

Role Models For Last Day Living Part III: Noah

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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It was the year 1899. Only a few years before this, our church had begun work in Australia, and now a school at Cooranbong, Avondale, just south of Sydney was under construction. An urgent appeal for funds to help in the building was made to the Church which was gathering for its General Conference in March of that year. Ellen White wrote a letter, reminding the brethren that the Church had pledged to match dollar for dollar in the building of this new work across the planet.

Elder George Irwin (if you went to school at Pacific Union College, maybe you'll remember "Irwin Hall"), president of the General Conference, stood and read the letter aloud to the delegates and asked, "What are we going to do about this?" Elder W. W. Prescott stood also and challenged the congregation. "Are we going to sit here and do nothing, or are we going to do something?" The people responded, "Yes, let's do something."

President Irwin pledged to give \$100.00, which at that time represented a month's salary. Prescott joined him in making a pledge for \$100.00; so did Elder J. N. Loughborough and soon many others were making pledges. Secretaries scrambled to jot the figures and names on papers to keep record. Before too long \$3,400 had been pledged. Not all were \$100.00 pledges; some were for \$50.00, \$10.00 or \$5.00, but a sizable amount was committed toward the school at Avondale.

Then a voice was heard from the room, "I pledge to give \$5,000.00." This would be an amount equivalent to more than 4 year's salary! Heads swiveled to see who this might be, but they didn't recognize the man who had spoken. His name was Henry Norman. Captain Henry Norman. While Elder F. H. Westphal had been in route from South America to the General Conference, he had become acquainted with Norman while he was on vacation and Westphal had shared with him some of the Bible truths he held dearly. Norman became interested and upon Westphal's invitation, decided to change his vacation plans and attend the General Conference session. Daily he drank in the truths presented. He kept his first Sabbath there, and when the call for funds came, Captain Norman, an owner of a fleet of ships, responded with pledges as well as committing his own personal yacht, worth \$11,000, to be used as a mission launch, anchored in New York's harbor.

Captain Norman testified, "Here is the baby of the family. Of course you all know that I am not a minister of the gospel, but I thank the Lord that I found this people....I am here to stay....with the Lord's help, I intend to serve God faithfully. I have given myself and all that I have to the Lord." Before the session came to its end, Norman had pledged over \$400,000, including \$200,000 toward the General Conference Association, \$100,000 for the foreign mission board and \$100,000 to be divided up among different countries, including another \$10,000 for Australia. The congregation was grateful and ecstatic!

By late March, almost \$2,400.00 of the funds that had been pledged by the delegates had been received and sent to Avondale. With eager expectation they awaited the remainder of the funds, including the \$5,000.00 pledged by Captain Norman for the school, as well as the \$10,000 for Australia at large.

About this time, a question arose. "Where was Captain Norman?" No one had seen him for a while, nor knew of his whereabouts. Whispers of a whirlwind romance with one of the secretaries of the General Conference were heard, and it was learned that certain proposals had been made to one of the young women, who had advanced the "Captain" \$300.00 from her personal savings so that he could go and attend to an urgent need in New York, after which he would send for her. No one, including a heart-broken and purse-lightened secretary ever heard from Captain Norman again! It was all a fraud! Total fabrication! Nothing but a mirage! Apparently there was no fleet of ships, there was no personal yacht and no funds. Not one penny was ever given in his name to the cause. They had been deceived; taken in by a skilled and consummate con-artist; a professional grifter who saw an opportunity and likely knew from the start what his strategy would be. (See Ellen G. White, Vol. 5, by Arthur L. White, pp. 410-418.)

From the very beginning, Satan has been a deceiver; a confidence artist. He talked Eve into believing something that didn't exist. He presented himself in a false light, leading her to believe his words. The pledges he made turned out to be a mirage, an empty promise, just as did those of Captain Henry Norman. Yet many today still are eagerly grasping onto them. But happiness is not found in departing from the Lord of life and His gracious counsels.

Satan deceives many into believing that the plan that God has clearly laid out and made known to us in His Word has no basis in reality. People give evidence by the loudest of all languages, that is, by their life choices, that they do not believe that soon this world will come to a final end. People go about their lives as if there were no glorious advent approaching. They eat and they drink, they plan business

and conduct marriages with no thought as to whether their lives are conforming with God's design.

Such was the pattern of the world before the time of the flood. Jesus said, "As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." Matthew 24:37-39.

Satan will work to influence many that there is no "end" coming, as he successful did in Noah's day. He will also work to deceive many with respect to the manner of Christ's coming so that they will not be prepared. He will also work to deceive many as to the way in which we are to be prepared for Christ's coming.

