



# He Walked with God

**Genesis 6:1-14; Matthew 5:13-20; Romans 12:9-20**

There are few characters in the Bible described as walking with God. The best known is Enoch in Genesis 5:24. We know this description applied to Enoch because it stands out as virtually the only special aspect of his life before being taken up to live at God's side. Without this description we would know no more of him than as being the father of Methuselah, and the son of Jared. It is in his walk with God that Enoch stands out. Meanwhile, in Genesis 6, we are introduced to another character described in the same way. We know this character by the name of Noah. In Noah's case, knowing he walked with God is not the only thing we know about him, but it may just be the most important.

There was nothing so special to set Noah apart from others of his day. The text says nothing of any special qualities or traits attached to Noah. It tells nothing of any great initiative. Nothing was written of his strength, his skill, or of a mechanical imagination. It tells us nothing of experience in building ships, or working with wild animals. There was nothing special about Noah to distinguish him from the people of his generation. He was simply one more in his line of descent. His grandfather, Methuselah, is described as the man who lived to an older age than any other, but according to the mathematics in our text, died in the year of the flood. Enoch was his most distinctive ancestor—his great-grandfather. He was special simply for walking with God, the very same description applied to Noah.

The rest of the folkloric heroes of the Ancient Near East were much more than Noah. Gilgamesh was perhaps best known. His history says he heard tell of the gods' plan to destroy the earth, due to the fact that humans were making so much noise that the gods were unable to sleep. With his strength, skill, and initiative, he built a huge floating box in very short order, captured mounds of animals to place inside the boat and thus he protected life on earth. Thanks to Gilgamesh the greater disaster was averted. He even managed to rescue the gods themselves, since with the flood they had nothing to eat until Gilgamesh offered sacrifices after the waters had abated.

In contrast to such a hero, Noah was no one. He was a peon. He was an unknown. He had no initiative. It took him one hundred years to finish constructing the ark. The building plans were given to him by God. He did not so much as bring even one animal brought into the ark. That was done by God. Noah did not even manage to shut the door. Before the waters arrive, we do not hear him speak the first word. He comes to us as a servant, a slave who does nothing more than bow himself. It was the one characteristic he had to recommend him. He followed the instructions of God—he walk with the Almighty.

God called him to a special task, but not because Noah was something special. Rather God called him because Noah humbled himself to walk with God and obey him. God called him because he could have confidence that Noah was prepared to serve according to the instructions that God gave him. He walked with God and trusted in his grace.

The story says that all the people around him turned aside from God's ways. Their lives were filled with violence. The intentions of their lives and thoughts were violent and malevolent. They were destroying God's creation with their violence, so God decided to bring history toward its conclusion. Since they were destroying the world, God decided to destroy the world completely. But upon deciding

to bring human violence to its logical conclusion, God looked upon Noah with grace. It was not that he was anything special, but it was a matter of God's grace.

Noah was in relationship with God. He walked with and talked with God. He served and sought God. It was this relationship that distinguished him. This was what separated him from others, because in walking with God, he acted according to God's will and character rather than that of his generation. He was different. While his contemporaries were violent, Noah followed God. While the others imagined wickedness, Noah walked with God. His faith and dependence set him apart, for they changed his character and his actions.

Day after day, Noah walked with God, listening, learning and bowing his life in obedience to different standards than those of the world around them. It was not a law he obeyed. There was no list of regulations. He did not follow firmly the traditions of their own people. Indeed it was his inconformity with the norms of his society that claimed God's attention. The norms of his society were not in accordance with God's will. While society acted in violence, God loved peace. While society thought in selfish patterns, God cried out for thinking in terms of the best for creation as a whole. Noah preferred to follow God in contrast to human norms. He stood against the tide of life around them. He decided to follow God's standards, walking in dependence and faithful service.

It was a somewhat lonely life, as it was unique in his generation to live at odds with the rules of his society. He walked with God, but not with the people around him. Certainly he lived under some pressure to conform. There were norms among his people that he was expected to follow. There were routines and priorities that his family and neighbors expected to see incorporated in his life. They were, at least partly, practices that militated against God's will. He had to choose between accepting the standards of his people and following God's ways. He had to choose between family and the standards God told him to follow.

Noah's father died five years before the flood waters. His grandfather, Methuselah, did not survive the flood. According to our math, he apparently died in the flood with the rest of the people. The text states that Noah was the only of his generation to lay down his life in readiness to serve God. Even though this was the reality he lived, he did so vigorously. He came before God with his wife and children, but otherwise by himself. Walking with God demanded a greater commitment than society around him accepted. It demanded serving God, without worrying whether others followed suit.

To what extent are we like Noah? We live in the midst of a society of people who often call themselves followers of God. Their lives, however, do not demonstrate the reality of lives dedicated to walk with God and do His will. We know many people who go to church as a routine, but do not let this life with God alter their way of behaving and relating to others. Their walk does not stand out from the rest of society.

We live in a violent world. As the description of Genesis, that violence damages and destroys the God's creation. Amidst a world of violence, destruction, arrogance, anger and lack of forgiveness, what difference shows in our walk? Noah walked with God. Day after day, he followed God's ways in obedience, humility and service. Doesn't God want the same from us? God doesn't pay much attention to other features of our lives. He just wants us to walk with Him. Are we ready to stand out like that?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*