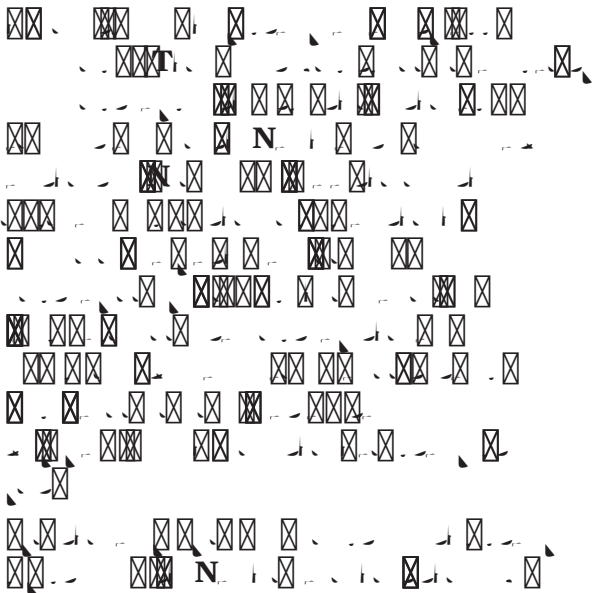


THE WORLD WITHIN AN ARK PART 1: NARRATIVE

Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks. “F

... I ... F ...
...
... (Gen. 6:13-17)

Imagine, for a moment, a Divine voice calling out to you with an important task that you, and only you, can actualize. Aside from a few family members, there will be no one to assist you. You are on your own. Your world will narrow into



... N ... I ...
... I ...
... Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make an opening for daylight in the ark, and finish it within a cubit of the top.

you realize you've missed something critically important. You just closed the door on all of humanity. Holed up in the ark's dark and cavernous inside, you review the directions repeatedly to see where you went wrong. Suddenly you see what you failed to see before. With your singular focus on following directions, you missed that in the opening and closing of the instructions, God presented an apocalyptic vision of the world. And now it is too late to do anything to help all those you left behind. All you can do is monitor the sea and pray.

This is the fate of Noah.

God told Noah exactly what to do. But God also told Noah why. Noah focused on the what and bypassed the why. The directions he was given form a unique and unusual passage because the Torah rarely offers concrete recommendations. Abraham was told to go to another country and start a nation with no GPS. Moses was commanded to free the Jews from slavery and take them out of Egypt with no map and no guidance other than a staff. Esther was told by Mordechai to save her people but was given no script. Ruth made a covenantal commitment to Judaism without any explicit instructions. Why is it that Noah, of all people, was given such clear guidelines?

There is a powerful framing to God's technical instructions. Every few lines, God explicitly told Noah about the moral state of the world. Noah responded by taking out his tools and concentrating on the skylights. Noah missed the larger driving factor behind the situation. Rashi notes this and cites a passage of Talmud (BT Shabbat 108b) to support his reading. There are numerous ways, Rashi notes, that God could have saved Noah. Why select an ark? "So that the men of the generation of the flood might see him constructing it for 120 years and might ask him, 'What do you need this for?' and so that he might answer them, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, is about to bring a flood upon the world' – perhaps they might repent."

According to the Talmud, the ark's significance was not in its use during the flood but its very presence long before the water hit. Noah's neighbors would be curious about this building project– how could they not be? – and badger him with questions.

Noah could use this conversational opportunity to discuss the larger forces in society that prompted this task and perhaps convince others to repent. They could have all built arks, every last one. The ancient seas could have, without much imagination, been filled with many other arks