

Revised copy - do not remove.

The story of Noah and his Sons. Wakefield

NOAH:

Oh true God of might, maker of all that is;  
Three persons, to say right, one God in endless bliss;  
Thou made both day and night, beast, fowl, and fish;  
All creatures in our sight wrought thou at thy wish,  
As thou well might. 5

The sun, the moon magnificent  
Thou made; the firmament;  
The stars also, most resplendent,  
To shine thou made full bright.

Angels thou made for certain, each order that is. 10  
To give thee joy in heaven, Lord thou did all this,  
Most wondrous to be spoken. Yet was there unkindness  
Far, for more by times seven than I can well express --  
And why?

Of all angels in brightness, 15  
God gave Lucifer most lightness.  
Yet proudly he left his dais:  
Set himself by God most high.

He thought himself as worthy as Him that him made,  
In brightness, in beauty; thus God did him degrade: 20  
Put him a low degree, swiftly his pride repaid,  
Him and his company, all their joy un-made  
For ever.

They shall never win away  
From there till the judgement-day, 25  
But burn in pain for ay;  
They shall leave it never.

Soon after, that gracious Lord to his likeness made man,  
That that place might be restored, just as he first began.

At the Trinity's accord, Adam, and Eve, that woman, 30  
 To multiply without discord, in Paradise put he then,  
 And then to both  
 Gave his command:  
 On the tree of life to lay no hand  
 But yet the false fiend 35  
 Made Him with man wroth,  
  
 Enticed man to gluttony, stirred him to sin in pride.  
 But in paradise, certainly, there might no sin abide;  
 And therefore man most speedily was put out in that tide,  
 In woe and suffering for to be, in pains both deep and wide,40  
 Most grim,  
 First in earth and then in hell,  
 With devils for to dwell,  
 Unless He grant his mercy well  
 To those who trust in Him. 45  
  
 Oil of mercy of His might, I hear He has decreed  
 To all who live in right, and will Him love and heed.  
 But now before His sight, all living souls indeed,  
 Most part of day and night do sin in word and deed  
 So bold: 50  
 Some in pride, ire, and envy,  
 In covetousness and gluttony,  
 Some in sloth and lechery,  
 And other ways manifold.  
  
 Therefore I dread lest God on us will take vengeance, 55  
 For sin is now abroad, without any repentance.  
 Six hundred years and odd have I in this existence  
 On earth as earthen clod, lived with great grievance  
 Each day.  
 And now I grow old, 60  
 Sick, sorry, and cold:  
 As muck upon mould  
 I wither away.

But yet for mercy will I cry and call:  
 Noah, thy servant I be, Lord over all! 65  
 Save from offending thee, my children all,  
 And bring them, Lord, and me, to thy heavenly hall  
 To rejoice.  
 And keep me from sin  
 This world within. 70  
 Mankind's comely king,  
 I pray thee, hear my voice!

GOD: Since I have made each thing living in land,  
 Duke, emperor and king, with mine own hand,  
 To have their pleasuring by sea and by sand, 75  
 All should obedience bring at my command  
 And intent,  
 Who made man such a creature,  
 Fairest of favour.  
 Man must love me par amour 80  
 For all this, and repent!

Methought I showed man love, when I made him to be  
 All angels above, like to the Trinity;  
 Now must I him reprove, for low lies he  
 On earth, and there does move in sins that displease me 85  
 Most of all.  
 Vengeance will I take  
 On earth, for sin's sake;  
 My wrath thus will I wake  
 Both with great and small. 90

I repent it sore that ever I made man.  
 By me he sets no store, and his sovereign I am.  
 I will destroy, therefore, both beast, man and woman:  
 All shall perish, less and more. They shall curse that bargain  
 That ill have done. 95

In earth now I see nought  
But sin that is unsought  
Of those who well have wrought  
Find I scarcely one.

This middle-earth below, I shall destroy therefore 100  
With floods that soon shall flow, and run with hideous roar.  
I have good cause, I know, for men fear me no more.  
As I say, I shall do so: my sword of vengeance draw,  
And make end  
Of all that bears life, 105  
Save Noah and his wife,  
For never made they strife  
With me, nor would offend.

