

NOAH BUILDS AN ARK

Genesis 6

In the internal sense, the stories of the serpent and of Cain and Abel tell of the origin of evil in man's turning from the Lord to self, of the consequent loss of the innocent, celestial state, and of the loss of charity as men became more and more confirmed in self-esteem and self-will. It will be easy in all the classes to introduce the story of Noah by a question concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil and a brief statement concerning man's first disobedience and its results.

Doctrinal Points

Since the time described by the story of Noah men have been of the "spiritual" instead of the "celestial" nature. This means that we all have to learn what is true and obey it until we come to love it. We cannot trust our natural affections to tell us what is right.

Notes for Parents

Today we have another of the wonderful symbol stories from the Ancient Word. If we realize its nature and meaning, we do not worry about the size of the ark or about how so many animals could be crowded into it and get along together and have enough to eat for a year (cf. Gen. 7:11, 8:13).

The first people used their freedom to disobey the Lord. The tree of knowledge of good and evil—a symbol of their own desires and reasonings—was more attractive to them than the tree of life. This was the beginning of evil in the world, as it is the beginning of evil in each one of us, when we allow ourselves to think that we know better than the Lord what is good for us. Once we start on that path of reasoning we stray further and further from the right way. The early people eventually became monsters of selfishness.

The flood which destroyed them was not a flood of water but a flood of falsity and evil.

The few who still recognized their need of the Lord and tried to obey Him are pictured by Noah, and the ark in which he and his family rode out the flood is the character he was able to build by obeying the divine commands. Every detail of the story is full of meaning if we have the key. The pitch with which the ark was covered within and without is our natural selfishness which the Lord makes use of to deter us from doing many wrong things. The three stories in the ark are the three planes of our intellect: knowledge, reason, and understanding. The door in the side is our means of receiving from others and giving to others in our daily lives. The window above is our willingness to look to the Lord for guidance and strength. The animals are all our various affections and thoughts.

Your younger children will be interested in this story as a story. The Lord gave it in this form so that it would be read and remembered. But as you read on in the Bible, keep some of this inner meaning in mind, and you will soon realize what a truly wonderful book the Bible is and how much more it has to say to us than we at first suspect.

Primary

Even young children can get the idea that disobedience always leads to trouble. The fact that people got so bad that they had to be destroyed is the introduction for the lesson today. But Noah was good, and the Lord always takes care of us when we are good. The children will enjoy hearing about the ark and the people and animals in it. They should learn the name *Noah*, and, if possible, also *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth*.

You remember how kindly the Lord took care of the first people in the beautiful Garden of Eden. Do you remember what was the one thing He told them not to do? They began to think about this tree, and its fruit looked very good to them, and so finally they disobeyed the Lord and ate of the fruit. They thought the Lord would not know, but He did. The Lord knows everything we do

and He knows our thoughts and feelings, too.

So the first people had to leave the beautiful garden and go out and work for their food. The Lord cannot give us things if we do not use them as they are meant to be used.

When we once begin to disobey our parents, we are very likely to begin to do more and more wrong things. So the early people, after they were sent out of the Garden of Eden, went from bad to worse until finally they became so bad that the Lord had to get rid of them altogether. They were destroyed by a great flood.

But there were a few people who still wanted to obey the Lord, and the Lord made plans to save them from the flood. Let us read the story of Noah and what the Lord told him to do. [Read Genesis 6:7-22.]

Who were Noah's three sons?

What did the Lord tell him to make?

An ark is a box or chest made to hold something and keep it safe.

What was Noah's ark made of?

How was it divided inside?

Where was the window?

Where was the door?

What people went into the ark?

What else was Noah told to take into the ark?

When the flood came, the ark floated on top of the water, and so they were saved.

Junior

The Juniors can easily understand the general meaning of this story, the gradual decline once selfishness creeps in, until the whole life is flooded with wrong thoughts. The lesson offers a good chance to point out that everything may have either a good or a bad correspondence because when a good thing is misused, it becomes bad. So water, which pictures truth, can become a destructive flood and picture falsity instead of truth. Have the children look up and read Matthew 7:24-29.

