

# How Long Did it Take to Build the Ark?

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## Comparing Four Ideas on the Ark Construction Period

God told Noah to build an Ark. How long did he have to do it? There is no scripture that gives us a the definitive answer, but it was a big project, and Peter tells us "God waited patiently while the Ark was being built". It wasn't quick then.

### 120 years: When the Countdown began (1536AM)

This option hinges on the meaning of [Genesis 6:3](#) "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." More literally, "And said Jehovah: Not shall rule my spirit in man forever in their erring, [since] he [is] flesh; and shall be his days a hundred and twenty years."<sup>1</sup>

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	לֹא־יִרְדּוֹן	רוּחִי					
spirit	my	rule	shall	Not	:	Jehovah	said	And
בְּאָדָם	לְעֹלָם	בְּשָׁגָם	הוּא	בָּשָׂר	וְהָיָה			
ever	for	man	in	erring	their	in		
יָמָיו	מֵאָה	וְעֶשְׂרִים	שָׁנָה:					
his	days	a	hundred	and	twenty	years		

There are two suggested readings of this verse, depending on whether God was talking about humans individually or mankind as a group.

- **Lifespan was reduced to 120 years.** This addresses mankind



*individually*. The first contradiction is that individuals were not living forever, they were living less than a thousand years. This is not very long from God's perspective. The second contradiction is that Noah did not comply to this new 'law' - nor did a single patriarch all the way down to Moses. Every single one lived longer than 120 years. It is also contradicted by everyone since who has died before 120 years of age. To avoid this dilemma, some claim that the lifespan was to *approach* 120 years. The verse does not say that, nor do longevity records support this claim - lifespan leveled out at a much lower limit: "The length of our days is seventy years— or eighty, if we have the strength" (Psalm 90:10). Incidentally, this dubious interpretation is forced into the text of NLT, CEV and The Message.



- **Mankind had 120 years left before Noah's Flood.** This addresses mankind *collectively* - the population as a whole. There is no contradiction with "forever", since the world will continue for as long as God is supporting it (*strive* is usually translated *judge*). This statement comes just before the introduction of Noah and the account of the global flood, which brought an end to the whole population. Taken this way, the verse does not contradict itself. The next question is whether Noah heard this warning;
  - **Noah was unaware of the 120 year warning.** Then who heard it? If not Noah then God must have revealed it (much later) to Moses. In other words, God secretly said to Himself that the world has 120 years left. Prophetic statements uttered by God are not normally treated as though nobody heard them, especially when Noah, "a preacher of righteousness" clearly heard from God and was about to inherit the world.
  - **Noah had 120 years warning:** This assumes that rest of the instructions were given at the same time (1536AM), which is 20 years before Noah's first son was born, yet the instructions refer to Noah's sons and their wives. This would make it a prophesy to someone who was barren, about their future children. This is not unusual. God made similar promises to Adam, Abraham,

Manoah, Zachariah and Elizabeth, even Mary. Noah was unusually old (500 years) before his children were recorded, and such a remarkable fathering age probably means something (like patient endurance for example). Noah has more than a passing resemblance to Abraham. Considering the desperate situation of Noah's apparent defeat (in the population contest as the last righteous representative of the Messianic line), it would make sense to assume God made His covenant at the same time as he promised the offspring - just as He did with Abraham. (Gen 17:7).

This is a long time to build a boat, but not if 120 years includes all the planning and preparation – selling land, learning shipbuilding, growing food, harvesting timber and, of course, preaching.(2 Peter 2:5). It could also be dropping a hint that Noah did not get a lot of help.

### **20-70 years: After all the children were married (after 1586AM)**

God made a promise to Noah and declared that his wife, his sons and their wives would board the Ark with him. (Gen 6:18). The idea here is that Noah's children were married before God could make promises about them.

There is another issue here - no grandchildren were born to Noah until two years after the Flood. According to the theory, the wives of Noah's sons had not conceived during the entire period of Ark construction, so God must have closed all the wombs for decades. So the women waited patiently while God waited patiently while the Ark was being built.

It also means that Noah could not receive instructions until the last son was married. However, God waited patiently while the Ark was being built, not while Ham was looking for a wife.

### **100 years: After the children were born (1556AM)**

This idea assumes that when Noah is first mentioned in Genesis 5:32, he was 500 years old, and that this is the same time that God gives Noah instructions about the Ark. Since we know he was 600 when the Flood came, this leaves 100 years to build the Ark.

To be more exact, Noah was 500 (Genesis 5:32) when he had his first son

Japheth, (Genesis 10:21). Two years after the Flood, Arphaxad was born to Shem at 100 years of age (Genesis 11:10), so Shem was 2 years younger than Japheth. Ham was the youngest (Genesis 9:24) so we might guess another 2 or 3 years. So all the children had not been born until perhaps 95 years before the Flood.

This theory claims that God spoke to Noah in the year Japheth was born, and was speaking prophetically about the other two sons and all three wives. This is the worst of both worlds - the 120 years (Genesis 6:3) makes no sense, and 5 of the 8 Ark crew are spoken of prophetically.

