

Old Testament Personalities

NOAH

By Art Ferdig

About the time of Adam's death, the earth was experiencing a great population explosion. With life spans of eight hundred and nine hundred years, people could produce dozens of children during a normal lifetime of marriage.

The natural death rate was low as well. Adam's was the first recorded natural death, and that was 930 years after creation. Anyone who can do simple multiplication will conclude that there could easily have been more than a billion people inhabiting the earth within the first thousand years. There were probably more.

But now the sad part. Wickedness was multiplying just as fast as the population. Most everyone had rejected the commandments of the true God and disregarded any code of moral conduct.

An age of evil

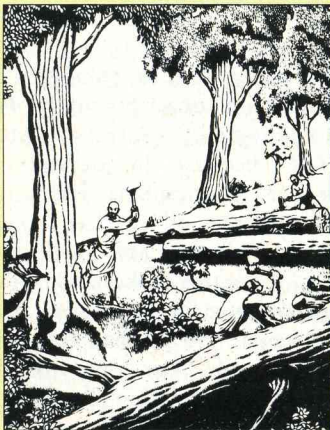
By the end of another 1,300 years the population had mushroomed; and mankind had sunk to new lows of depravity and corruption.

Evil men wrought havoc with each other, being especially brutal to the posterity of Seth. Among his offspring were a line of righteous men

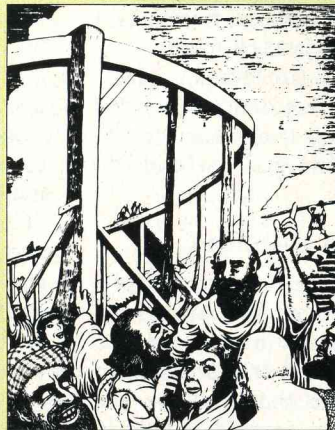
(about 250 years after creation) who dedicated themselves to serving God, even though surrounded on every side by wickedness (Gen. 4:26).

The most notable was Enoch (Gen. 5:24), whose righteous example infuriated the wicked. God may have rescued Enoch out of this turbulence to save him from a violent death at the hands of his enemies, for "God took him."

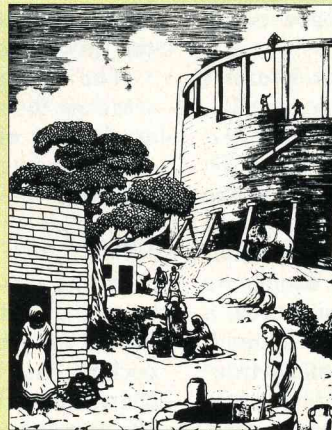
Genesis 6:2 tells us, however, that even this righteous line of Seth eventually gave in to the corruption around them. They began to marry women outside their faith and soon



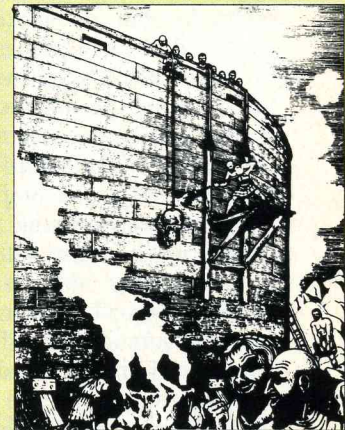
The building of Noah's massive ark required large amounts of timber.



Noah suffered harassment and ridicule for making the great ship.



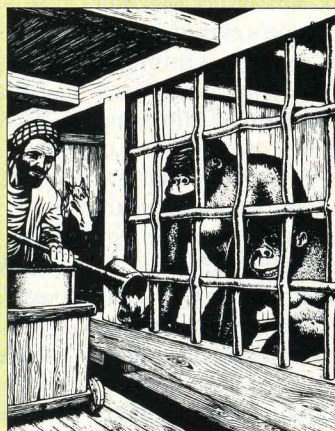
Hired craftsmen were undoubtedly necessary for the boat's construction.