Where were the first people placed by the Lord?

How was the Garden of Eden watered?

What tree was in the midst of the garden?

What other tree was in the garden?

What did the Lord tell Adam and Eve not to do?

You have become familiar with the story of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, the story of Eve's yielding to the temptation of the serpent. After they disobeyed, they did not die physically, but something which had been in them died: the beautiful, innocent state in which they had lived was lost. They were driven out of the garden.

Did you ever do something naughty and have it lead to other things that were worse and worse? Sometimes a boy disobeys his mother and then lies about it and gets angry and even hurts someone rather than own up and say he is sorry. Did you ever think that every thief and murderer was once an innocent baby? How did he become so bad? It wasn't all at once, you may be sure, but little by little. So in the early times, after the Garden of Eden state was closed, people gradually became worse and worse, until most of them were so bad that the Lord could no longer make any impression on their hearts and minds. They could not even think anything but selfish thoughts, and this selfishness and false thinking is pictured in the Bible by a great flood which increased until it drowned them all.

But there were still some good people, and the Lord saved them in a wonderful way.

In the Bible story who is the person whom the Lord saved?
Who were saved with him?

We always think of Noah's ark as a sort of houseboat, don't we? But that is because it floated on the water. An ark is really just a box or chest, big or little, made to keep something safe. There are two other famous arks mentioned in the Bible. Look up Exodus 2:3 and 25:10. Noah's ark is a picture of something we can all have to keep us safe from the flood of wrong thoughts and feelings which our natural selfishness brings upon us. This ark is a strong character, built according to the Lord's directions. When you are older, you will be able to understand just what each part of the ark pictures, but first you must fix in your minds the description of it

as it is given in our chapter, and this is something you can do now.

What was it made of?

Gopher wood was some kind of pine or cedar, containing pitch.

How was it made watertight?

How many stories did it have?

What other inside divisions are mentioned?

Where was the door?

Where was the window?

Perhaps even now you can see what the door and window picture. Can you say our Sunday School benediction? As we live with other people in the world, we are always coming in or going out from the house of our character, and we want the Lord to be with our thoughts and acts to keep them always pure and kind. This is the “door” in the side of the ark. And we need to have a “window” in our minds always open toward heaven. That is, we want always to be conscious that the Lord is seeing us and always learning more and more of what He is saying to us in His Word.

Do you know what the birds and animals picture which Noah was told to take with him into the ark? They are all the thoughts and feelings—some good and some bad—which make us what we are.

When everyone was in the ark, who shut them in?

Have you ever watched the people boarding a large airliner at an airport? When everyone is on the plane, someone on the *outside* closes and bolts the door. Do you know why? It is the only way to be sure that no one can jump or fall out of the plane until it is safely back on the ground. So you can see why the Lord Himself shut the ark.

The size of the ark is given us in cubits. The word *cubit* first meant a “bending,” and so it came to mean the bending in the arm, or the elbow. In the early days, before people learned to measure things with the carefulness that scientists must use today, a man’s measuring stick was his own arm. A cubit was the distance from the tips of a man’s fingers to his elbow. We may think of a cubit as a little over a foot and a half. Thus the ark is pictured

as being more than 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. In other words the ark was very large indeed. Be sure, however, to learn its dimensions in cubits—300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high—because, as you will learn later, numbers in the Bible all have meanings which help us to understand the lessons which the Lord is trying to teach us.

Do you know how many days it rained after Noah entered the ark?

Intermediate

The most important thing to impress on the young people is that while the story of Noah and the flood is not historical fact, it is nevertheless a true story, a far more important story than if it had been mere historical fact. This lesson should be used to make clear in the minds of the young people the distinction between the terms *celestial* and *spiritual*, celestial always having to do with the will or love, and spiritual with the understanding or truth. The correspondence of the ark and its details should be carefully taught.

