בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Noach

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Compiled from the works of
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THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi

Parshas Noach

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Rashi in His Own Words

בראשית ו', י"ד: עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי גֹפֶר קִנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת הַתֵּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר׃

רש"י ד"ה עשה לך תבת: הרבה ריוח והצלה לפניו, ולמה הטריחו בבנין זה, כדי שיראוהו אנשי דור המבול עוסק בה מאה ועשרים שנה ושואלין אותו מה זאת לך, והוא אומר להם עתיד הקב"ה להביא מבול לעולם, אולי ישובו׃

Bereishis 6:14: Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with compartments, and you shall caulk it both inside and outside with pitch.

Rashi Heading - Make for yourself an ark: There are many ways to bring relief and rescue available to Him; why, then, did He burden him with this construction? So that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him occupying himself with it for one hundred twenty years and ask him, "For what do you need this?" He would say to them, "The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to bring a flood upon the world." Perhaps they would repent.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Noach, Hashem commands Noach [1] to "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with compartments, and you shall caulk it both inside and outside with pitch." Rashi, citing the words "make for yourself an ark," explains that G-d has many means at his disposal with which to save Noach's family. He burdened Noach with building an ark for the benefit of the people of his generation. Watching him work on this huge vessel for 120 years would make them ask what he was doing. Upon being told that G-d was going to bring a flood with which He would destroy the world, there was hope that they might repent.

However, Rashi does not address an obvious question. Why did Noach spend 120 years building this ark? All Mitzvos must be done with the greatest alacrity possible. He could have brought people to Teshuvah by building the ark immediately and keeping it on display in public for the same 120 years!

The answer is actually quite simple. Since Hashem commanded Noach to "make for himself an ark," he had to construct it by himself. It was his personal Mitzvah. For one person to build a three-story vessel about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet tall took that much time.

1. Bereishis 6:14.

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Rashi's Explanation

In this week's Torah portion, Noach, we are told that Hashem would bring a flood to destroy most of the world. He would save Noach and his family, who were the only righteous people in the world, from whom He would repopulate the world. He commanded Noach to build an ark. When the flood was to come, he, his three sons, his wife, his daughters-in-law, and (at least) two of each animal were to enter the ark, thereby being saved from the flood.

Hashem tells Noach, "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with compartments, and you shall caulk it both inside and outside with pitch." Rashi, citing the words "make for yourself an ark," comments that "there are many ways to bring relief and rescue available to Him; why, then, did He burden him with this construction? So that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him occupying himself with it for one hundred twenty years and ask him, 'For what do you need this?' He would say to them, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to bring a flood upon the world.' Perhaps they would repent."

In other words, Rashi is explaining why Hashem specifically commanded Noach to build an ark. He could have saved Noach and his family in many different ways. However, building an ark could bring people to Teshuvah.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

There is one seeming difficulty that Rashi does not address. All Mitzvos must be fulfilled with alacrity. How much more so is this true for a Mitzvah meant to save the world? How can it be that Noach took 120 years to complete his Mitzvah of building the ark?

The Talmud disagrees, [2] which Rashi cites as evidence of just how righteous Noach was. The Torah said that Noach was a righteous man "in his generations." [3] Two opinions exist on what this implies. One opinion is that this praises Noach. He was righteous even in a generation of wicked people; how much more so would he have been righteous in a pious generation. Others, however, think this is a derogatory statement about Noach. He was considered righteous only because he lived in a wicked generation. Had he lived in a generation of pious people, he would not have been considered especially important. We may use this to answer our question. If we say that Noach was not particularly righteous, perhaps he did not fulfill his commandment of building the ark as quickly as he should have!

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2. Sanhedrin 108, a.
3. Bereishis 6:9.

However, this does not answer our question. The Torah says clearly at the conclusion of all of the commandments regarding the building of the ark[4], that "And Noach did; *according to all* that G-d had commanded him, so he did." We see that whatever the case was in terms of his piety, he was perfectly righteous regarding the building of the ark. Again, why did Noach take so long to build the ark?

We also cannot answer, according to Rashi, that his taking 120 years was not a lack of alacrity. Rather, it added to the Mitzvah and was part of it. Rashi himself says that throughout the 120 years that he was building the ark, he tried to inspire people to do Teshuvah. As Rashi says, when people would ask him what he was doing, he would tell them that, "'The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to bring a flood upon the world.' Perhaps they would repent."

This does not answer our question. If Noach had completed the ark quickly and displayed it publicly, it would have accomplished the same thing. Everyone who saw it would have asked him what it was, and he would have had the same opportunity to attempt to bring them to repentance.

