

Who was Noah's oldest son? Let's see, most of the time the three sons are listed as Shem, Ham and Japheth, right? Typically, lists like this are done in birth order, so Shem must be the eldest, right? Nope.

It takes a little detective work, but you can determine that Japheth was the oldest.<sup>1</sup> Shem was second, and Ham was the youngest.<sup>2</sup> This order is confirmed by the order of the table of nations in Genesis 10, where I am listed first. Me, Japheth, yes, I'm the firstborn son of Noah. I'm not one of those birth order crazies, but in our case, birth order is important.

And we're bonus babies. You know, babies born to parents well after they think they will never have another child. My brothers and I are big-time bonus babies. All born when our father was more than 500 years old!<sup>3</sup>

Dad is rather well known even in your time. Noah, maybe you've heard of him? He is a farmer and a preacher by profession, but you know him better as a boat-builder.<sup>4</sup> Reputation justified; there is no record that his preaching did any good to anybody outside of our family. He must have done something right though, because he found favor in God's eyes.

East Saint Louis, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the US. Relatively gentle compared to some cities in other countries, however. And these... no worse than my neighborhood. They have gangs, we had Nephilim.

During my time, the sons of God saw the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married the ones they chose. Their offspring were The Nephilim. Certainly, this brings up loads of questions for modern readers but just know, it was bad. How bad? The Lord saw the wickedness of people was so bad that all inclinations of their hearts were *only* evil *all* the time. The earth was filled with violence. It was so bad that the Lord regretted that he had made human beings. He was so troubled that he said he would wipe out the human race and all land creatures.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 10:21. However, some translations can be interpreted that Japheth is not the oldest.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 9:24

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 5:32

<sup>4</sup> 2 Peter 2:5

My father was a righteous man. He walked faithfully with God. I'm not saying he was perfect, but he had a faultless reputation among his people. God came to him and said that he was going to wipe out all the people and the earth. However, he would have mercy on my father and our family.

God said he was going to bring floodwaters to destroy every living creature on the land. Wait a minute, you might say. I thought it was rain that caused the flood. Well, at the time God first told my father, he talked only of floodwaters. You see, we understood floodwaters, but there is no Biblical record we even knew about such a thing as rain.

God's salvation plan for our family was for us to build a big boat that would hold not only our family but representative animals of every kind. How big of a boat? About 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. About the square footage of half of a football stadium, and a height of more than four stories.

The Bible does not specify when Noah started building the Ark, but based on the fact that all of his sons were to have wives, and we were born 100 years before the flood, you can guess that Noah built the ark for maybe fifty or more years.

Here, let me set the scene for you. A five hundred and fifty year-old man building an humungous boat in the middle of nowhere. The toughest people in the world walking by and making fun of him. The old man preaching to them between his hammer and axe swings. His old wife bringing him food from time to time. His three sons and their wives vacillating between helping him and hiding their faces from their friends. Every day. For decades.

Dad was tougher than anybody who came by. He never wavered. He never quit preaching. He never quit working. My father completely believed God. He knew the stakes were high for his family. What a man!

Over the decades, the boat began to take shape. Three decks, with rooms on each deck. Coated with tar inside and out. It had a roof, one small window, and a door on the side. Storage rooms and eating troughs and mangers.

One day, we got the message from God to start gathering food, both for us and the animals, and put it on the boat. Soon, animals started showing up. Animals of every kind. Many types had never been seen by any of us. The more animals that arrived, the more scared our neighbors became. God did not allow any of animals to be harmed by the neighbors. Maybe that Noah guy isn't so crazy after all. But they weren't too worried, there still wasn't any water. Smelly, yes. Noisy, yes. Floods, no.

When my father turned six hundred years-old, God instructed the eight of us to go into the boat with seven pairs of some types of animals and birds, and one pair of other types of animals. It took seven days for us to get everything loaded and onboard. When the last animal walked onto the boat, God closed the door and sealed us in. We were good to go.

Imagine us in the boat. Suspense levels pegged. We realize we have no sails or rudders. We are completely at God's mercy. We have no control. We sit in the darkness and quiet. My father prays and prays. Nothing happens. Dead quiet. Nothing happens. Nothing.

Is that a scratching sound? A rattling sound? Rain?! So that's what rain sounds like. Louder and louder, the rain pounds the boat from every direction. The flood waters slap against the bottom of the boat. After a few hours, a different kind of pounding. Dad bursts into tears. The neighbors! Our neighbors are drowning, they are finally ready to believe him. Frantic to enter the ark and get salvation. Too late. We can do nothing. Screams fade, and the boat shudders as it lifts off the ground.

The springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens were opened by the Lord. For forty days the flood increased. The waters rose until they covered the highest mountains by more than twenty-five feet. Every living thing that lived on the earth died. Every. Single. Thing.... except those of us on the ark.

We floated for one hundred and fifty days. God shut off the springs and flood gates of heaven. He sent a wind to drive back the waters. We landed on the mountains of Ararat, and the waters continued to recede.

After forty days, Noah opened the window and sent out a raven. It couldn't find a place to land, it came back. Days later, Noah sent a dove, but it returned, too. He waited another seven days and sent the dove again. The dove returned, an olive branch in its beak! We knew the waters had greatly receded. A week later, Noah sent out the dove, it did not return.

Later, when the land was completely dry, God commanded us to leave the ark with all the animals. We did, with instructions for all of us to be fruitful and multiply. Noah sacrificed a few of the birds and animals, which pleased the Lord.

The Lord gave us dominion over the animals but instructed us not to eat any animals with blood still in them. We were also instructed not to take the life of humans because we are made in the image of God.

God gave us an unconditional, one-sided promise. He gave his promise to all humans and animals. He said he would never again destroy all life with flood waters. As a sign of this promise, he placed a rainbow in the sky. Every time we see a rainbow, we remember that promise.

Ok, all the evil people were gone. Time for a fresh start. We messed up pretty quickly. No sooner had we gotten off the boat than my father planted a vineyard. At the first harvest he got drunk and passed out naked. My youngest brother saw him, and made fun of him in front of me and my brother, Shem. Shem and I honored our father, we averted our eyes and covered him with a garment.

When our father found out what his youngest son had done, he placed a vicious curse on Ham. He pronounced that Ham's descendants through one of his sons would be the slaves of my descendants and Shem's descendants, and that my territory would be enlarged.

My father lived 350 years more after the flood, and died at the age of 950 years. You can't even begin to imagine the stories grandpa told his grandsons and great grand sons and great great grandsons, and then they told their sons, grandsons and great grandsons.

What happened to the three sons of Noah? All people on earth were our descendants. I had seven sons, and they had many sons. The maritime peoples came from my family.

Shem's family became known as Semites. He had five sons. Many nations came from his descendants, including the Israelite nation from Abraham. And this was why Shem was typically listed first in the order of sons. The Bible was written by the Israelites, who came from Abraham, who came from Shem.

Ham had four sons. His grandson Nimrod was a mighty hunter and the creator of many of the early civilizations, such as Babylon and Uruk, Akkad and Ninevah. The Philistines and Canaanites were descendants of Ham. Those descendants would become mortal enemies of the Israelites, descendants of Shem.

So, there you have it, one of the most famous stories of the Bible. But hundreds of ancient civilizations had flood myths and stories? That's what you're thinking. Some of you, anyway. Of course, they did. And where did those civilizations come from? They are descendants of my brothers and me. The flood story was passed down, on and on, told to our children and all of their descendants. Lots of stories, one flood.