מפרשים

Classical Commentaries

RAMBAN

Why did the Torah save Noah and his three sons?

Genesis 6:9

Ibn Ezra reads toldoth as "events" (what a day may bring forth), dividing the verse simply: Noah was righteous in his deeds and whole-hearted in his heart, and takes b'dorotav (in his generations) as a chronological note—spanning the flood and the generations afterward, until Noah died in Abraham's fifty-eighth year. Ramban instead insists toldoth must mean literal "progeny," since a person's toldoth cannot be events beyond his control, and reads the verse as explaining why Noah alone, with his three sons, was saved; he further understands tzaddik as one found innocent in judgment and tamim as Noah's exclusive devotion to G-d, untouched by the idolatry and divination of his age. For b'dorotav, Ramban departs from the two interpretations cited from Rashi (crediting or discrediting Noah relative to other eras) and instead reads it plainly: across the many generations before the flood, Noah alone was righteous and worthy of being saved. AI SUMMARY

"This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.—"

THESE ARE — 'TOLDOTH' NOAH. Commentators have explained the word toldoth to mean "his experiences" [or "his events"] much the same as the sense of: what a day 'yeiled' (may bring forth). In this way the word toldoth refers to the entire section [since all the events of the flood are occurrences in the life of Noah].

But this does not appear to me to be correct since the external events in the life of a person, [over which he has no control], are not his toldoth. The correct interpretation is that the word toldoth here retains its literal meaning of "progeny," just as, These are 'toldoth' (the progeny of) the sons of Noah; And these are 'toldoth' (the progeny of) Ishmael. Thus Scripture is saying, "These are the progeny of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth."

Scripture however repeats, And Noah begot three sons, because [at the end of the first verse] it interrupted by saying, Noah was a righteous man, and whole-hearted, in order to inform us why He commanded him concerning the ark. And even though Scripture has already stated above, And Noah was five hundred years old; and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth, it returns to mention them a second time in order to relate that Noah was unlike all his ancestors who begot daughters and sons. This is the meaning of the words, three sons; Scripture mentions their number in order to say that these three alone were his progeny, and they were saved by his merit, and by them was the whole earth overspread.

HE WAS A RIGHTEOUS MAN AND WHOLE-HEARTED. — Scripture mentions that he was guiltless and perfect in his righteousness in order to inform us that he was worthy to be saved from the flood without any punishment whatever since he was whole-hearted in righteousness. For a tzadik (a righteous person) is one who is found guiltless in judgment as opposed to the wicked person, as Scripture says, And they come unto judgment, and the judges judge them, by justifying the righteous, and condemning the wicked; and also, For Thou art just in all that has come upon us, for Thou hast dealt

truly; similarly, In righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor. But in the case of Abraham, concerning whom it says, that he will command his children to do 'tz'dakah' and 'mishpat,' Scripture praises him for righteousness which is synonymous with judgment, and for mercy which is synonymous with tz'dakah.

And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said, "Righteous in deeds; whole-hearted in his heart." However, it is written, Thou art whole-hearted in thy ways; [the term "whole-hearted" is thus used in connection with "ways" and not with matters of the heart]. Now after Scripture said that Noah was a righteous man, meaning that he was neither a man of violence nor one who perverted his ways as did the guilty ones of his generation, it further said that he walked with the glorious Name, fearing Him alone. He was not enticed by the astrologers, enchanters and soothsayers, and surely not by idolatry, and he paid no heed to them at all; to G-d alone he did always cleave, and he walked in the way G-d chose or taught him for he was a prophet.

This is analogous in meaning to the verse, After the Eternal your G-d shall ye walk, and Him shall ye fear, which is stated in connection with the removal of him who prophesies to encourage the worship of idols and gives a sign or wonder to verify his words, as I will explain. I will again mention this in connection with the verse, Walk before Me, and be thou whole-hearted, if He Who is perfect in knowledge will be with me.

Now since Noah was a righteous man and undeserving of punishment, it was fitting that his sons and his household be saved by his merit for if his sons were to perish, it would have been a punishment upon him. Or it may be said that he was a perfectly righteous man, and his sons and household were also righteous since he taught them; this is analogous to that which is written concerning Abraham: For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household.

IN HIS GENERATIONS. — Some of our Rabbis explained it to his credit, [i.e., he was righteous despite his generation]; it follows all the more had he lived in a generation of righteous people. Others explain it to his discredit. [In comparison with his own generation he was considered righteous, but had he lived in the generation of Abraham he would not have been considered of any consequence.] Thus the language of Rashi.

The correct interpretation according to the plain meaning of Scripture appears to be that he alone was a righteous man in those generations, there being no righteous or whole-hearted men except him in those generations. In a similar sense is the verse, For thee I have seen righteous before Me in this generation, meaning that there is no other in the generation worthy of being saved.

Scripture says, in his generations —[using the plural form]— because many generations passed since the time men had become corrupted, and there was no righteous man besides him. Let not the word of our Rabbis concerning Methuselah, [which said that he was a righteous man], cause you difficulty for Scripture tells only that there was no righteous man worthy of being saved from the flood in all those generations except Noah.

IBN EZRA, WHO READS IT DIFFERENTLY

THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS. — Toledot (generations) means the events that transpired during his lifetime, as in what a day may bring forth (yeled) (Prov. 27:1). These are the generations of Jacob (Gen. 37:2) is similar.

A MAN RIGHTEOUS. — In his deeds.

AND WHOLE-HEARTED. — In his heart. Tamim (wholehearted) is an adjective. It belongs to those roots whose second and third letters are the same. All three letters of the root remain in this word.

[IN HIS GENERATIONS.] — At the time of the flood, and in the generations after the flood. For Noah lived till the fifty-eighth year of Abraham. Let this be a mnemonic device, our father Abraham was the age of Noah (58) when Noah died.