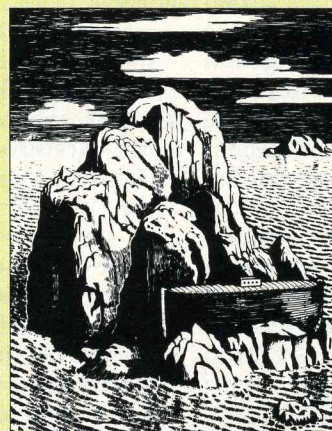
The work went on for decades — while the world refused to repent.



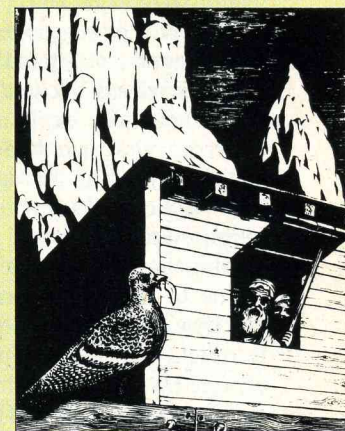
All earth's air-breathing life perished, except the ark's precious cargo.



Noah had to care for his ship's great menagerie.



The ark ran aground on Mt. Ararat after five months on the waters.



A dove Noah sent out returned with an olive branch.

Illustrations by Basil Wolverton

were absorbed into the perverse society, totally losing sight of God and His law of love.

It's important to note that this pre-flood society was not comprised of a ragtag generation of cave dwellers. It had, to the contrary, become somewhat sophisticated.

Music, literature, art and architecture were quite advanced. Various metal-working skills were also practiced (Gen. 4:22). The people knew a great deal about physical things, but had utterly rejected spiritual knowledge.

God, in reviewing the terrible state of affairs, was momentarily sorry He had ever created the human race (Gen. 6:6). He determined to give mankind 120 years to repent en masse or be destroyed (verse 3).

Then, seeing they refused to change, He decided to do just that — destroy the entire perverted society, both man and beast, in a flood.

Yet God did find one righteous man — Noah, the ninth descendant

from Adam through Seth. Noah walked with God, following in the footsteps of righteous Enoch, his great-grandfather. And God extended him mercy.

Noah found grace

Little is mentioned of Noah until he reached the age of 500 years. Then he had three sons — Shem, Ham and Japheth. There is no statement to identify any of these sons as Noah's firstborn, which leads to speculation that he may have had other children earlier — possibly sons who became wicked themselves or fell victim to violence. Josephus states that Noah at one point feared for his life and fled from his land with his wife and children. (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book I, Chapter III).

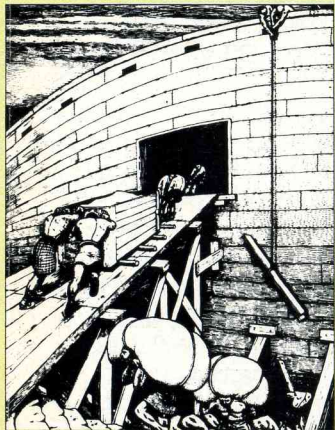
So it was this family — Noah, his wife and his sons and their wives, eight persons in all — that God decided to spare. And this, because of Noah's righteousness.

God spoke directly to Noah, telling him of His decision to destroy wickedness from the earth. He told him to build a great ship through which his family and all birds and mammals would be saved alive while God covered the earth with a flood.

God said that Noah wouldn't have to go looking for the animals, for they would come to him (Gen. 6:20), but he would have to provide quantities of food and grain.

