

3. *Noah* is the next man in the writer's list of faithful fathers (11:7). This accords with the Genesis account and its tracing out of Seth's line of faithful descendents. Genesis introduces Noah as the climax of the "generations section" pertaining to Adam (5:1-32), and it distinguishes him as the first man directly connected with God's promise of a restoring human seed (Genesis 3:15). That connection was through Noah's role in the flood episode, hence its central place in his own "generations section" (Genesis 6:9ff).

The fall resulted in a curse on the whole creation, such that God's intended *peace* (*shalom*) and *rest* (*shabbat*) were destroyed. Instead of creational harmony and flourishing in which man, the image-son, administered God's loving lordship, the creation was now characterized by division, estrangement, hostility and disintegration. No longer would the earth yield its provision eagerly and abundantly; henceforth it was going to oppose the human image-lords (and itself) at every point, consuming their life energy and eventually their lives and bodies (Genesis 3:17-19). The creation that reflected the living God was now subjected to futility, alienation, and the agony of death. Thus the promise of a restoring seed was the promise of the rest and peace God intended; it was the promise of life out of death. The Genesis account explicitly connected Noah with this promise and God's abiding commitment to it, first by the name given to him (derived from a Hebrew word meaning *comfort* or *rest*), and then by his father's prophetic commentary on it: "*This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed*" (Genesis 5:29).

Like Abel and Enoch, Noah and his faith must be viewed through the lens of his ordained place in and contribution to the unfolding salvation history as it moved inexorably toward its climax in Jesus the Messiah. The Hebrews writer wasn't simply compiling a random list of faithful individuals drawn from Israel's scriptures; rather, he was echoing the Scripture's own purpose, pattern, and direction in telling its story. This story is traced out through the lives of faithful individuals – men and women who believed the God who had promised, and so entrusted themselves and their lives to Him in sure hope of the day when He'd arise and fulfill His good word. All of these died in faith without receiving what was promised, but they saw it from a distance and held tightly to it (11:13, 39).

Genesis' treatment of Noah's life is much more extensive than its account of Abel and Enoch (6:1-9:29). Yet it, too, focuses on one matter, namely Noah's role in the flood event by which God purged and renewed the earth. In this way, Noah represented a huge step forward in God's disclosure of His intent for the world: If the Protoevangelium (Genesis 3:15) promised remedy for the curse, Noah's life experience showed that this remedy would involve the creation's cleansing and renewal in connection with a great work of deliverance. *Noah, then, prefigured Eve's promised seed, but in a way that provided insight into how this offspring would accomplish the mission appointed for him.*

As he did with Abel and Enoch, the Hebrews writer derived his understanding of Noah's faith from the scriptural record. But, while Genesis devotes four chapters to Noah, the writer described him and his faith in only a single sentence (11:7). His statement is a summary snapshot of the Genesis account, and so must be interpreted through the lens of that account, but especially as it contributes to the larger Genesis story and its concerns.

The writer highlighted the key aspects of the Genesis narrative: God’s warning to Noah of impending destruction (6:11-13); His command to build an ark to preserve him and his family (6:14-18); Noah’s devoted submission (“reverence”) in obeying God’s word (6:22); the significance of Noah’s faithfulness for the world and for himself (7:1-9:29).

Noah’s inclusion in his list shows that the writer believed his faith was of the same sort as that of Abel and Enoch. Yet, his depiction of Noah’s faith connects it more concretely with his description of faith in verse 11:1. As faith gives *present substance* to what God has promised but not yet brought to pass, so Noah believed God concerning “things not seen.” It is the nature of faith to believe God for things that don’t presently exist; things that He has spoken of and pledged. To believe God is to believe *His* vision and goal for His world, and Noah shared this sort of trusting confidence with Abel and Enoch (and all of the faithful after them). At the same time, the Hebrews writer distinguished Noah from those two men by explicitly connecting his faith with the “*assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen.*”

- The scriptural account of Abel and Enoch doesn’t correlate their faith with the Hebrews writer’s description in 11:1; one must look back to the promise of Genesis 3:15 to find any suggestion of how their faith believed God for “things not seen.” The indication is that their faith held tightly to Him as He’d pledged to remedy the curse and renew His creation through a triumphant human being.
- Noah shared this same confident faith in a future renewal, but with a more concrete perception of it. For God had revealed to him His intent to renew the corrupted world through an unprecedented, indeed unimaginable, work of destruction, deliverance, and cleansing – a work that had Noah at its center.