## We Don't Know (?AM)

Since we are not told exactly when God instructed Noah, the idea is that we cannot pinpoint how long it took to build the Ark. This only leaves us with clues from outside Genesis - like 1 Peter 3:20, "...God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the **ark** was being built." This suggests we should opt for a longer rather than shorter time span. Solomon took seven years to build the temple, and 14 for his own palace, so we should expect at least 20 years for an Ark.

Since we don't know, maybe we could choose some biblical number like 40, representing Noah's years in the wilderness. Or why not pick one of the above if it has more 'for' than 'against'?

## Comparison of Theories for Construction Time of Noah's Ark

	<b>Gen 6:3</b>	<b>Gen 6:18</b>	<b>Gen 11:10</b>	<b>1 Pet 3:20</b>	
<b>Years</b>	<b>120 years</b>	<b>son's wives</b>	<b>grandchildren</b>	<b>patiently</b>	<b>Summary</b>
120	Countdown	Prophetic	fine	best	Speaking prophetically about the sons and wives.
20-70	?	married	delayed	OK	God was talking to Himself about the 120 years, wives were barren during entire Ark construction.

100	?	Prophetic	fine	good	God was talking to Himself about the 120 years, speaking prophetically about 2 sons and the 3 wives.
unknown	?	any	fine	?	If indeterminate, then pick the best option above.

## Comment

We don't know how long it took to build the Ark. Of the options described, 100 years seems the most problematic. For the "must-be-married" scenario, a very short Ark-building leadtime runs counter to 1 Pet 3:20, but a longer leadtime extends the barren period of all three wives. In addition, a building schedule of 120 years is the only option that makes use of Genesis 6:3, which is left without a logical meaning in the other scenarios.

A definitive answer? We don't know for sure but 120 years is a reasonable guess. If there is a better (other) suggestion for Genesis 6:3 then the building period might be in the range from 20 to 70 years.

## References

1. Genesis 6:3 from the Interlinear Literal Translation of the Hebrew Old Testament: George Ricker Berry, Hinds and Noble, NY, 1897. Download <http://www.netwaysglobal.com/biblia/index.html>. See also other translations online at Parallel Hebrew Old Testament: (Chapter 6) <http://www.hebrewoldtestament.com/B01C006.htm>

Genesis 6:3 (Blue Letter Bible). "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not **always** strive with **man**, for that he also is **flesh**: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." The KJV skips the word *shagag* (to err) which adds meaning to the word flesh here.

Word	Strong's	Meaning	Usage in KJV
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<p><b>always</b> (olam)</p>	<p>H5769</p>	<p>1) long duration, antiquity, futurity, <b>forever</b>, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world                  a) ancient time, long time (of past)                  b) (of future)                      1) for ever, always                      2) continuous existence, perpetual                      3) everlasting, indefinite or unending future, eternity</p>	<p>ever 272, everlasting 63, old 22, perpetual 22, evermore 15, never 13, time 6, ancient 5, world 4, always 3, alway 2, long 2, more 2, never + 0408 2, misc 6</p>
<p><b>strive</b> (diyn)</p>	<p>H1777</p>	<p>1) to judge, contend, plead                  a) (Qal)                  1) to <b>act as judge</b>, minister judgment                  2) to plead a cause                  3) to execute judgment, requite, vindicate                  4) to govern                  5) to contend, strive</p>	<p>judge 18, plead the cause 2, contend 1, execute 1, plead 1,</p>
<p><b>man</b> (adam)</p>	<p>H120</p>	<p>1) mankind, man                  a) human being                  b) <b>mankind</b> (much more frequently intended sense in OT)                  c) Adam, first man</p>	<p>man 408, men 121, Adam 13, person(s) 8, common sort + 07230 1, hypocrite 1</p>
<p><b>flesh</b> (basar)</p>	<p>H1320</p>	<p>1) <b>flesh</b>                  a) of the body                      1) of humans                      2) of animals                  b) the body itself                  c) male organ (euphemism)                  d) kindred, blood-relations                  e) flesh as frail or erring (man against God)                  f) all living things                  g) animals                  h) mankind</p>	<p>flesh 256, body 2, fatfleshed + 01277 2, leanfleshed + 01851 2, kin 2, leanfleshed + 07534 1, mankind + 0376 1, myself 1, nakedness 1, skin 1</p>
<p>(shagag)</p>	<p>H7683</p>	<p>1) to go astray, <b>err</b>, commit sin or error                  a) (Qal)                  1) to err (mentally)</p>	<p>err 1, flesh 1, sin ignorantly 1, deceived 1, went astray 1</p>

	2) to sin (ignorantly or inadvertently)	
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It seems like Berry (1897) holds the closest: "And said Jehovah: Not shall rule my spirit in man forever in their erring, [since] he [is] flesh; and shall be his days a hundred and twenty years.", which, for ease of reading, would be: "And Jehovah said: My spirit shall not rule mankind forever in their error, since he is flesh, and his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

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