We all know the story of Eve and the serpent. It is a story of disobedience which led to the loss of the beautiful garden of innocent happiness. Eating the forbidden fruit led to great evil. So love of self and trust in self led men further and further from the Lord, until they became so evil that their wickedness was like a great flood, drowning out all spiritual life, all good affections, and all true thoughts, and leading finally to physical self-destruction.

The river in the Garden of Eden represents truth from the Lord, which makes everything live. But when people look to themselves for truth, they find only false ideas, which cause their destruction.

Everyone, however, did not become so bad. Noah and his family picture the people in whom enough good remained so that they could be saved. The ark, in which they were able to ride out the flood, symbolizes the character which they formed by obeying the Lord. It had three stories, the three planes of the mind. It had a window above, meaning that their minds were open to receive light from the Lord. And it had a door in the side, which is a picture of their coming and going in obedience to the Lord's commandments. You remember our Sunday School benediction: "The Lord keep

our going out and our coming in, from this time forth and even forevermore.”

But it is also said that the ark had “rooms.” This means that now the will and the understanding in man were separated. People were now to be able to keep their thoughts and their desires separate so that even when they wanted to do wrong, their minds could be shown the truth and they could obey it and afterwards learn to love it. So they could be saved. That is the way we are saved, too—by learning what is right and doing it, even when we do not want to. The first people were a “celestial” people: knowledge from the Lord flowed directly into their wills, and they could not think anything they did not also will. This was why, when their wills became selfish, they could no longer receive truth from the Lord. But the people called Noah, the people of the Ancient Church, were a “spiritual” people: truth from the Lord was first received into their understanding, and then, if they obeyed it, could enter their wills.

In working out the meaning of passages in the Word, it is helpful to know the meaning of some of the names used. Often the spiritual background of a story is given in a brief genealogy, and one who does not know the meaning of the names thinks it has no importance and wonders why it is a part of Scripture. The genealogy leading up to Noah is too long to detail here, but in general it pictures successive stages of departure from pure love to the Lord, each stage leading to further perversions, and each succeeding stage being more external than the last.

Noah means “rest,” and pictures that point at which the Lord intervened in the downward course of human nature and “shut in” the remaining good qualities from further temptation by closing off the direct contact which men had previously had with the spiritual world.

Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. These three represent three approaches to the truth which the new state of life possessed. *Shem*, which means “name,” recalls Adam’s naming of the animals; he represents the new ability to recognize the quality

not of affections but of truths. *Ham* means “warm.” There is an affection for the truth with this church or stage which is further pictured by the gopher wood used in the ark—gopher means “burning,” and refers to the trees which contain pitch. *Japheth* means “extension.” When we first begin to explore the realm of truth, our curiosity leads us into wide fields of knowledge. These three abilities were preserved from destruction, together with the affections (the wives) properly related to them, the good affections (animals) which supported them, and the truths (food) which in turn supported both man and beast.

After Noah and his family had entered the ark, it is recorded (Genesis 7:16) that “the Lord shut him in.” So in our lives, when we are trying to do what is right, the Lord shuts us in—that is, He provides that we shall not be faced with any temptation which we are not strong enough to fight. Divine providence continues to stand between us and such temptations until the “ark” of our character comes to rest on firm ground where we can establish enough of a foothold to resist temptation. It rained forty days and nights.

Basic Correspondences

- a flood (water in a bad sense) = truth turned into falsity
by selfishness
- three = completeness on the three planes
of will, thought, and act
- forty = a state of temptation



Senior

The Seniors will be interested in the fact that the tradition of the Most Ancient Church and the Ancient Church has come down in mythology in the stories of the Golden and Silver Ages, quite rightly named, since gold corresponds to love and silver to truth. Impress upon them the fact that since the time pictured by the story of the flood there has been no return on earth of

the celestial state; that is, we never “just naturally” know what is right. Our wills are inherently selfish and we have to learn what is right and make ourselves do it. And we never reach the stage when we know enough. We must be constantly learning more.

