**Prayer and Praise Service**

**August 21, 2024**

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Each Sunday we are journeying *To The Mountain with God* and each Wednesday we are standing in the valley between the Sunday summits to both reflect on what we experienced on last Sunday and to anticipate what we will encounter this Sunday.

On Sunday we went to the mountains of Ararat where Noah’s ark landed. There is so much in the flood narrative from Genesis 6-9 that increases faith and helps us know the intentionality of the Bible. I want us to see three things tonight to highlight the Bible’s intentionality: God’s control of the flood, the symbolism of the birds, and some further information about God’s relationship with the rainbow.

**God’s control of the flood.** Look at **Genesis 8:2 READ.**

When the flood began in 7:11, God brought the waters from under the earth and above the earth. Now the flood is ending, and you will notice passive verbs used in 8:2. A passive verb means something or someone else is doing the action. Often that something or someone is not mentioned. Here we read that “the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens *had been closed.*” The writer of this story, traditionally taken to be Moses, includes the passive language (“had been closed”) so that we can be assured that the flood was not some freak of nature but rather a purposeful act of God. Someone shut off all the water. That Someone was God.

We are discouraged from using passive language in writing. (But I just used the passive in that sentence.). Active language is clearer because you do not have to guess the subject of the action. Active language also moves with more “punch.” But Moses chose to use passive language likely because he wanted to show God working behind the scenes. Remember the end the flood occurred during what appears to have been an almost year-long period of divine silence for Noah. God is working, but He is doing it quietly behind the scenes.

We can rest assured that, even when we think God is not working, He is. As we shared on Sunday, in the periods of silence we should keep doing what God last told us to do until He tells us the next thing to do.

Throughout the flood account God is very much in control. In 6:17 God tells Noah, “I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.” But God also promises Noah, his family, and the animals’ survival telling Noah in 6:18, “I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark - you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.” And that is exactly what God does in chapter 9. Trust and obey God – life is always best that way.

**The Symbolism of the Birds**

The raven and the dove serve more than a physical purpose in the narrative. They also serve a symbolic purpose.

Ravens were considered unclean birds since they feed on dead flesh. It was unfit for human consumption and unworthy for sacrifice in worship. According to rabbinic tradition, the raven was released first because it was expendable since it was neither good for food nor worship. “Its departure from the ark signified that the impurities of the past have been removed and the creation of the new world had a fresh start.” “The dove conveys for the ark’s inhabitants the opposite meaning of the raven.” Doves were commonly found in the sacrificial legislation for rights purification and were appropriate for the burnt offering and sin offering among the poor.[[1]](#endnote-1) Even today a raven is associated with villains and death, but a dove is associated with peace.

**God’s relationship with the rainbow:**

Both the prophet Ezekiel in the OT and the Apostle John in the NT got a glimpse of the throne room of God. They both saw four living creatures around the throne with the faces of a man, lion, ox/calf, and eagle. These “faces” correspond to the four types of living creatures with whom God made his universal, unilateral, unconditional covenant in Genesis 9.

But both Ezekiel and John also saw a rainbow in the throne room.

**Ezekiel 1:24-28**  24 . . . [When the creatures] stood still, they lowered their wings. 25 Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. 26 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Ezekiel describes the radiant glory of the Lord as a rainbow.

In Revelation 4, John has his encounter:

**Revelation 4:2-3**  At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

John described a rainbow encircling the throne.

Since God connects the sign of a rainbow with the fact that He keeps His promises, it is not a far leap to say that the promises of God surround His throne and form the foundation of His throne. That God keep His promises near indicates to us that His promises are a big deal to Him. Therefore, we can count on God to always keep His promises.

**Guided Prayer as we look back to the “The Mountains of Ararat”**

As we look back at the mountains of Ararat and remember the God of the Promise, let’s take a moment to consider some promises of God and pray those back to God. We will show a promise of God on the screen. Read that biblical promise and then pray it back to God. I will demonstrate with the first one:

**PSALM 103:17**

From everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children.

**NAHUM 1:7**

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.

**MATTHEW 6:31‑33**

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

**ROMANS 8:32**

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

**1 PETER 5:7**

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

**Looking to Mount Moriah**

We now turn from the mountains of Ararat and look to Mount Moriah.

This Sunday, Pastor Stewart will take us to the important biblical summit in Genesis 22 where God tested Abraham by calling for him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

You are familiar with the irritating sound associated with a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. Whether on radio or television, the annoying alarm sounds and then the voice comes on letting you know “this is only a test”.

Thankfully, from the outset of Genesis 22, Moses sounds the alarm in his writing and says, “This is only a test.” Genesis 22:1 says, “Some time later God tested Abraham.” If we did not have this first sentence, we would be horrified by what God asks of Abraham. However, while we still can’t believe God is asking this, we know it is “just a test,” so we then watch how Abraham will respond and how God will handle such an unusual request.

Abraham responds with total faith. It is truly a powerful story. Tonight, let’s read the story and “watch” it unfold before our eyes. Follow along with me on the sheet I’ve given you so we will all have the same translation. As we read, I want you to notice the deliberate, painstaking action of the story. I also want you to notice the faith of Abraham in God and the action of God behind the scenes. **READ.**

As you prepare for Sunday this week, reflect more upon this event from Mount Moriah and be ready to hear about the cost of following God.

1. NAC, 387-388. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)