

Players:

Torah - *God*

Midrash Bereshit Rabbah

Midrash Devarim Rabbah

Rashi - *R. Shlomo Yitzhaki* (1040-1105)

Ibn Ezra - *R. Avraham ibn Ezra* (1092-1167)

Ramban - *R. Moshe ben Nahman Gerondi* (1194-1270)

Zohar - *R. Moshe de Leon* (1250-1305)

Seforno - *R. Ovadiah ben Yaakov Seforno* (1475-1550)

Sefat Emet – *R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter* (1847-1905)

Martin Buber (1878-1965)

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson - *Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies*

Rabbi Cheryl Peretz - *Associate Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies*

Dr. Richard Elliot Friedman - *Ann and Jay Davis Professor of Jewish Studies, University of Georgia.*

Obi-Wan Kenobi – *Really Powerful Jedi Master*

Narrator: Rabbi Aaron Alexander – *Assistant Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies*

Genesis 6:9: “These are the records of Noah. He was a virtuous man. He was unblemished *in his age*...”

Narrator: Hey! Why do we have these additional words "in his age"? Couldn't the Torah have just said that Noah was virtuous and righteous?

Rashi: Well, the Midrash claims that this seemingly superfluous phrase can be read in two different ways. 1) It is to Noah's praise. If he had lived in a time where being righteous was common, he would have been seen as extremely righteous. 2) On the other hand, “in his age” could also be read to his discredit. He was only righteous in the age that he lived. If, however, he had lived in Abraham’s generation, he would have been your average Joe!

Ramban: Rashi, seriously; the correct read is that Noah *alone* was the righteous man in his age, worthy of being saved from the flood.

Dr. Richard Elliot Friedman: First of all, it is not at all unusual for the words "in his age" to be there. After all, THAT'S WHEN HE LIVED! And I agree with Nachmanides (Ramban), Noah *was* righteous, or, "unblemished". How do we know this? The Torah teaches us that animals to be sacrificed should be unblemished, i.e., without fault. It would seem that this description would also apply to Noah, where the same word (unblemished) is used.

Narrator: So what was so great about Noah anyway?

Ibn Ezra: He was righteous in his deeds and pure in his heart.

Ramban: Hold on there Ezra! We know from other sources that wholehearted refers to external actions, not heart. But I agree with you that his deeds were righteous. He wasn't violent. He wasn't perverted. He didn't worship idols. I could go on, as usual, but that's enough for now.

Rabbi Peretz: Not perverted, heh? What about the time he got naked in front of his own sons! But, that happens way after the Torah calls him righteous. So maybe he was righteous before the flood, but then acted mischievously later on.

Narrator: But aren't there commentators who think that Abraham and Moshe were even more righteous than Noah? In fact, some might even think Noah wasn't very righteous at all!

Devarim Rabbah: How about this conversation: "Hey Moses," says Noah, "I'm greater than you are because I was saved from the flood." "Actually," replies Moses, "I'm better. I was able to save my generation and myself. You know, the ones who did that golden calf thing! You only saved yourself. You didn't have the strength to save your generation as well."

Narrator: And didn't Abraham save the lowly Sodomites & Gemorites? Couldn't Noah have shown that same compassion?

Zohar: That's right! Abraham fought for those people, but Noah kept silent and didn't request mercy on those in his generation

Martin Buber: In reality, Noah and Abe just had different jobs. Noah was picked for survival. Abe was picked to go on a mission that included others.

Rabbi Artson: Excellent, Martin! It couldn't have been easy for Noah to become righteous with all that bad stuff happening around him. Give him credit- he should be an example for all of us.

Obi-Wan Kenobi: My students, that's how easy it is to let the Dark Side take hold of you. You must constantly fight the evil inclination that resides within you and all around you.

Narrator: Doesn't the Torah give us another hint about whether Noah was righteous or regular?

Genesis 6:9 continued: "...Noah walked *with* God"

Rashi: That might help, but we do have another verse that says Abraham walked *before* God. Therefore, it is possible that Noah needed to walk beside God so that God could support Noah in his righteousness. Abraham, on the other hand, drew his righteous strength from within himself. He could walk on his own.

Bereshit Rabbah: Good point! It's like a King who has two children: He asks the younger child to walk with him, because the child's spiritual faculties are undeveloped and inferior. The King asks the older child to walk before him, because the older child's spiritual powers are developed and superior.

Sefat Emet: Guys, come on. Do you really want to say that Abraham didn't need God's support? He knew God was the source of everything and seriously depended on God.

Seforno: I prefer a more literal read (*peshat*). Noah walked in God's ways, doing good, and rebuking his contemporaries.

Narrator: So there you have it. One God, two midrashim, seven rabbis, two scholars, a mystic, and a Jedi knight. And yet, the most important opinion is absent.

What do YOU think?