Preparing the ark

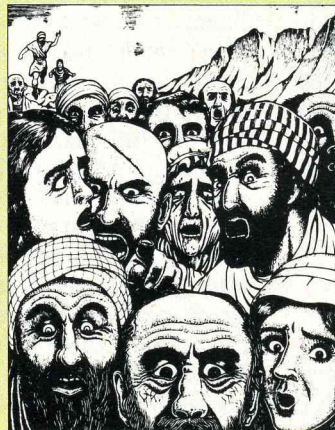
Skeptics have claimed the ark couldn't possibly hold all those animals and provisions, but simple fact proves otherwise, for the average size of the animal kingdom is roughly that of a medium-sized dog. There was plenty of room for everything, including waste. The physical dimensions alone stagger the imagination: 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, 45 feet high. It had three decks totaling more than 2½ acres of surface, and its capacity in volume exceeded 1.5



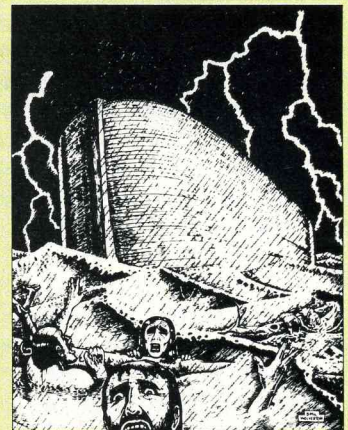
The ark was designed to hold numerous provisions also.



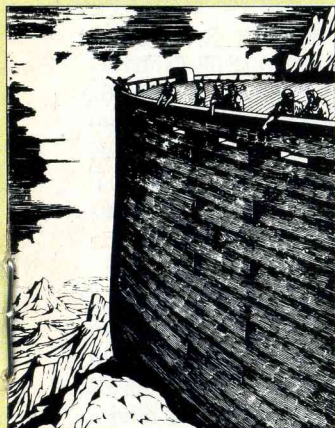
God caused the animals to come to Noah and board the ship.



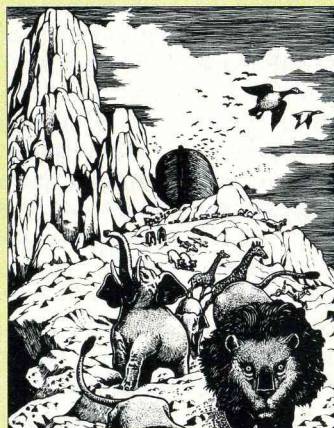
People were terror-stricken when Noah's prediction came true.



God caused it to rain for 40 days and 40 nights.



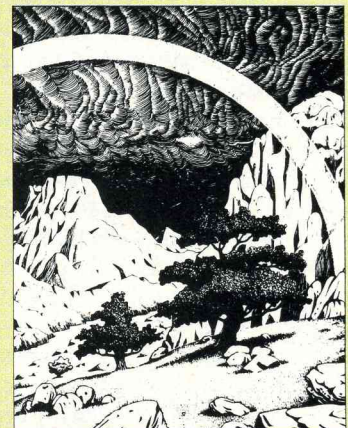
A year and 10 days after the flood began, the earth was again dry.



Noah's unusual passengers disembarked to repopulate the earth.



Noah offered sacrifices of thanksgiving to God.



The rainbow symbolized God's promise to never again destroy all living things.

million cubic feet. That's equivalent to 175 modest one-bedroom apartments!

Building the ark, then, was not a simple undertaking. Until the last hundred years, it was the largest oceangoing vessel ever constructed. Considering that all the work was done without the help of modern equipment, it must have taken Noah and his sons — undoubtedly with the aid of hired laborers and craftsmen — several decades to build and outfit it with supplies. Some suspect it may have taken the full 120 years that God had allotted mankind.

Certainly Noah suffered an immense amount of harassment and ridicule for building a great ship in the middle of a dry field. But when the crowds gathered to jeer, he probably took the opportunity to warn them of how God viewed their wicked society and remind them that their 120 years of grace was running out. For Noah was a preacher of righteousness (II Pet. 2:5).

He also must have possessed considerable resources and wealth, as enormous quantities of timber, building supplies and foodstuffs — plus labor — had to be purchased or obtained by barter. Yet, his wealth shouldn't surprise us. God demonstrates time and again throughout the Bible how He physically blessed those who humbly served Him.

