

## Noah, a Man for Our Time in a World of His Time

Barry H. Wilkins

Gen 5:28,29 and 6:5-8:1; 1 Pet 3:18-22

### 1. Introduction

What does the story of Noah evoke for you? An old Sunday school image of Noah's ark looking like a boat resting on dry ground with a rainbow already in the sky, and animals 2 x 2 going in, usually giraffes and elephants and a mouse or two, well, two, I suppose? All the details of the flood narrative are important, the ark, the animals, the raven, the dove, the olive branch, the 7, 40, 150 days, but today I want to concentrate on a central message, focused on Noah himself. We're going to ask; *Do we know God's rest?*

We will see that Noah and the flood are about comfort, rest, mercy, salvation. Genesis 5:28, one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible when we understand its meaning: "Lamech (not the one who did the murder and wrote that ghastly poem oozing his hatred in chapter 4) fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.'"

In place of "relief" other versions have "Comfort" or "Rest". The words all mean the same. Mercy against all odds. The world lives, and we live our lives, not at rest. God offers rest, and Noah is the prime example of knowing this rest. Notice the footnote in ESV – 'Noah sounds like the Hebrew word for Rest'.

We'll see that the account of the flood is constructed to bring a deeper meaning. That's where we're going this morning, to a terrific rescue from a dreadful predicament; but before we go to Noah himself let's go to Noah's world.

We will continue to look today at how the early chapters of Genesis spell out the reality of judgement and Man's responsibility for it, but we shall also see that wherever there is judgement, there is mercy to be found, too.

### 2. The World of Noah

Note the ESV's heading at Genesis 6 "Increasing corruption on earth." Is it true? Is sin increasing on the face of the earth?

To recap the last two Sundays: We have heard from our minister of the slide into defiance of God in the face of His grace.

A fatal chain of events was set in motion by Adam & Eve. In eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil rather than the tree of life:

*First*, they were being disobedient "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Genesis 2:17a.

*Secondly*, they doubt the Word of God when he said "for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:17b.

*Thirdly*, they envy God's authority to decide what is right and wrong. "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:5.

And having made their declaration of independence it was downhill all the way. Men did not know darkness from light.

Isaiah 5:20 “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness.”

Therefore judgment is already inevitable. “You will surely die” Genesis 2:17. You will surely no longer be in communion with me. You will no longer walk with me. You are spiritually dead.

The first Lamech’s absurd lust for vengeance, oozes hatred (7/77 = completeness of his vengeance). Man had descended into defiant opposition to God. Let me take you now to one of the saddest verses in the Bible.

Genesis 6:11,12 “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.”

Jeremiah 17:9, KJV “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

Genesis 6:5,6 “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart”.

Reminding one of

“What is this that you have done?” Genesis 3:13 & 4:10. Can you feel the grief in those words?

### **3. The World of Our Time**

Is sin increasing on the face of the earth?

Over the five decades or so that I have known Christ there has been, I believe, a steady decline in the understanding of the reality of sin as the real problem of mankind, and alongside it there has been a steady eroding of emphasis on God’s salvation, mercy and forgiveness even amongst evangelicals. The replacement of these mercies by some aspect or other of human pride and the rise of the Me cult, where man is made great, even within the evangelical wing of the church, is of very great concern.

The Me syndrome is in our faces constantly. Wherever we look we see lost souls worshipping in the temple of self, bowing down before the altars of greed, power, recognition, feeling ever-so-good, and hatred. Our roads are choked with a catalogue of impatience, intemperance, selfishness, aggression and outright disobedience. And these attributes are all focused on Me – My rights, what I want, I am more important than You, I need to get there first, I need to impress. And this catalogue of self-centred behaviour is on display also on our TV screens, in board rooms, cafés, at supermarket checkout queues & at airport baggage carousels.

Brief illustrations:

1. It’s all about you. In trying to help a friend disengage from an internet account, it wouldn’t let us go, page after page enticing us not to go, the final appeal was, Your internet account with us is all about YOU.
2. I went to get a new pair of glasses a few months ago and emblazoned across the back wall was the slogan “Eyewear to be seen in, not just for seeing”. YOU are going to look so COOL.
3. Do you know, 500 million people spend an average of an hour a day on their personal social networking sites – all about YOU.

This is the world of Noah’s time, and it’s the world of our time.

