

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

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The Days of Noah #1

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I keep telling myself that something strange is going on in our country, even the world. Frankly, something doesn't feel right with all that is being reported in our day. So what is going on?

On the one hand, we hear dire reports of how bad the economy is and the need for Congress to quickly pass an \$800 billion (or, is it \$1 trillion?) economic stimulus package, of course, with stringent restrictions or strings attached. Everyone wants bailout money; the latest being the state of Ohio, to the tune of \$5 billion. Mortgage rates are down, but people aren't buying houses. A large inventory of unsold cars sits in dealership lots and imports sit at shipping docks with no place to go. Holiday retail sales were dismal. But this is not restricted to the US, for it is reported that most of the world is in a slump as well, with some countries in worse shape. Even worldwide shipping by sea seems to be way off the mark as indicated by the Baltic Dry Index, which has slipped 93% from over 11,000 to less than 800. This index is set where the supply of raw materials meets the demand for ships to be booked to carry those materials from country to country or from continent to continent. In other words, the BDI indicates where the worldwide demand for goods and materials rests at any given point in time. The reason for the dramatic decrease could be related to the credit crisis (shippers and bankers not wanting to take risks), or because there simply is less demand for goods. So, some ask if this is an indication of a bottoming out of the worldwide slump, with happy days coming soon, or an indication of more dire news to come. As the saying goes, time will tell. But then again, perhaps this is an indication of the impending fall of Babylon as recorded in Revelation 18 where it is reported: **"And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more"** (18:11). And now, the state of Israel is on the offensive again as it seeks to destroy Hamas.

On the other hand, as I have been out in public, it seems that life goes on as if there is no recession or impending depression. People don't seem to be troubled by what is going on. We went out to dinner recently and the restaurant was packed and the parking lot for this good-sized shopping center was buzzing with a lot of traffic. People are in the stores buying goods. Gas prices are way down. The roads are as crowded or gridlocked as they have been all year long. The stock markets around the world are moving up. The Obama's are moving to Washington, and many are getting ready for the party.

Is this the calm before the storm, or are we in it and have been lulled to sleep by the shaking, or is there a spirit of deception at work? Well, one thing we can be sure of is that we are in the days of Noah.

The phrase *the days of Noah* appears five times in Scripture (Genesis 9:29; Isaiah 54:9; Matthew 24:37; Luke 17:26; 1 Peter 3:20). Interestingly, according to the biblical meaning of numbers, the number *five* signifies *grace*, which is most appropriate when one considers all that transpired in the days of Noah. Of course, those who know something of end-time prophecy will immediately think of Jesus' words to His disciples regarding the signs of the end of the age.

(37) "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. (38) For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, (39) and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:37-39 NASB; also Luke 17:26-30)

There is no doubt that most of us read this passage, along with the account in Genesis of the days preceding the flood and the devastating effects of the flood on the inhabitable world, and interpret it all in a negative light. Thus, when we hear of the days of Noah, we generally think of people going about

their business, doing legitimate things, as if judgment is not imminent. As we will see, this is not quite what was happening in the days of Noah, for the people were corrupt and warned of their condition by Noah and his grandfather. However, on careful examination, the days of Noah are not all negative; there is a very positive side. To explain this I must build the answer, so bear with me. The positive side of this will come in the next issue.

To begin, let us consider the first mention in Scripture of the days of Noah.

So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died. (Genesis 9:29 NASB)

On one level, it could be said that the days of Noah actually encompassed all the days of his life. We know that prior to the flood, **the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence** (Genesis 6:11), but it was not like this for the entire days of Noah. In Hebrew Scripture, the book of Jasher is mentioned twice (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18). Although this book did not make it into the sacred text, it nevertheless was respected by Joshua and David and provides some important historical insight into details that are absent in Scripture. Consider the following.

Jasher 5:6-9: After the lapse of many years, in the four hundred and eightieth (480) year of the life of Noah, when all those men, who followed the Lord had died away from amongst the sons of men, and only Methuselah was then left, God said unto Noah and Methuselah, saying, Speak ye and proclaim to the sons of men, saying, Thus saith the Lord, return from your evil ways and forsake your works, and the Lord will repent of the evil that he declared to do to you, so that it shall not come to pass. For thus saith the Lord, Behold I give you a period of one hundred and twenty years (120); if you will turn to me and forsake your evil ways, then will I also turn away from the evil which I told you, and it shall not exist, saith the Lord. And Noah and Methuselah spoke all the words of the Lord to the sons of men, day after day, constantly speaking to them.

Jasher 5:21: And the sons of men who knew the Lord, died in that year before the Lord brought evil upon them; for the Lord willed them to die, so as not to behold the evil that God would bring upon their brothers and relatives, as he had declared to do.

Jasher 5:34: In his five hundred and ninety-fifth year (595) Noah commenced to make the ark, and he made the ark in five years (5), as the Lord had commanded.

The book of Jasher recounts that the sons of Seth, leading up to Noah, had followed the Lord and that God willed their death in order to spare them from the evil that was going to come upon the earth. For the first 480 years of Noah's life, there were men who followed the Lord, so that all mankind was not corrupt up to this point. Thus, the point could be made that righteousness was on the earth, at least through some men, roughly half the days of Noah, and that it was after the death of the ones that had followed the Lord that the earth was corrupt to the core. This is not to say that there was no corruption prior to this point, for there most assuredly was since men rebelled against God early on. But corruption had reached its zenith, and it was at this point that the Lord set 120 years for Noah and his grandfather Methuselah to exhort the people to repent. They came from good stock, for Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of judgment (Jude 14). Obviously, mankind did not repent and evil was rampant on earth for the next 120 years of the days of Noah. If we accept the account given in Jasher, we could conclude that it was true that everyone went about their daily routine, eating and drinking and the like, but the norm of the day was corruption. They were not good and upright people in the sight of the Lord; they were corrupt. In other words, they were immoral and unethical to the core.

Now, this is the negative side of the days of Noah, but in his days, we also begin to see God's grace. Noah spent the last five years of this period building the ark. Again, *five* is the number of *grace*, which indicated that the grace of God was to be extended to righteous Noah and his family as the waters engulfed the earth. After the flood, the days of Noah extended for another 350 years to yield a grand total of 950 years for his days. The Lord blessed Noah and his sons in this day.