If Abel and Enoch had faced a challenge in believing God regarding His promise of a man who would single-handedly resolve the curse that had consumed the entire created order, the challenge to Noah’s faith transcended theirs in two crucial respects: Noah had to believe God that He was going to supernaturally deluge the entire earth with a massive, all-destroying flood. But he also had to believe God that deliverance would come in the form of a massive vessel – a covenant ark – that he *himself* would build and fill. Noah was to be God’s instrument of condemnation and renewal, but through a seemingly impossible task. With little help, he was required to construct a ship of unprecedented scale, and not at a seaport, but far inland. And assuming he could accomplish that monumental project, he then needed to gather the food and other resources for months of supply for an innumerable host of animals that the Lord was going to gather to him.

Noah had to believe God for the *unbelievable* – not just the unimaginable cataclysm of the flood, but his own crucial role in it. If it was difficult to believe that God would bring such a deluge, that was nothing compared with believing that *he* could fulfill God’s charge to him. How could such a thing be done? Even if he could acquire the materials and find the strength to build the ark, how would he supply its host of inhabitants? And could he convince his family that he hadn’t lost his mind? And how would he withstand the continual scorn and ridicule of those who watched him build year after year?

The Genesis account is surprisingly silent regarding Noah's thoughts and struggles in carrying out his mission. Though volumes surely could be written about that long and arduous episode, the narrative simply states that he did "*according to all that God had commanded him*" (Genesis 6:22). However, it does hint at how Noah would have handled his myriad challenges by describing the sort of man he was: Noah was a "*righteous man, blameless in his generation, a man who walked with God.*" As such, he was a man who "*found favor in the eyes of the Lord*" (Genesis 6:8-9).

Again, it's critically important to interpret these statements properly: Faith and righteousness imply one another in that the person who is *right* with God relates to Him, to himself, and to all things according to the truth as it exists in God and is manifest in His creation. Faith is owning and living out the truth of human existence as God's *image-son*; it is the "righteousness" of intimate sonship. This is the sense in which faithful individuals "walk with God," and Noah's "walk" was on display for all to see over many long years of laboring in a seemingly absurd cause. But by his faithfulness, mocked and scorned as insanity by those who watched him, Noah condemned *them* as the insane ones.

All of the individuals noted in chapter 11 were characterized by this sort of "reverent" faith, but Noah also enjoyed a further distinction: He was the first explicit prefiguration of the "seed" promised to Eve. God pledged a human descendent who would overthrow the serpent and the curse that resulted from his deception, and He furthered this revelation through Noah and his mission. Noah is presented as unique in his time, a righteous man in the midst of a human race in which "*every inclination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil continually,*" a race of alienated and perverse image-children that grieved their Creator-Father and provoked Him to destroy them (Genesis 6:5-7). But God's intent in this wasn't to annihilate His good creation, but to purge and renew it with a view to His design for it. Thus He didn't seek the destruction of mankind, but a new human race born out of a new "Adam" – a new human community inhabiting a renewed earth covenanted to Him through the devoted obedience of a righteous, faithful deliverer.

This is the lens for properly perceiving Noah's distinction as a righteous man who uniquely enjoyed God's favor. He, too, was a son of Adam born under the curse, and in that way Noah stood in solidarity with his generation (Genesis 9:20-28). But, unlike them, he walked with God, and yet his primary distinction was his typological status. *The text doesn't describe Noah as uniquely "blameless" and "righteous" to persuade the reader that he was without sin, but to connect him explicitly with the coming deliverer.* The Genesis narrative wants the reader to see in Noah a prototype of Eve's promised son and his restorative work, and thus describes him and his relationship with God in these absolute terms. Treating Noah in this way is essential to the typological correspondence.

The Hebrews writer understood this, as reflected in his summary of Noah, which surely would have turned his readers' minds to the object of their faith: *Noah, by his faith and the means of a covenant ark, was God's instrument of condemnation, deliverance, and renewal. And by this unwavering faith, he indicted the world as false and obtained the inheritance that belongs to all of the true image-children – those who preceded him, but, even more, those who would follow after him as coming from him as God's new Adam.*