# נֹחַ

## Parashat Noach

*Genesis 6:9–11:32 · Shabbat 17 October 2026 · 6 Cheshvan 5787*



# Finished and unfinished

*Noah walked with God. Abraham is told to walk. Uriel Simon on the tense that separates them.*

### THE TEXT

GENESIS 6:9

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹחַ׃

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was in his generations a man righteous and wholehearted; Noah walked with God.

GENESIS 11:31–32

וַיִּקַּח תֶּרַח אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־הָרָן בֶּן־בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כַּלָּתוֹ אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אִתָּם מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם׃ וַיִּהְיוּ יְמֵי־תֶרַח חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תֶּרַח בְּחָרָן׃

And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

GENESIS 17:1

וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתֵשַׁע שָׁנִים וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדַּי הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי וֶהְיֵה תָמִים׃

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him: 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou wholehearted.'

### IN HIS WORDS

> צדקתו של נח היא בגדר עובדה מוגמרת – "נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדרתיו, את האלהים התהלך (בלשון עבר) נח" (ו׳, 9) – אשר בזכותה הוא מציל מכליה את עצמו ואת ביתו, ומבטיח את עתיד האנושות.
>
> *Noah's righteousness is an accomplished fact ("Noah was a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations; Noah walked [in the past tense] with God," 6:9), and by its merit he saves himself and his household from annihilation and secures the future of humanity.*

> צדקתו של אברהם, לעומת זאת, היא בגדר משימה
>
> *Abraham's righteousness, by contrast, is a task.* (on Genesis 17:1)

> אברהם איננו אבי האנושות, אלא אבי האומה, ובניגוד לאדם וחוה הוא לא נברא בידי הבורא, אלא נבחר על-ידו.
>
> *Abraham is not the father of humanity but the father of the nation; and unlike Adam and Eve, he was not created by the Creator but chosen by Him.*

> על מנת להתחיל התחלה חדשה עליו להתנתק מהוריו-מולידיו ומאחיו התנתקות אתנית, טריטוריאלית וערכית.
>
> *To make a new beginning he must detach himself from the parents who bore him and from his brothers: an ethnic, territorial and moral detachment.*

## THE TEACHING

Parashat Noach opens by telling us who Noah is and closes by telling us where Abram came from. Uriel Simon, who died on 30 September at 97, read the two ends against each other. Noah's righteousness, he wrote, is *"an accomplished fact"*, and he found the proof in the grammar: אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹחַ, Noah *walked* with God, in the past tense. The verdict is in before the story starts, and it is enough to carry Noah, his household and the whole human future through the flood.

Abraham gets the same verb, but as a command. Eleven chapters later God says to him, הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי וֶהְיֵה תָמִים, "walk before Me, and be wholehearted" (17:1). Noah *was* תָּמִים; Abraham has to become it. *"Abraham's righteousness, by contrast, is a task."*

That is why the last verses of Noach matter. Abraham arrives late, ten generations after Noah, and Simon draws out what that means: he is the father not of humanity but of a nation, and he was not created but chosen. A chosen person has to leave something behind. Terah sets out for Canaan and stops halfway, in Haran (11:31). Next week's call, לֶךְ־לְךָ, asks Abram to finish the journey alone, leaving land, birthplace and father's house: what Simon calls an ethnic, territorial and moral break.

This is the kind of reading Simon spent his life defending: *peshat*, the plain sense, read so closely that a verb tense becomes theology. In "The Religious Significance of the Peshat" he argued that searching for what the text actually says is itself a religious duty, and that the plain sense has to be renewed in every generation, because readers and their questions change.

## FOR THE TABLE

- Noah walked *with* God; Abraham is told to walk *before* Him. What is the difference?
- Is a finished righteousness a lesser thing? What does Abraham's unfinished righteousness make possible that Noah's could not?
- Terah set out for Canaan and stopped in Haran. What journey have you started that someone else will have to finish?

### פרופ׳ אוריאל סימון ז״ל

Uriel Simon (Jerusalem, 1929 – 30 September 2026) taught Bible at Bar-Ilan University for decades. He read the Bible through its medieval interpreters, above all Abraham ibn Ezra, and wrote *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms*, *Reading Prophetic Narratives* and the JPS commentary on Jonah. He won the Bialik Prize, and he was one of the founders of Oz VeShalom, the religious-Zionist peace movement. This reader takes one text and one of his teachings each week.

## READ SIMON HIMSELF

אברהם המקראי – הברכה שבניגודים (Biblical Abraham: The Blessing of Contradictions), from *Seek Peace and Pursue It (Yedioth Ahronoth, 2002)*, the essay quoted on this sheet.

"The Religious Significance of the Peshat," *Tradition* 23:2 (1988), trans. Edward L. Greenstein.

"The Biblical Destinies: Conditional Promises," *Tradition* 17:2 (1978).