But wait a moment; isn't it the case that we believers also are in those catalogues advertising self, modelling those garments of self-interest? I know for certain that I'm there. What a tragedy that many Christian ministers strut back and forth across stages in front of large crowds, even with a Bible in their hand but quoting from it so rarely, and proclaiming their own opinions instead of the Word of God. And it is not just on stages that they strut. Others do their strutting in the pages of learned evangelical journals. A while ago I read an article in one with bewildered dismay. The author used the term 'I, Me, My, Myself' 30 times on just the first page. What I think, when one writes this kind of thing, what my readers say, how I respond – it went on forever. God save us from strutters. But don't we all exhibit such attributes, behaving like peacocks climbing on to a woodpile to preen their feathers and crow?

In an issue of the Southern Cross a few months ago, our archbishop wrote of 'Approaching God Trivially'. He was lamenting the lack of corporate repentance as prescribed on biblical grounds in our ancient church services. He wrote, "The absence of any acknowledgement of sin as we approach God always surprises me. But equally astonishing is the somewhat casually given assurance that we are now forgiven if we have said a certain prayer, the wording of which is barely consistent with Christian understanding of sin and repentance at all."

Why In our worship, do we Christians no longer "acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness ... provoking most justly God's wrath and indignation against us" ... Is it perhaps that the "remembrance of them" is no longer "grievous to us, the burden of them" no longer "intolerable". That was the somewhat archaic general confession in the Book of Common Prayer communion service. Have we not, as the archbishop said, tended to trivialise sin?

But is this one so outdated that we cannot say, from the general confession in the morning prayer service? "We have erred, and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. There is no health in us."

Devices and desires – the burning flames of greed, the desire for power, things, gratification, recognition; and the desolate wasteland of schemings, connivings, gossiping, deceit, all to get our own way, what we want.

Oh yes, sin is increasing on the face of the earth, just as in Noah's day, but on the other hand, the human condition is unchanged. "The earth is corrupt in God's sight". Surely there has to be a solution. Well, there was for Noah.

#### **4. Noah's name**

Let's have a look at our hero today. First his name is of great significance. It is spelt with just two letters in Hebrew (only the consonants matter) – a 'n' and a 'h'. We say Noah, they would have made a sound of that final 'h' rather like the 'ch' of 'Bach' – Noach if you like. Allow me to do what Hebrew scholars do, and put a dot beneath the 'h' to remind us that it's pronounced like the 'ch' of 'J S Bach' or 'Loch Ness monster':

### **a 'n' then a 'ḥ' – Noah**

Please look again at Genesis 5:29, that beautiful verse: "He will comfort (Noah) us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed" (NIV). Thus, Noah represents the promise of salvation, the undoing of the curse, the redemption of mankind. Noah's name means Salvation. Let me support this with a few other texts, first jumping to the very end of the Bible:

Revelation 14:12,13 “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus ... Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... that they may rest from their labours ... !”

And the words of Jesus, Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Did Jesus just mean these as words of soothing comfort in times of distress? I think not. Was not Jesus himself steeped in the scriptures, identical to what we know as the Old Testament? Could he perhaps have been alluding to Genesis 5:29? Would he not have known also Psalm 116:7-9 “Return, O my soul, to your rest (that’s the Noah word again); for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.” Notice there walking, deliverance, rest.

Psalm 116 is a salvation psalm, replete with words such as gracious (note this word, we’ll come back to it shortly); merciful; preserves; saved; rest (Noah); delivered; salvation; loosed my bonds. Notice also walking with God.

And let me take you to near the end of the exodus narrative, Exodus 33:14 “My presence will go with you {cf. Exodus 3:12, “I will be with you”}, and I will give you rest” (I will Noah you). Remember this is in the context of the exodus, the prime example of rescue and redemption, and indeed exactly what the Hebrews understood by the word, a setting free, a salvation, rest.

And Jesus knew Isaiah, too, for example this in the song of salvation as the shortest chapter in Isaiah is known, Isaiah 12:1-2 “You will say in that day: ‘I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me (Noah me). Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation’.” Notice again comfort (Noah), anger turned away, salvation, trust, strength, song. Strength and Song are often used in association with salvation, they are salvation words.

And Isaiah 30:15 “In returning (repentance) and rest (Noah) you shall be saved, in quietness and trust shall be your strength.”

Isaiah 40:1 “‘Comfort, comfort (Noah, Noah) my people’, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” In other words she has received judgement and more, but now there’s salvation for the remnant, for the faithful few.

