urged and commanded to build his famous Ark, so are we 'urged' and 'commanded' to take the fundamental principles and values given to us in the Word of God; to work on them and to bring them together in our lives. It's also important, that like Noah's Ark, which had a window at the top, open to the heavens, what we build is open to the Lord above, and that His light and love is able to flow into us. Here is where we shall have protection, and a refuge, and a means of escape from the waters of falsity and evil which would otherwise sweep us away to our spiritual death.

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