After men were cast out of the Garden of Eden, they became worse and worse. Once we start on a willful and selfish path, we are liable to stray further and further. You know from reading, if not from experience, how rapidly a boy or girl can drift away from good and orderly habits if he is allowed to go his own way. Every criminal started life as an innocent baby.

The river in the Garden of Eden stands for truth from the Lord. But when men look to themselves for truth, they get only falsity, and this falsity grows until it is a flood which destroys their spiritual life. With the Most Ancient people this destruction resulted in the destruction of physical life also. Swedenborg tells us why in one of the quotations which you will find at the end of this lesson. Even today men sometimes die from the violence of their own passions. So the flood in our story, though symbolic, pictures a very real and terrible time in the history of the human race.

Men, however, were not all evil. Some, although they had lost their first happy state, remained in general obedient to the Lord. These people are represented in the Bible story by Noah and his family. The character which they developed through obedience to the Lord is the ark, in which they were enabled to ride out the terrible period of temptation. Forty signifies fullness of temptation which is about to be overcome; so it rained forty days and forty nights. You remember also the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, and the Lord’s forty days of temptation.

Every detail of the ark is significant. It was made of gopher wood, a wood containing pitch. Wood represents natural goodness and pitch selfishness. So these people were partly good and partly bad. The measurements of the ark have a meaning, as all numbers do, but we have not time to go into this detail. Its three stories picture the three planes of the mind; its window above, the fact that the mind was open to instruction by the Lord; its door in the

side, the fact that in their daily life their coming and going was regulated by obedience to the Lord: “The Lord keep our going out and our coming in, from this time forth and even forevermore.”

Two details are especially interesting. The ark was pitched within and without with pitch, the symbol of self-love. We shall find it as the “slime” in the story of the Tower of Babel, and the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were built in a valley of slime-pits. But the Lord makes even our self-love serve as a protection, if we are trying to obey Him, as we can see if we think how many times we refrain from doing wrong for fear of punishment or of what people will say or think of us, or from hope of reward.

Also the ark was made with “rooms.” The earliest people were not “divided” in their minds. The Lord spoke directly to their hearts, and they thought and acted as they felt. So when their hearts became evil, the Lord could no longer reach them, and for the good remnant who survived, it was necessary that He separate the will and the understanding in order that even when their desires were selfish, they could see the truth with their minds and by obeying it learn to love it. Men have been so constructed ever since. We know how often we have to make ourselves do what we know is right even though we do not want to do it.

The animals and birds taken into the ark picture all the affections, both good and evil, which went to make up the character of those people, and the food the ideas which fed those affections. The fact that they were taken in by twos means that they were the affections in which thought had been “married” to will. But we notice in Genesis 7:2 that a distinction was made among the animals, in that seven pair of each “clean” beast were to be saved and only one pair of each unclean beast. In these people the good was stronger than the evil.

The civilization called *Adam* is known in the New Church as the Most Ancient Church and in mythology as the Golden Age. It was of the affectional or “celestial” type because in it men were led by their affections. The civilization called *Noah* was of a different

type: intellectual or “spiritual,” because in it men were led by their thoughts. It was the Ancient Church, or the Silver Age.



Adult

The nature of the Ancient Church with the reason for the separation of the will and the understanding in man is very important. Let it lead into a discussion of the nature of conscience and the fact that it must be developed through constant study of the Word, and must often be corrected.

We have seen how the first created people were ‘developed by the Lord into a church—the Most Ancient Church—and how they lived an innocent, happy life led directly by the Lord and caring for the things of this world only as they taught of spiritual things—the state pictured by the Garden of Eden with the tree of life in the midst. Temptation crept in through their desire to be led by themselves instead of by the Lord, and to reason from what their senses told them instead of from what the Lord told them. This turning of their hearts away from the Lord made it impossible for the Lord any longer to teach them through their hearts, and so they lost the perception of truth which they had had and the ability to communicate directly with the spiritual world. They finally came to think only of themselves and of their life in this world, and they used the knowledge of heavenly things which had been handed down to them to excuse and confirm their selfish desires. This is pictured in our lesson today by the marriages between the sons of God and the daughters of men, the sons of God being the heavenly truths handed down to them, and the daughters of men the evil affections which had sprung from their self-love. The result was a race of giants; that is, they became very great in their own eyes and thought of themselves as gods. That this spiritual condition actually worked itself out in material ways we know from the mention of remnants of the giants in later portions of the Scriptures (Numbers 13:33; Deuteronomy 3:11). Goliath of Gath was one of the last of these physical giants. They were giants in body because of their monstrous perversions of heavenly things

