

In the watery Netherlands, a modern Noah builds an ark

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Utrecht, Netherlands, February 10 (ENInews)--If there was ever a country that understands floods, it is the Netherlands, where one-quarter of the land is below sea level, and it is there that a modern Noah is constructing an ark.

Dutch building contractor Johan Huibers is close to completing a full-sized replica of the legendary boat in Dordrecht, located on the Maas river. It all began in 1992, when Huibers dreamt of a flood. "I saw the Netherlands disappearing under an enormous mass of water, comparable with the tsunami in Southeast Asia," he said in media interviews. "The next day, I found a book about Noah's Ark in the local bookshop, and since then, my dream has been to build the ark."

In Genesis 6:15, God gives Noah the dimensions: "The length of the ark shall be 300 cubits, the breadth of it 50 cubits and the height of it 30 cubits." Although there is some variation in today's theories as to what constituted a cubit in biblical times, one equivalent in modern times is half a metre, or a foot and a-half.

Huibers, a creationist and evangelist, started out with a modest plan. He decided to build a half-sized replica of the ark. Using modern tools, Huibers began in 2005, working six days a week and doing most of the work himself with occasional help from his son after school.

He had to overcome some practical problems. In verse 14, God tells Noah, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch." As it turned out, modern scholars are not sure what "gopher wood" was. It may have been a mis-translation or it may be extinct. So Huibers used American cedar and Norwegian pine.

Huibers' home province of North Holland is for the most part reclaimed polder (low-lying) land situated below sea level. The risk of flooding is a sensitive issue in the

Netherlands. The catastrophic flood of 1953, which killed over 1,800 people in the south-western province of Zeeland, led to the construction of the Delta Works, a series of water defences completed in 1997.

Huibers' first ark was narrow enough to travel the inland waterways of the Netherlands. He finished the ship in 2007 and installed exhibits on board aimed at proving the biblical creation narrative to be true and evolution theory false. The interior was populated with life-size models of animals, including giraffes, elephants, lions, crocodiles, zebras and bison. In a 50-seat theatre, visitors could watch a segment of the Disney film Fantasia that retells the story of Noah's Ark.

The scaled-down ark toured the Netherlands, hosting more than 400,000 visitors from 2007 to 2009. It did not take long before Huibers embarked on his next project – the construction of a full-sized replica.

Huibers began work on his second ark in 2008. With a volume ten times that of the first, the ship is to house two theatres, a cinema, a restaurant and a deck with live animals. On another deck, a small train will take visitors literally through the Bible story.

To enable him to focus on this project, Huibers sold his first ark last December to Aad Peters, a fellow Christian.

Peters, a puppeteer and theatre-maker, wants to use the ship to reacquaint the Dutch public with stories in the Bible from which he believes they have largely become estranged. "For Red Riding Hood you can go to a theme park, but where can you go to see Adam and Eve?" he said in a newspaper interview.

The new owner wants to change the ship's purpose from evangelism to "biblical entertainment." He said, "the stories have to speak for themselves. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit."

Peters said he believes that for many years, it was not done in the Netherlands to speak about the Bible, in contrast to other parts of the world where it is completely normal to talk about religion. "The advantage of the rise of Islam in the Netherlands is that we are allowed to talk about Christianity again," he said.

As for Huibers, does he expect another deluge? "The dream fills people with fear when I tell about the tsunami. But that is not my message," Huibers said in 2006, in

an interview with a Dutch Christian magazine while he was working on his first ark. "God has promised that he will never again destroy with water. I believe that. There will therefore not be a flood as direct punishment from God," he said.

What then does Huibers expect? "I only look forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Maybe it will take another 50 or 100 years, nobody knows that, but we are very close. That all is not well with our society seems obvious to me. But I am not one for whipping up fears. My message is: 'Choose Jesus now, while it's still possible.'"

Huibers said his second ark will soon be ready. The ship was recently made seaworthy and, by May 2011, the first visitors are expected to come onboard.

The ark will remain in Dordrecht until the middle of 2012, when Huibers then plans to take his ship around the world, beginning with London in time for the Olympic Games.