And have you ever thought of the best known psalm in this way?

Psalm 23:4 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort (Noah) me.”

The valley of the shadow of death represents the worst that can happen to us, and yet, I will fear no evil, your rod (a defensive implement) and staff (a support), they Noah me, they save me, they redeem me, they set me free, they bring me through unscathed and victorious. Now, Psalm 23 is a Davidic psalm, therefore it is a messianic psalm. Now, was there not one who, more than anyone else, walked through such a valley but came through in victory to sup at the banquet table? Oh yes, Jesus, the Christ, is the ultimate fulfilment of this psalm.

Let me now home in on the core message of our Noah narrative.

## 5. Grace, the way out of judgement

The next intriguing thing about Noah's name is that it has the same two letters as another important OT word, the 'h' first this time, then the 'n', pronounced 'hen' (the 'h' is as the 'ch' of 'Bach', remember). There may or may not be significance in that back to front spelling, but there's definitely very much significance that they both occur in just one verse in our reading today.

### **a 'h' then a 'n' – hen**

So now let's go to this sensational verse:

Genesis 6:8 **“And Noah found Favour (‘Grace’ KJV) in the eyes of the LORD.”**

Or: **“And nh found hn in the eyes of the LORD.”** – Just to show how these two short, back-to-front but utterly significant words are side by side in the text.

Because 'hen' means Grace or Favour. It is only used for favour shown by a superior to an inferior being, and is therefore freely given, and nearly always by God towards man. 65 times in OT translated 'Grace' more often than not in older translations, hardly ever by 'Grace' in new translations, sadly. And this one time only in the whole of Genesis. So we have Grace (hen) and a Salvation word (Noah) juxtaposed. In this one verse we have God's grace and God's comfort. Notice the wonderful connection between these two words.

Similarly in that Exodus text I quoted earlier: Exodus 33:12,14 **“I know you (Moses) by name, and you have also found favour (hen) in my sight ... My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest (Noah).”** You have found 'hen' – I will 'Noah' you. You have found grace – I will comfort you.

And later in Exodus 34:6,7 **“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD (YAHWEH, YAHWEH), a God merciful and gracious (hen), slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.”** Notice the word gracious there as in Psalm 116 earlier, the hen word turned into an adjective

That prime example of a flood victim, Jonah, quoted that Exodus verse (in Jonah 4:2) having previously said (Jonah 2:3,5,9) **“you cast me into the deep ... the flood surrounded me; all your waves and billows passed over me (sad, sad, sad!) ... But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you ... Salvation belongs to the LORD”** (joy, joy, joy!).

Noah's was a personal experience, like Jonah. Both he and Jonah sacrificed to the LORD.

What are we to make of isolated disaster experiences? We think of them as warnings of God's final judgement, to wake us up to the need to get right with God. How many victims of the QLD floods, as their very first act on finding themselves safe, bowed down to the Lord and offered the best of themselves to Him? I know one did, a young lady who had watched her parents swept away to their deaths and she quietly and confidently said, “God is in control.” That lady, I said to myself, walks humbly with the living God.

Do you know, there are 50 uses of the word 'Flood' in the bible, nearly all in the OT. Without exception representing destructive power, i.e. judgement. Flood, the seas, the waters, the deep are all images of judgement.

I was pointed by a Christian friend of mine to a sermon by Charles Spurgeon after a notorious coal mine disaster in Northumberland in 1862 when 204 men and boys suffocated to death when the only shaft was blocked by a huge fall of machinery.

**“O sword of the Lord, when will you rest and be quiet? Why these repeated warnings? Why does the Lord so frequently and terribly sound an alarm? Is it not because our drowsy spirits will not**

wake up to the reality of death? ... 200 witnesses cry out from the pit, prepare to meet your God! ... If you die, you will not live again to forget the God who daily loaded you with mercies, to profane his name, to insult high heaven, to live in this world like the swine which feed beneath the oak tree forgetful of the green bough that yields the acorn, or like the cow that eats the grass but never thanks the sun and cloud which nourishes the pasture ... Men of Earsdon, now is the time find your Saviour. Christ is lifted up before your eyes. Look to him now and live!"