From danger he is in, hastily will I go  
To Noah my servant ere I begin, to warn him of his woe. 110  
In earth I see but sin, running to and fro,  
Both great and small within, each one the other's foe  
With wicked intent.  
All I shall destroy so  
With floods that soon shall flow; 115  
I shall bring them woe  
That will not repent.

Noah, I thee command, my friend, a ship that thou must build --  
To this thy back must bend -- of board most stoutly nailed.  
Thou sought always good end, and in my cause travailed; 120  
Did thine obedience lend: my friendship shall thee shield,  
As reward.  
Of length thy ship must be  
Three hundred cubits, warn I thee;  
Of height just thirty; 125  
And fifty cubits broad.

Anoint thy ship with pitch and tar within, aye, and without  
 Good remedy these are, to keep the water out.  
 No man thy work must mar. Begin three chambers stout;  
 Thou must fit many a spar herein without a doubt, 130  
 To end fully.  
 Make in thy ship new  
 Parlours one or two,  
 And stables that will do  
 For beasts that there must be. 135

One cubit in height a window shall thou cut;  
 When that is finished quite, a door shall it abut.  
 With thee shall no man fight, nor shout at thee nor strut.  
 When all is done thus right, thy wife and mate thou put  
 In ship with thee; 140  
 Thy sons of good fame  
 Sem and Japhet, the same,  
 And Cam of good name;  
 Their wives also three.

For all shall I destroy that live in land, but ye, 145  
 With floods that from on high shall fall in great plenty.  
 Seven days it shall be dry, then rain incessantly,  
 Fast falling from the sky, and last for days forty  
 Without fail.  
 Take aboard ship with you 150  
 Of each kind of beast, two:  
 Male and female – that will do,  
 Ere thou pull up thy sail,

For they may help thee settle, when all this thing is wrought.  
 Store well every victual, for hunger that ye perish not. 155  
 Of beasts, fowls, and cattle, keep them in thy thought  
 For this is my counsel: some fodder should be sought  
 In haste.  
 They must have corn and hay,  
 And other food each day. 160

Do now as I do say,  
In the name of the Holy Ghost.

NOAH: Ah bless me! What art thou that thus  
Tells us before what shall be? Thou art marvellous!  
Tell me, for charity, thy name so gracious. 165

GOD: My name is of dignity, and also most glorious  
To tell.  
I am God most mighty;  
One God in Trinity;  
Who made thee and each to be. 170  
Thou should love me well.

NOAH: I thank thee, Lord so dear, that would vouchsave  
Thus low to appear to a simple knave.  
Bless us, Lord, here, for charity I crave;  
The better may we steer the ship that we shall have 175  
For certain.

GOD: Noah, to thee and to thy fry,  
My blessing grant I.  
Ye shall grow and multiply,  
And fill the earth again 180

When all these floods are past, and fully gone away.

NOAH: Lord, now homeward fast then I shall make my way.  
My wife will I ask what she will say  
And I fear that this task will make some fray  
Betwixt us both. 185  
For she is so tetchy,  
For little, oft angry;  
If any thing wrong be  
Soon is she wroth!

Then he shall go to meet his wife

- God speed, dear wife! How fare ye? 190
- WIFE: Now as ever might I thrive, the worse for seeing thee  
Tell now – look alive! – and where, pray, were ye?  
We may sink or survive, for as much as I see  
You care!  
While we work till we stink, 195  
You do what you think,  
Yet of food and drink  
Our cupboard is bare!
- NOAH: Wife, we are hard pressed with tidings new.
- WIFE: But you should be dressed all in Stafford blue, 200  
For you're always impressed, be it false or true!  
But God knows I'm oppressed – and that do I rue –  
Full ill!  
For I dare be sworn,  
From evening to morn 205  
Of sorrows ye mourn.  
God send you now your fill!
- We women should harry all bad husbands  
I have one, by Mary, who never understands!  
If he talk I must farry, howsoever it stands 210  
I must look as if I'm sorry, wringing both my hands  
In fright.  
But give me a little while,  
And once more I'll beguile:  
I shall smite and smile, 215  
And pay him back alright!
- NOAH: Whee! hold thy tongue, ram-shit, or I shall it still!