and exaltation of themselves. These perversions—or falsities—ultimately destroyed them both soul and body, stifling all spiritual life within them and causing them to destroy each other. This is the flood which covered the tops of the mountains—a flood of false persuasions burying all points of approach to the Lord.

In our chapter for today we come to a statement of an apparent truth, when it is said that the Lord repented that He had made man and determined to destroy him. The destruction of the Most Ancient Church was not the work of the Lord, but of the evils and falsities which men had chosen themselves. Nor does the Lord change His mind. He foresees all things and makes provision for them. His love and wisdom are constant, but their working out in human affairs necessarily changes with the changes in men's states. So a father's love for his child does not change, but it cannot express itself in the same way when the child is bent on wrongdoing as when the child is good. When men became so evil that they had closed all ways of approach against the Lord, He permitted them to destroy themselves in order that a new church could spring up and develop among those few who had retained some desire to do right.

Those few among whom the new church could be developed are represented by Noah. They were by no means wholly good; indeed, they were so far perverted that they could not possibly be restored to the original state of the celestial church. The Lord had to take them as they were and provide a new means of approach to them. This is pictured in the building of the ark. It was made of gopher wood. Wood is the symbol of natural goodness—the only goodness that was left in the people of that time—and Swedenborg tells us (AC 643) that gopher wood is a highly inflammable wood; so it pictures natural goodness full of selfishness. The ark was to be made, as our translation gives it, with “rooms.” This pictures a change which the Lord wrought in man's very nature in order to save him. We have seen that the people of the Most Ancient Church were taught through their wills; that is, their thoughts were the direct result of their desires. So long as their

inmost desire was to serve the Lord, they could think nothing but what was true; but when their desires became selfish, they could think only what was false. So it was necessary for the Lord to separate man's will from his understanding, in order that his mind could see what was true even when he did not wish to do right; then he could learn the truth and be led to make himself live according to it until he was so confirmed in right action that the Lord could give him a new will. Thus the people of the Ancient Church—as the church described by Noah and his descendants is called—were led to do right by conscience instead of by perception. This separation of the will and the understanding is what is pictured by the ark's being divided into rooms. The three stories picture the three planes of the mind: knowledge, reason, and understanding, comparable to act, thought, and will, through which the man of this church could be led to do right. The window open above pictures the mind open to receive truth from the Lord, and the door in the side, hearing and obedience to the truth. (AC 651-658) It is by obedience to the commandments that we open the door to the Lord's entrance into our lives (cf. Revelation 3:20). So the ark in every detail is a picture of the character of the people who constituted the remnant from the Most Ancient Church after they had been put into a new order by the Lord so that they might again receive a knowledge of the truth and by obeying it learn to love it. The first church was a celestial church because it was led by love of the Lord in the heart. The second, the Ancient Church, was a spiritual church because it was led by truth from the Lord in the understanding. This newly ordered mind enabled the good remnant to survive the flood of falsity which destroyed the rest of mankind.