The Explanation

According to Peshat, the explanation is that since Hashem told Noach, "make for yourself an ark of gopher wood," Noach had to make it from beginning to end. He had to do everything. He could not delegate any part of the job. Similarly, in the realm of Halachah, the Rogotchover Gaon writes that whenever the Torah uses the word "make," the Mitzvah consists of the actual act of making the object itself.

Jewish law has a rule that if one appoints an emissary to do something for him, it is as if he himself did it. However, not everyone agrees this applies in such a case. Additionally, it would certainly not apply to a non-Jew before the giving of the Torah.

The question is not why Noach took so long to build the ark. Rather, the question is how he could build such a massive structure entirely on his own, with no help whatsoever, in a mere 120 years. He built a three-story, seaworthy ship that was approximately 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet tall. It also had living quarters for everyone aboard and every type of animal.

The Rogotchover Gaon explains two possible perspectives on building the ark. One is that the ark must exist. G-d commanded that there must be an ark. The other is that Noach must *build* the ark. This distinction relates to the ark's purpose. If the ark was merely meant to save the survivors, then it doesn't matter who builds it

4. Bereishis 6:22.

or how it is built. All that matters is that an ark exists. However, if the point of the ark is to inspire people to Teshuvah, then the building of the ark is of primary importance.

According to Peshat, the point of the ark is the latter. Therefore Rashi states his comments at such length. "There are many ways to bring relief and rescue available to Him; why, then, did He burden him with this construction? So that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him occupying himself with it for one hundred twenty years and ask him, 'For what do you need this?' He would say to them, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to bring a flood upon the world.' Perhaps they would repent." According to Peshat, the fact that Hashem could have saved Noach and his family any way He chose, but chose to save them with an ark, is not really much in question. Saving people and animals from a flood by placing them in a ship is perhaps the most natural way to do so. It is keeping closest to the laws of nature. Rashi is not bothered that Hashem chose to use an ark. Rashi explains why Hashem burdened him with this construction for 120 years.

Rashi's commentary on the Talmud is quite different from his commentary on the Torah. This is although both are geared toward explaining the "simple" meaning. This is largely because the target audience for each is different. Under ideal circumstances, a young child begins studying Torah. However, he does not begin studying the Talmud until he is older. Therefore, the "simple" meaning of Torah, Peshat, is quite different from the "simple" meaning of the Talmud. Therefore, even if there is an apparent contradiction between something that Rashi says in his commentary to the Torah and something he says in his commentary to the Talmud, it is not a question. His explanation in each comes from a different approach.

In the Talmud, Rashi says that Noach's son Shem helped him build the ark. The Rogotchover uses this as proof that the point of the ark is that it must exist. How can we explain the difference between Rashi's explanation of the Torah and his explanation of the Talmud? Looking at the simple meaning of the verses, there is no reason to say that anyone helped Noach build the ark. To the contrary. The Torah says, [5] "And *Noach* did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did."

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

The Zohar distinguishes between Noach's Divine service and that of the Tzaddikim who came after him. Noach did not pray for the rest of the world. Therefore, the floodwaters are called "the waters of Noach." [6] As the Zohar says, "the flood was a result of the fact that he did not pray on behalf of his generation." Therefore, it is called by his name. This contrasts with Moshe, who prayed for all the Jewish people. Not only that, but he was

5. Bereishis 6:22.
6. Yeshaya 54:9.

prepared to sacrifice himself on their behalf. We find that while beseeching the Almighty to forgive the Jews for the sin of the golden calf, Moshe said that, [7] "If you do not forgive them, please erase me from the book which You have written (the Torah)."

This statement of the Zohar is quite puzzling. Rashi makes it clear that Noach rebuked the people of his generation. He went out of his way to warn them that if they do not repent, G-d will bring a flood and destroy the world. Obviously he cared about them; why didn't he pray for them?

The difference between Noach and Moshe is quite clear. Noach did not rebuke those of his generation to sacrifice himself on their behalf. Instead, he focused on fulfilling Hashem's command. Therefore, it is written in works of Chassidus [8] that Noach "did not pay heed to whether his words of rebuke and warning would actually affect those with whom he spoke, and awaken them to do Teshuvah." Therefore, "he did not pray (with the same self-sacrifice as Moshe) on behalf of his generation."

Moshe, on the other hand, did not tend to the Jewish people merely to fulfill Hashem's command. He truly loved and cared for every individual Jew, just as he cared for himself. He was therefore prepared to sacrifice himself on behalf of the Jewish Nation.

(Adapted from a talk given on the First Day of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan 5736)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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7. Shemos 32:32.
8. See Sefer Hamaamorim 5700 Page 29.

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