WIFE: By my thrift, if thou hit, I'll give thee thy fill!

NOAH: Well come then, just try it: Have at thee, Gill  
See how this blow will fit! 220

WIFE: Ah, so! By God, you'll me kill!  
But I am sure  
I shall not in your debt  
Leave this place, you may bet:  
Take you there a latchet  
To fasten your door! 225

NOAH: Ah! wilt thou so? Marry, take that!

WIFE: Thou shall three for two, I swear by my hat!

NOAH: And I shall pay you, in faith, tit for tat!

WIFE: Out upon thee, ho!

NOAH: Thou can both scratch like a cat  
And yell! 230  
At the moment she strike  
So too will she shriek:  
There is not her like  
In earth nor in hell!

But I will keep charity: I have things to do. 235

WIFE: Here shall no man tarry thee: I pray thee, go to!  
I am sure we shall miss thee – for a moment or two!  
To spin I'll address me.

NOAH: Whee! Farewell to you!  
But wife,  
Pray for me busily 240  
Till I return unto thee.



WIFE: Even as you pray for me,  
Just so, upon my life!

NOAH: I tarry too long from my work, I know.  
Now will I take along my gear, and will go. 245  
Yet I may go wrong - it may well be so -  
I must sing a fool's song unless God help me, lo,  
Like mad men!  
Now here shall we see  
If I know carpentry. 250  
In nomine Patris, et Filii  
Et Spiritus Sancti  
Amen.

To begin with this tree my bones I bend now.  
I trust from the Trinity succour somehow 255  
Will be sent. Now, bless me, it goes well, I vow,  
My work. Blessed be he that amends this now.  
The length here, lo:  
Three hundred cubits evenly;  
Of breadth, lo, is it fifty; 260  
The height exactly thirty  
Cubits - just so!

Now my gown will I cast, and work in my coat.  
I will make here the mast, ere I flit one foot.  
Ah, my back breaks, alas! This is a sorry note! 265  
It's a wonder that I last, such an old goat,  
Behold,  
To begin thus to make!  
Bones so stiff they will break;  
No wonder that they ache, 270  
For I am so old.

The top and the sail both will I make;  
The helm and the castle also will I take;  
To drive every nail will I not forsake.  
This gear may never fail, that dare I truly state 275  
Anon.

This work is most noble.  
These nails they run through all,  
Through both the large and small  
Timbers, each one. 280

Window and door, as he said should be;  
three chambers and no more, well made, truly;  
Pitch and tar, to be sure, spread evenly.  
This will ever endure, and this pleases me,  
For see: 285

It is better wrought  
That I could have thought.  
Him that made all of nought  
I thank only.

Now will I certainly go, and not dither, 290  
My wife and family to bring now hither.  
Listen now carefully, wife, and consider:  
Hence must we flee, all we together,  
Quickly!

WIFE: Why sir, what now ails you? 295  
Who is it assails you?  
To flee it avails you  
If frightened ye be!

NOAH: There's other yarn on the reel, my good dame.  
WIFE: Come then, tell me - reveal - or you'll get the blame! 300  
NOAH: He that all harms may heal - blessed be his name! -  
He has promised to shield us from our good, from shame,  
And said  
All this world around

With floods most profound  
That shall flow and abound 305  
Shall be overlaid.  
He said all would he slay, excepting we,  
Our bairns that us obey, and their wives all three.  
A ship then did he say I should make speedily, 310  
To save us from this fray, and all our property.  
Thank we him all!  
Fast, therefore, go we thither.  
WIFE: But I know not whither;  
I tremble and dither 315  
For fear of that tale!