But the story has an application to our individual lives as well as to the history of the race. We have compared our infancy to the Garden of Eden state, and we have seen how evil creeps in as soon as we begin to have enough self-consciousness to want to choose our own way. Have we not all seen spoiled children—children who have been allowed to have their own way? Are they not well

described by the picture of the giants of old, very great and important in their own estimation, and bending all their efforts and reasoning to the satisfying of their selfish desires, even to the point of violence against those who try to control or thwart them and even sometimes violence toward themselves when they cannot get what they want? Each one of us has an inheritance of evil which, if indulged and confirmed, would lead him to complete spiritual and even physical destruction. But in very early childhood we become conscious of the division which the Lord has provided between our will and our understanding. We are taught what is right and, if our parents are wise, we are made to do it even against our will; and so we gradually form good habits and develop a conscience which helps us to direct our conduct. The life of a little child so taught and directed is also pictured by the story of Noah and the ark. The animals taken into the ark are all his affections, good and bad, which form the basis of his personality and must be dealt with in the course of his regeneration. The flood is the long series of temptations to which his selfish desires and reasonings subject him. Noah and his wife are his recognition of the Lord and his desire to do what is right. Their sons and daughters-in-law are the thoughts and affections which grow out of this recognition and desire. And if he keeps these alive in the ark, the time will come when his ark will rest on the top of the mountain and the flood will subside; he will have acquired fixed habits of right conduct which he is no longer tempted to break; his mind will have come to rest in the Lord's will and he will be ready to go forth to his work in the world in freedom—"freedom is to be led by the Lord."

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, nn. 607, 608: "But what is yet unknown in the world, and is perhaps difficult to believe, is that the men of the Most Ancient Church had internal respiration, and only tacit external respiration. Thus they spoke not so much by words, as afterwards and as at this day, but by ideas, as angels do; and these they could express by innumerable changes of the looks and face, especially of the lips. In the lips there are countless series of muscular

fibres which at this day are not set free, but being free with the men of that time, they could so present, signify, and represent ideas by them as to express in a minute's time what at this day it would require an hour to say by articulate sounds and words, and they could do this more fully and clearly to the apprehension and understanding of those present than is possible by words, or series of words in combination. . . . But in their posterity this internal respiration little by little came to an end; and with these it became such that they could no longer present any idea of thought except the most debased, the effect of which was that they could not survive, and therefore all became extinct. . . . When internal respiration ceased, external respiration gradually succeeded, almost like that of the present day; and with external respiration a language of words, or of articulate sound into which the ideas of thought were determined. Thus the state of man was entirely changed, and became such that he could no longer have similar perception, but instead of perception another kind of dictate which may be called conscience, for it was like conscience, though a kind of intermediate between perception and the conscience known to some at this day."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 639: "If the ark with its coating of pitch, its measurement, and its construction, and the flood also, signified nothing more than the letter expresses, there would be nothing at all spiritual and celestial in the account of it, but only something historical, which would be of no more use to the human race than any similar thing described by secular writers. But because the Word of the Lord everywhere in its bosom or interiors involves and contains spiritual and celestial things, it is very evident that by the ark and all the things said about the ark, are signified hidden things not yet revealed."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Where did the Lord place the first people? *Garden of Eden*
P. What were they to do there? *dress it and keep it*
P. How was the Garden of Eden watered? *river*
J. What tree was in the middle of the garden? *life*
J. What other tree is mentioned? *knowledge of good and evil*
P. What were the people told not to do? *eat of tree of knowledge*
J. What did the Lord take out of Adam while he slept? *rib*
J. Into what did He make it? *woman*
P. How did the first people disobey the Lord? *ate forbidden fruit*
P. What was their punishment? *driven from garden*
J. Did they repent? *no*
P. What did the Lord finally decide to do? *destroy man*

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- J. Why did He save Noah and his family? *they were good*
- P. What did He tell Noah to build? *ark*
- J. Can you describe the ark? *gopher wood, pitch, three stories, rooms, window, door*
- P. Who went into the ark with Noah? *wife, sons, their wives*
- J. What were the names of Noah's three sons? *Shem, Ham, Japheth*
- P. What else did Noah take into the ark? *pairs of all creatures*
- S. What is meant by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? *looking to self for truth*
- I. What is pictured by the flood? *truth falsified and made destructive*
- S. What is the symbolic meaning of the ark? *good character formed by obeying the Lord*