

מדרש Midrash

ON GENESIS 6:9

Was Noach only good compared to his terrible generation?

Bereshit Rabbah 30:9

Noach's righteousness is weighed against his generation, and the sages dispute what this implies about him. Rabbi Yehuda reads it as limiting praise: Noach was righteous only by comparison to his thoroughly wicked contemporaries, much like a one-eyed man called "abundant light" among the blind, or the least-spoiled barrel in a ruined cellar. Rabbi Neḥemya reads it as magnifying his praise: since Noach remained righteous despite the corrupting influence of his generation, he would have been even greater among the righteous, like a fragrant balsam that still perfumes the air even in a graveyard, or a virgin who stays pure amid licentious company. AI SUMMARY



"In his generations" – Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Neḥemya, Rabbi Yehuda said: [Only] in his generations he was considered righteous, but had he been in Moses' generation or in Samuel's generation, he would not have been considered righteous. In a marketplace of completely blind people, they call those who are blind in one eye, 'the one of abundant light.' This is analogous to one who had a wine cellar. He opened one barrel and found that it was [spoiled and turned to] vinegar. A second was the same; a third, he found it turning sour. They said to him, '[Do not drink it;] it is turning sour.' He said to them, 'Is there any better than it?' They said to him, 'No.' So too, in his generation he was considered righteous, but had he been in Moses' generation or in Samuel's generation, he would not have been considered righteous.

Rabbi Neḥemya said: If in his generation he was righteous; had he been in Moses's generation or in Samuel's generation all the more so. This is analogous to a bowl of balsam oil that was sealed

with a tight-fitting lid. It was situated in a graveyard and its fragrance wafted through the air. Had it been outside the graveyard, how much more so! This is analogous to a virgin who was in a marketplace full of immoral women and she did not get a bad reputation; had she been in a marketplace of upright women, all the more so! So too, had he been in Moses' generation or in Samuel's generation all the more so.