NOAH: Be not afraid. Have done. Gather our gear,  
So that we shall, ere noon, be there without fear.  
SON 1: It shall be done, and soon. Brother, help to bear.  
SON 2: I'll not sit here and moon, but help with good cheer 320  
Now to pack.  
SON 3: Without any boast,  
I shall do my utmost.  
WIFE: Help your mother the most,  
Or you'll get a smack! 325

NOAH: Now we are there, as we should be,  
Get in our hear, cattle, and property.  
Into this vessel here, children all three.  
WIFE: I was never, I swear, closed up, I tell thee 330  
In a hostelry like this!  
In faith, I cannot find  
Which is before, which is behind!  
Shall we here be confined,  
Noah, as ye hope for bliss?

NOAH: Dame, as is reasonable, here must we await grace. 335  
Therefore, wife, with good will come into this place.  
WIFE: Sir, for Jack nor for Jill will I turn my face

Till I have on this hill spun for a space  
 Without doubt.  
 You'll be lucky to get me! 340  
 Now down will I set me.  
 I advise ne man upset me,  
 For fear of a clout!

NOAH: Behold now this wonder! The cataracts all  
 The heavens do sunder, both great and small; 345  
 And the seven stars wander, each from its stall.  
 The lightning and thunder that here fall,  
 Smash down  
 Both halls and bowers,  
 Castles and towers - 350  
 So sharp are these showers  
 That fall all around!

N. WIFE: Therefore, wife have done! Come in the ship fast!  
 Go whistle a tune from the top of the mast!

WIFE1: Good mother, come in soon, for all is overcast, 355  
 Both the sun and the moon.

WIFE 2: And many a wind-blast  
 So sharp!  
 Such great floods begin  
 Therefore, mother, come in!

N. WIFE: In faith, yet will I spin. 360  
 All in vain ye carp!

WIFE 3: If ye like, ye may spin, mother, in the ship.  
 NOAH: Now is this twice "some in", dame, by my friendship.

N. WIFE: Whether I lose or win, in faith, thy fellowship  
 Set I not at a pin! This spindoe will I slip 365  
 Upon this hill!  
 Ere one foot I will go.

NOAH: Peter! Such foolishness, lo!  
 Now without more ado  
 Come in if ye will! 370

N. WIFE: Yea, water comes so near that I sit not dry!  
Into the ship, for fear, therefore, I fly!  
For dread that I drown here.

NOAH: Dame, certainly  
It shall be bought most dear that ye stayed foolishly 375  
Out of the ship.

N. WIFE: I shall not at thy will  
Go from door to dung-hill!

NOAH: In faith, and from your long sitting-still  
Ye shall taste of the whip!

N. WIFE: Spare me not, I pray thee, but do just as ye think 380  
These great words shall not flay me.

NOAH: Stay here, dame, and drink,  
For beaten shall thou be with this staff till thou stink.  
Are these blows good? Tell me!

N. WIFE: What say ye, Wat Wink?

NOAH: Speak!  
Cry for mercy, I pray! 385

N. WIFE: To that say I nay.

NOAH: If ye do not, I say  
They head shall I break!

WIFE: Lord, at ease were I - it would be heart's solace  
If just once I might try to wear a widow's face! 390  
For thy soul - it's no lie - I'd pay for many a mass.  
So would passers-by that I see in this place:  
Many wives that are here  
Wish their husbands were dead -  
For, as ever ate I bread, 395  
So I wish our sire were!

NOAH: Ye men that have wives, now while they are young,  
If ye value your lives, then chastise their tongue!  
My heart scarce survives, nor liver and lung  
To see how strife strives these wed-men among. 400  
But I,  
As have I bliss,  
Shall chastise this!

Yet may ye miss,  
Nicholl Knee'high!

405

NOAH: I shall make thee still as stone, beginner of blunder!  
I shall beat thee, back and bone, and break all asunder!

WIFE: Out! Alas, I am gone! Man-monster! War-monger!

NOAH: See how she can groan, and I lie under!

But wife,  
Cease this strife I beg you,  
For my back's almost in two.

410

N. WIFE: And I am beat so blue  
That I may not thrive.

SON 1: Ah! Why fare ye thus, father and mother dear?

SON 2: Ye should not swear and cuss, standing in peril sheer.

SON 3: This weather is hideous! Disease comes too, I fear.

NOAH: We will do as ye bid us - no more be angry here,  
Children.