Spurgeon was converted himself at age 15 on the text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." Isaiah 45:22

## **6. Generations of Noah**

Moving on to Genesis 6:9 "These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God." This is the account of Noah. Notice how he walked with God. This doesn't mean he was sinless, rather that no-one could point a finger at him and say, "but you are supposed to be a Godly man..." because he trusted God. A prime example of salvation by faith.

Notice only one generation c.f. all the others in Genesis. Noah was a very important figure in God's plan beginning to unfold of salvation for mankind. Notice how in the entire account Noah says NOTHING. It is God who speaks.

Genesis 7:1 "You are righteous before me in this generation."

## **7. The apex of the narrative**

What do you think is the highlight of the flood story? Noah? his family? the ark? animals 2 by 2? flood? raven? dove? olive twig? destruction? Noah's sacrifice? the rainbow? Let's have a look at the remarkable symmetrical structure of the Flood narrative (a common device in the bible):

**Noah, Righteous, Walked with God, Obedient, Humble, Found Favour** Genesis 6:9

Noah's sons

Enter the ark at God's command ("Go into the ark" Genesis 7:1)

7 days

7 days wait

40 days rain "The LORD shut him in" Genesis 7:16 (enfolded him in his grace)

Mountains covered

150 days – waters prevailed

"God remembered Noah" Genesis 8:1

150 days – waters abated

Mountains uncovered

40 days flood abated

7 days wait

7 days wait

Exit the ark at God's command ("Go out from the ark" Genesis 8:16)

Noah's sons

**Noah, Righteous, Built an altar to the LORD, Sacrificed** Genesis 8:20

God is speaking. God is driving the narrative. God is in control. That is why it's a joyful outcome to a hopeless predicament. So, at the apex (climax) of the narrative, we read that "God remembered Noah", that is, he favoured him, he showed grace to him, the man who was a faithful remnant in his generation, who still called on the name of the LORD.

## **8. Calling on the name of the LORD**

Remember Genesis 4:26 “At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.”

This is a rare phrase in the bible, about 15 times in the OT, 2 in the New. It is nearly always linked with Covenant promises or with salvation.

For example, Psalm 105:1 “Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!”

And three times in Psalm 116 which we looked at earlier, Psalm 116:4 “Then I called on the name of the LORD: ‘O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!’”

Psalm 116:13 “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.”

Psalm 116:17 “I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD.”

Joel 2:32 “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved”, quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2.

To ‘call on the name of the LORD’, then, is to have faith in God’s promise and provision of salvation. When we have this tying together in Genesis 4 onwards of ‘calling on the name of the LORD’, salvation from destruction, mercy, grace, we cannot escape the conclusion that Noah was supremely an example of a true believer in the living God, no doubt about it, because he trusted a promise of salvation that had the Christ as its ultimate fulfilment.

The account of this extraordinary event is the first in the Bible of salvation by grace. That’s not to say that grace was not previously present – far from it as our minister has explained over his last three talks. In light of this the ark must not be seen just as a boat. Ark in Hebrew means box. Later in the exodus account we encounter another box, the ark of the covenant. It cannot be just coincidence that the godly men or man who put these early chapters of Genesis together used the word ark for Noah’s boat. Noah’s ark was God’s means of dispensing grace. On top of the ark of the covenant was the mercy seat, where God sat, figuratively speaking, dispensing his mercy.

## **9. Noah a man of our time**

Noah therefore was a man of our time in a world of his time. His life is perfected in the Christ in that he walked with God, called on his name, devoted himself to Him, trusted in Him, took Him at his word, a faithful remnant, righteous. St Peter describes Noah as “a herald of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5), and the writer to the Hebrews “an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

He is found in many places in the Bible because his name means salvation and his name is bound to grace.

He lived and we live in a world that defiantly rejects God and the grace that he offers so freely. In a corrupted and cursed world he came through a death experience into victory as our extract from 1 Peter explains: Peter’s great statement about Christ preaching (that is, bringing the gospel in his ministry, his death and resurrection, not just preaching sermons) to disobedient, spiritually imprisoned people for all time. And he links this directly with Noah who was brought safely through the flood in a baptism experience.

My friends, what was Noah’s ark made of? What is my ark made of? What was Noah’s ark, his comfort, his consolation, his safety, his rest, his redemption, his salvation, made of? Gopher wood, yes. But his ark and my ark are surely built from obedience to God’s call and claim on my life; saying Yes to God, taking him at his word.