Let's think about Noah as an example of last day living. Beside the very words of Christ linking the event of the flood with the event which brings the world to its end, we can see from the Bible record's description of the conditions that existed that there is a direct comparison between that time and ours. We read, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." Genesis 6:5, 11.

That's a pretty accurate picture of our world today, isn't it. The Scripture tells us that God intentionally "took a look" before He took action. That is consistent with His nature of justice. He already knew about the conditions that existed on earth. But to help us have confidence in His justice, His conduct is expressed in a way with which we are familiar. He looked into it one more time before He acted. Like the court at Belshazzar's last feast, the Divine Investigator said, "You have been weighed and found wanting." A final audit was conducted before the sentence was executed.

Notice also that God has full access into the thoughts of our minds. Nothing is hidden from His eyes. He Who made man can read his mind. Sin begins in the mind, or "heart," and then surfaces in outward behavior. The Bible repeatedly reveals to us an Omnipotent and Omniscient God Who can read the hearts of men and women.

In that generation, evil continuously occupied the thoughts of mankind. God was not in all their thoughts. Unbridled violence and corruption characterized the age.

Does that sound familiar? We could take time to discuss the events of this last week which verify the accuracy of the comparison, but won't take the time to do so. The newspapers and TV news reports spill over with the accounts of violence and bloodshed. Killings in warfare; street violence; bloodshed between family members. The list is unending. The similarity between our society and that of Noah's is sadly all too accurate.

What can we learn from Noah to help us today? We are told that, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD," and "he was a just man, perfect in his generations, Noah walked with God." Can the Lord say those things about you, about me? I hope so! It is only grace-filled followers who are mature in their Christian walk who will survive the "flood" that is coming.

Noah was a builder, a farmer and a preacher. The ark he was commissioned to build was 300 cubits by 50 cubits by 30 cubits, or about 450' by 75' by 45'. By today's standards, that is not a very large boat. The Zaandam, the ship on which we cruised to Alaska recently, measures 780' in length. There are larger ships than that. We mention this because some attach doubt to the story of Noah due to the size of the ship. How could it possibly contain many people, along with the animals?

Keep in mind, though, a couple of things. The biblical cubit was the distance from end of elbow to tip of finger, which today averages about 18". But if the size of men before the flood was proportionate to their longevity, no doubt Noah, who lived to be 950 years of age and his contemporaries would have towered over today's tallest basketball players, and that distance between elbow and the tip of the finger would have been longer. Those 300 cubits might have been much more than 450 feet. Interestingly, the Santa Maria, the flagship vessel of Christopher Columbus, was only 87 feet in length.

The deeper truth is, that if many people had responded to his preaching, the world-wide flood never would have come! If Noah had had the success of Jonah, there would not have been a deluge! If the people had repented and been converted, God would not have sent the waters. Don't let a little thing like Noah's ark being "small" cause your confidence in the Bible story to waver.

Noah was told to build an ark. "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood." Genesis 6:14. The "gopher wood" he was to use corresponds to what we call today cypress wood. It was very hard and enduring. He was shown by God how to build it. Noah was not the "architect;" the ark was designed by God. If we are "like Noah" today,

what is it that we are to build? Would we build a tower like those at Babel to escape further disaster?

No, the building that we are to do is of a different type. It's not a physical structure, in that sense. What we are to build is character. Just as in the case of Noah, the design comes from above. Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God Who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." Philippians 2:12, 13. This is a perfect description of how Noah went about his work. He had work to do in building the ark, but it was "co-operative work." It was work done by, through and with God. We call it "Noah's" ark, but the building of it was entirely of God! He gave the design and instruction; He gave the raw materials in the wood and the strength and skill necessary to accomplish the finished product. It really wasn't "Noah's" ark!

Every blow struck on the ark answers to a victory in character building in your life and in mine. As the ark was for Noah, character is the only thing we will take from this world to the next. Not our wallets, not our property, not our bodies; only our characters. A good question to ask yourself is, "How does the way I spend my time demonstrate what I feel is important?" Am I building a structure of balsa wood that will capsize when the smallest wave strikes? Am I asking Jesus for strength to "will" and to "do" His good pleasure?

Soon, very soon, the work day will be over, and there will be no more time for character development. How important to build now with Christ! How important for us to ask Him to remove every stain of sin, every character flaw! To whom are the promises made in the letters written by Jesus to the churches? It's to those who overcome. How can we build a character that will be an honor to Him? It is by studying the "Design" sent from heaven. Read His Word every day.

Read your Bible every day
When you do, take time to pray
He will lead you, He will guide
He will make you new inside

Let not a single morning pass without having spent time with Him. There is no substitute! Then during the day, let your mind be open to the Spirit's influences. Be in communion with Him throughout the day, and He will be close to you.