The great flood

The preparation was finally finished, and God told Noah to take his family and enter the ark. Seven days later, in the 600th year of Noah's life, it began to rain (c. 2370 B.C.).

This may have been the first rain ever, as God had previously watered the earth with a mist (Gen. 2:5-6). He may have withheld rain as a part of the curse He placed on the land (Gen. 3:17) to inhibit easy growing of crops. For Lamech, the father of Noah, prophesied that Noah would "comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed" (Gen. 5:29). The name *Noah* means *comfort*.

So God began to erase the curse on the land, but with a temporary action much more devastating. Lamech died before the rains came, but Noah's grandfather, ancient Methu-

selah, evidently died the same year as the flood at 969 years of age — the oldest age recorded in the Bible.

It rained for 40 days and nights, during which time water also burst forth from great crevasses in the earth — called "fountains of the great deep." The flooding continued until water covered the highest mountain to a depth of 22 feet (Gen. 7:19-20). All air-breathing life was destroyed except for the precious cargo on the ark.

After 150 days, the waters subsided sufficiently for the ark to run aground on Mt. Ararat in present-day Turkey. Noah and his family had been in the ark exactly five months.

About 2½ months later, other mountain tops began to appear. Noah waited another 40 days, then sent out a raven and a dove to see if they would find dry ground in the valleys below. But, finding no rest, they returned. Seven days later a dove was sent again, and this time returned with an olive branch.

Noah waited another seven days. Then, after sending out a dove that didn't come back, he removed a portion of the covering from the ark and looked out at the dry ground. It was now one full year and 10 days since the beginning of the flood. And God spoke from heaven, saying it was time to disembark.

Once off the ark, Noah immediately built an altar to God and offered sacrifices of every clean bird and animal (those fit for food). And God smelled the savor of the offering and appreciated Noah's attitude of thanksgiving and his acknowledgement of human frailty and sin.

Then God made a promise to Noah that He would never again curse the ground or destroy all living things (Gen. 8:21). He told them to be fruitful and repopulate the earth. He granted them rule over the animal kingdom (Gen. 9:2), and He also established the death penalty for the sin of murder (verse 6).

Then God set a rainbow in the sky as a sign of His agreement not to flood the earth again (verse 13). And so today, when we receive rain, we are also reminded of that assurance by the rainbow.

Noah and his sons found themselves in a fresh new world with plen-

ty of opportunity, along with plenty of work. They began to farm the land for food, using seeds and plant cuttings brought with them through the flood.

A curse on Canaan

As the years passed, Shem, Ham and Japheth each had several sons and daughters, and once again there was a working, thriving, small community of people on the earth. But this new society was no better than the first. God well knew "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). And Noah, if he hadn't suspected how fast things could degenerate, was soon to find out — through Ham's youngest son, Canaan.

After the grape harvest and wine-making was over one fall, Noah was guilty of celebrating a bit too much. He became drunk from the wine and passed out in his tent, probably in the company of Canaan, his grandson. Later, Ham entered the tent and found Noah alone, but lying naked on the bed. He immediately told Shem and Japheth, who covered their father with a blanket (Gen. 9:23).

When Noah awoke out of his stupor, he realized what his grandson had done to him (some sort of sexual dishonor) and placed a curse on Canaan and his descendants. He gave Shem the birthright and declared that Canaan would be a servant to both Shem and Japheth. And true to his prophetic blessing — and curse — Shem's future descendants (Israel) conquered and enslaved the progeny of Canaan at the hand of Joshua.

Noah lived for 350 years after the flood, making him 950 years old at death. During this time he probably set the first nine chapters of the book of Genesis in order, having brought the creation record (compiled by Adam) and the family genealogical records through the flood, and personally wrote the chapters pertaining to the pre-flood and deluge periods.

Noah was greatly beloved of God — a rare man, who had walked with God in two different worlds (pre- and post-flood). He bridged those worlds in an ark of gopher wood and died a powerful example of faith and obedience to his Creator. □