## **10. 2011 AD**

So it was in the year of our Lord 2011. The wickedness of mankind was great in the earth and every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The world was corrupt in God's sight, filled with violence; physical violence against people, violence against truth, violence against relationships, violence against property, violence against creation. But the world had not noticed that the great day of judgement had already come, when the Christ, the one and true faithful remnant who held his own faith in his Father's purposes to the end, hung on the cross and suffered and died, to pay the price, to offer eternal rest to those who call upon his name. Judgement on the one hand, mercy on the other.

But there was a remnant in 2011 who did trust in God. They recognised that their own sin and iniquity had "made a separation between them and their God" (Isaiah 59:1,2), but they recognized also that "the LORD's hand is not shortened that it cannot save." The separation was unbridgeable by any human effort, but bridgeable by God's love for us in Christ: "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him" (Psalm 103:11b). Thus they continually fell on their knees before him for mercy.

They had already built their ark, their comfort, by saying yes to God and devoting themselves to him despite what the world threw at them, and thus when the great cataclysm came, when the "fountains of the great deep burst forth" (Genesis 7:11), the day when God "mocks the mockers, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34), when the defiant ones had shut themselves into their own arks constructed of human pride, it was God himself who shut the believers in, that is he enclosed them within the embrace of his mercy, as he had done for Noah, and brought them safely through, and they were assured of their final rest, "a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). As Spurgeon also quoted from a hymn, "Far from this world of grief and sin, with God, eternally shut in".

My friends, we must each ask ourselves this: do I know God's 'hen', his grace? Do I find favour in his sight because I have said yes to Him and faithfully follow Him? Do I walk with God? Am I assured of that final rest? If I have found his 'hen', his grace, his mercy, then I have also found his Noah, his rest, his comfort, his mercy, his salvation. Will God my Saviour Remember me?

My friends, is your name ... Noah?

**Rock of Ages.** The cleft in the oolitic limestone rock in Burrington Combe (Mendip Hills, nr Bristol, England) in which Augustus Montague Toplady sheltered during a sudden storm when a young curate at nearby Blagdon. The hymn was written about 12 years later in 1775 not long before he died at age 38 from tuberculosis.



Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee,  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy wounded<sup>#</sup> side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Not the labour of my hands  
Can fulfil Thy law's demands,  
Could my zeal no respite\* know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone,  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling,  
Naked, come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless look to Thee for grace,  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,<sup>‡</sup>  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When mine eyes shall close in death,  
When I soar to worlds unknown,  
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

**Augustus Montague Toplady 1775**

<sup>#</sup> Original was **riven**, a more powerful word (torn apart)

<sup>\*</sup> Original was **languour**, meaning weariness

<sup>‡</sup> A modern version has weakened this to "**Stained by sin, to thee I cry**"

Toplady must have known of these words by John Wesley:

**"O Rock of Israel, Rock of Salvation, Rock struck for me, let those two streams of Blood and Water which once gushed out of Thy side, bring down Pardon and Holiness into my soul. And let me thirst after them now, as if I stood upon the Mountain whence sprang this Water; and near the Cleft of that Rock, the Wounds of my Lord, whence gushed this Sacred Blood."**

**John Wesley** in preface to a book of hymns by his brother Charles, early 1740s

## Amazing Grace

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound!),  
that saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now I'm found,  
was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
and grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
and grace shall lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be,  
as long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
and mortal life shall cease;  
I shall possess within the veil,  
a life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
the sun forbear to shine;  
But God who called me here below,  
will be forever mine.

**John Newton 1762**

John Newton was brought up by his Christian mother to know God, but he fell away as a tear-away teenager and ended up as a sea captain trading African slaves across the Atlantic. At port in the West Indies one day he was wonderfully converted. Some time later he became an Anglican minister and wrote this hymn in his 40s when vicar of Olney in Buckinghamshire.

These are the six original verses by him. An extraneous verse beginning "When we've been there ten thousand years..." was added in a novel (Unce Tom's Cabin) by a fictional character who characteristically mixed up verses of hymns. That verse does not belong and has little to do with this hymn which is about how the author was saved by grace, and subsequently how grace nurtured him in this life. It is wonderfully true for us all.

The familiar tune dates from the early 1800s and was possibly a tune sung by slaves on the cotton plantations of the SE USA.

The song was always popular in the US, but became unfamiliar for a hundred years in Europe until it was rediscovered in the late 1950s.