Often you have to repent for sins and mistakes, but flee to the One Who can forgive and restore. In this way, little by little, the building God has designed will take shape in your life. The ark wasn't built in a day, but daily progress was made and eventually it was finished. This is how we are to be like Noah. Build in the name of the Lord. Rely on His wisdom for guidance, for it is He Who builds within you.

You may not see a dramatic change, but change will take place. I happened to see the picture of a dear friend, taken a couple of months ago, and it struck me that success was being achieved in weight loss. Seeing this person every week didn't necessarily make the change as dramatic, but the proof was there in the photo from several weeks ago! Your life can be a demonstration of God's artistic work, if you allow His Spirit to be present with you.

So Noah built. He also farmed. After informing Noah that animals would be within the ark, He said, "You shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them." Genesis 6:21. How long was Noah, his family and the animals in the ark? We're told that the flood came in the 17th day of the second month of his 600th year and that they left the ark on the 27th day of the second month the next year. Genesis 7:11; 8:14. Adding to that the seven days that they were in the ark before the rain came, that makes a total of one year and 17 days! All during that time they were to subsist on what Noah had "gathered" and brought into the ark. Noah had to be a farmer and grow food.

What are we to "grow"? We are to grow the "fruits of the Spirit," which are divine qualities. Paul admonishes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Galatians 5:22-24. We are to grow in our characters to be more and more like Jesus. Peter states, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." II Peter 1:5-8.

It's interesting that in these two great lists of Christian attributes, one, the list in Galatians, begins with "love." The other, the one given by Peter, ends with "love." There is a rich lesson here. God is love. I John 4:8. God, Who is love, is the

beginning and end of our religion. He is the Alpha and Omega of our experience. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. Love, that prime attribute of godliness, is at the beginning, at the end, and is intertwined with every other characteristic of Christ-likeness. Are we growing in love?

As we, like Noah, are “growing,” we are growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus. We are growing to be loving, courteous, self-forgetful, generous and helpful sons and daughters of God. The world will know what a Christian is, when it can see this kind of agape love displayed in the characters of those who call themselves by the name of Christ!

Last year I planted several Thompson seedless grape plants along a fence in my back yard. I was amazed to see the growth, not only in the foliage but the fruit! Tiny miniscule berries began to form in clusters some months ago. Last week I harvested about three shopping bags full of ripe grapes. I didn't know exactly what to do with them, so I squeezed them and made grape juice. What a miracle! I put the plants in the ground, added water and growth and fruitage took place, through God's power.

So it is in our walk with Him. He will grow within us the fruits of His Spirit, if we will allow Him to. The graces of kindness and love will flourish in the life of the one filled with the Holy Spirit. May that be your experience and mine!

Noah was a builder, a farmer and a preacher. Doubtless he had things to say about general godly living, as did John the Baptist. But there was a specific component to Noah's preaching that took precedence over all other ingredients. His message was, “A flood is coming. Enter the ark.” To the people of his day, his message made no sense. He was a deluded old man whose thinking was foggy. What was he talking about, water coming from the sky? It had never rained before! All the scientists declared it was impossible. All the theologians said God would not destroy what He had made.

So people went about their lives, making their plans, putting their plans into effect as if there would never be any changes in the life cycle they had always observed. But they couldn't argue against Noah's conviction and sincerity, and they couldn't argue against the spectacle of the animals and birds coming into the ark. The door remained open, but the people doubted.

How easy it would have been to walk the few steps up the gangway into the ark! But they would have had to turn their back on everything else; family, possessions

and plans. It was easy to be saved, but it proved too hard for those antediluvians. How sad!

We likewise have a message to bear. It contains all the general instruction on godly living as would pertain to any generation, but it also has a very specific component. It is, "Jesus is coming. The end of all things is at hand. God must bring the saga of sin to a close. We must submit to Him and obey Him in all things, including worshiping on the day He personally designated as a reminder of His creation." The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus: that is our special and unique message to give to the world today.

Many will scoff, just as they did when Noah preached. There may be some who will listen initially, then become engrossed in the routine of every day life and lose the focus they once had. Do not be discouraged nor faint hearted. Angels of God accompany you when you speak His message for this hour. Do not be disheartened if people don't listen. They didn't listen to Noah, but the flood came. They didn't listen to Jeremiah, but Nebuchadnezzar came. They didn't listen to Jesus, but the Romans leveled Jerusalem. We hear of reports here in California lately in which people were warned to evacuate because of the fierce fires, but didn't listen. It's human nature! It's Satan's particular effort to deceive people into believing that "one day will follow another," and that this will continue indefinitely. It's his tactic to induce people to believe in something that is not, just as Captain Henry Norman did a century ago.