To the helm now shall I wend;

420

To my ship attend;

WIFE: I see in the firmament,  
I think the stars seven.

NOAH: This is a great flood, wife, take heed.

N. WIFE: So I thought, as I stood. We are in great dread.  
Huge waves, wild and rude.

425

NOAH: Help, God in this need!  
As thou art steersman good, and the best indeed  
Of all.

Now guide us in this rush

As thou did promise us.

430

N. WIFE: Our plight is perilous  
Help, God, when we call!

NOAH: Wife, take the helm from me, and I shall assay  
The deepnes of the sea here below, if I may.

WIFE: That shall I do most wisely. Now go thy way, 435  
 For floated here have we on this flood many a day  
 With pain.

NOAH: Now the water will I sound:  
 Ah, it is for to the ground!  
 This labour I expound 440  
 I had in vain.

Above all hills of green the water rose of late  
 Cubits fifteen. But in a higher state  
 It may not now be seen, for we know by this date  
 These forth days the rain has been; it wil therefore abate 445  
 I feel.  
 And now, as it is best  
 Again will I test:  
 Why now I'll be blessed -  
 It has waned a great deal! 450

Now are the weathers ceased, and the cateracts knit  
 Both the most and the least.

N. WIFE: I think, by my wit,  
 The sun shines in the east. Lo, is not that it?  
 We should have a good feast, were these floods flit  
 Away. 455

NOAH: We have been here, all we,  
 Three hundred days and fifty.

N. WIFE: Yea, and now wanes the sea.  
 Lord, bless this day!

NOAH: The third time will I plumb the depth now with care. 460

N. WIFE: Don't take so long! Come, lay in thy line there.

NOAH: I may touch with my thumb the ground ever here.

N. WIFE: We begin to welcome a most merry cheer!  
 Husband dear,  
 What ground may this be? 465

NOAH: The hills of Armony.

N.WIFE: Now blessed be he  
That thus provides for us here!

NOAH: Tops of high hills I see, many in my sight;  
Nothing to stop me, the weather is so bright! 470

N.WIFE: These are of mercy tokens most right.

NOAH: Dame, now counsel me what fowl best might  
Show its worth  
With flight of wing,  
Without tarrying to bring 475  
Of mercy some tokening,  
Either from south or north.

For this is the first day of the tenth moon.

N.WIFE: The raven, I dare say, will come again soon.  
As fast as thou may, cast him forth -- have done! 480  
And perhaps he may return before noon  
Indeed.

NOAH: I will cast out also  
Doves here, one or two.  
Go your way, go! 485  
Good hunting! -- God speed!

Now are these fowls flown to many a country.  
Then pray we, every one, kneeling on our knee,  
To him that is alone worthiest of degree,  
That he would send anon our fowls' bounty 490  
To please us.  
They must now find a landing,  
The water is so waning.  
Thank we God, all-wielding --  
That Lord that made us! 495

It is a wondrous thing, I think, truly,  
They are so long-tarrying, the fowls that we  
Cast out in the morning.

N.WIFE: Sir, it may be





N.WIFE: Here have we been, Noah, long enough now,  
With sufferings keen, and great woe I vow.

NOAH: Behold! -- on this green neither cart nor plough  
Is left to be seen; neither tree nor bough, 535  
Nor other thing.  
All is swept away --  
Many castles, I say,  
And towns great of array -- 540  
All are gone with this flooding!

N.WIFE: These floods unforgiving, through all this world wide  
Have destroyed everything, on sea and sea-side.

NOAH: To death did they bring the proudest of pride --  
Everyone living that ever was spied 545  
In sin.  
All are they slain,  
And put now to pain.

N.WIFE: From thence again  
Shall they never win? 550

NOAH: Win? No, believe me, they shall not unless  
He hears their sad plea, and brings them to grace.  
As in pain, bliss is he, so I pray in this space  
In that hall heavenly he will make us a place,  
So that we 555  
With his saints, in his sight,  
And his angels bright,  
May come to his light.  
Amen, for charity!

Here ends the story of Noah. Abraham follows.