

## Are you a Raven or a Dove?

This week's reading is from *Parashat Noach (Bereshit / Genesis 6:9-11:32)*, we are told of the wickedness of mankind on the face of the earth (וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל-יֶצֶר מַחְשְׁבַת לְבוֹ רָק רָע כָּל-הַיּוֹם: ו וַיִּנְחֵם) (וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֵל-לְבוֹ), and how the Lord instructs Noah to construct an Ark to save the living animals and his family from the coming destruction. The Targum Onkelos (*Bereshit / Genesis 6:10*) states that it grieved the Word (בְּמִימְרֵיהֶּ) of the Lord God that He had made man and so the Lord was bringing a great flood to destroy all life having breath from the face of the earth. The reason for this great destruction was because the heart of man was consistently focused upon evil (*Bereshit / Genesis 6:9*). Noah builds an ark and takes with him his family, two of every unclean animal, and seven pairs of every clean animal into the ark. In *Bereshit / Genesis 9:11* the Lord says וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם “*I establish my covenant with you,*” declaring that He will establish His covenant again with man. Looking through the rabbinic commentary, Sforno has a few comments concerning the flood and Noah's task of building the Ark.

### *Sforno on Genesis 6:17*

*G'd is saying, that Noah's task is to build the ark, whereas He, when the time expires, will bring on the deluge He had threatened as soon as the ark would be completed. The word מבול is a variant of מפלה, referring to something lost as in Deut. 14:21 כל נבלה, a carcass being a life lost. The definitive article ה in המבול refers to the destruction, the nature of which had not previously been spelled out. [my paraphrasing. Ed.] ואני הנני מביא את המבול אתה תשלים התיבה ואני תיכף אביא את המבול והוא לשון מפלה והפסד כענין כל נבלה. אמר אני אביא את המפלה וההפסד שאמרתי באמרי והנני משחיתם את הארץ:*

Sforno says that the word מבול is a variant on the verb מפלה which means “*to discriminate against; separate.*” The concept of discriminating or separating follows from last week's Torah portion, on the beginning of

God's creative work, separating the righteous from the unrighteous. Here the Lord is beginning a separation process due to the wickedness of man on the face of the earth (וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וְכָל-יֵצֵר מַחְשָׁבֹת) (לבּו רַק רַע כָּל-הַיּוֹם: וַיִּנְחָם יְהוָה כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱל-לִבּו) the Lord is making a distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous where the righteous obey God (building of the Ark) and are saved, the unrighteous do not obey God and they die. Sferno is looking at the Hebrew text and attempting to make connections between the various Scriptures in the Torah, to understand what is taking place here in the deluge that God is bringing upon this world. Notice how Sferno makes the connection of the flood to the carcass, the loss of life, and separating the righteous.

We are told in the narrative that Noah entered the ark and the floods come, and after the allotted time, the Lord caused the waters to recede. The Ark settled on the mountains of Ararat and Noah released a raven first and then a dove. What is the significance of Noah releasing both a raven and a dove?

In *Bereshit / Genesis 8*, the Torah states, א וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל- הַחַיָּה וְאֶת-כָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתִּיבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכּוּ הַמַּיִם: *8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. (NASB)* The MT states that the Lord “*remembered, recalled, or called to mind*” (וַיִּזְכֹּר) what was happening on the earth. The text suggests that the Lord forgot then remembered Noah His servant, and the animals (living creatures) with him on the Ark. The question is, when we read in the Scriptures that the Lord remembered, in the act of “*remembering,*” does the Lord ever forget? Radak a medieval rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian has the following to say concerning the Lord remembering Noah.

**ספר בראשית פרק ח Bereshit / Genesis 8:1-9**

א ויִזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נֹחַ וְאֶת כָּל-הַחַיָּה כָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וְיַעֲבֹר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁׁכוּ כּוֹ הַמַּיִם: ב וַיִּסְכְּרוּ מַעְיְנֹת תְּהוֹם וְאַרְבַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּכְלָא הַגָּשֶׁם מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם: ג וַיֵּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַלֹּךְ וְשׁוֹב וַיִּחְסְרוּ הַמַּיִם מִקְצֵה חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֵת יוֹם: ד וּבַיּוֹם הַתֵּבָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בִּשְׁבַע־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ עַל הַרִי אָרָרַט: ה וְהַמַּיִם הָיוּ הַלֹּךְ וְחָסוּר עַד הַחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בָּעֲשִׂירִי בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ נִרְאוּ רְאשֵׁי הַהָרִים: ו וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח נֹחַ אֶת-חַלּוֹן הַתֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: ז וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הָעֹרֵב וַיֵּצֵא יְצוּא וְשׁוֹב עַד-יְבֹשֶׁת הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ: ח וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הַיּוֹנָה מֵאִתּוֹ לִרְאוֹת הַקְּלוֹ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: ט וְלֹא-מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחַ לְכַף-רַגְלָהּ וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתֵּבָה כִּי-מַיִם עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחֶהָ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתֵּבָה:

*8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. 8:2 Also the fountains of the deep and the flood-gates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky was restrained; 8:3 and the water receded steadily from the earth, and at the end of one hundred and fifty days the water decreased. 8:4 In the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. 8:5 The water decreased steadily until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible. 8:6 Then it came about at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made; 8:7 and he sent out a raven, and it flew here and there until the water was dried up from the earth. 8:8 Then he sent out a dove from him, to see if the water was abated from the face of the land; 8:9 but the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the ark, for the water was on the surface of all the earth. Then he put out his hand and took her, and brought her into the ark to himself. (NASB)*

**Radak on Genesis 8:1**

ויזכר, *there is no “remembering” as far as G’d is concerned, seeing that He could not have “forgotten” something. When the Torah, nonetheless, uses such terms as “He remembered” as applying to G’d, this is a figure of speech enabling the reader to employ his imagination and*

*to realize that such wording introduces an activity by G'd now which had been latent for a while previously. We have numerous examples of such a term being used when a period of apparent inactivity by G'd had come to an end. Compare Leviticus 24:45 וזכרתי את בריתי, where the subject is that after a period of retribution, events occur which make it appear as if G'd had remembered His covenant only at that time. There are numerous other examples of this type. Here, it describes the fact that G'd concerned himself with the great discomfort experienced by all the people and creatures in the ark after such a long period of being cooped up. ויזכור, אין שכחה ואין זכרון לפניו יתב"ר, כי לשון זכרון הוא אחר השכחה, אלא דברה תורה בלשון בני אדם להבין השומעים, וכן "וזכרתי להם ברית ראשונים" (ויקרא כ"ו) "וזכרתי את ברית יעקב (שם) והדומים להם. וראה כי די להם סבול הצער הגדול בתבה, וראה שלא יאריך להם עוד תגבורת המים אלא יחסרו מכאן ואילך כמו שגברו.*

The concept of God “*remembering*” presupposes that He had forgotten, however, we know the Lord does not forget, where Radak states the phrase “*And God remembered*” וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים is a figure of speech to describe the Lord’s concern for His servant Noah, his family, and the animals. In the biblical text we are told the Lord caused the waters to recede and the Ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. It is at this point Noah decides to send out birds to determine whether the land is safe to travel. He starts by sending out a raven. Why did Noah send out a raven first?

The reason may be that he thought the raven (הָעֵרָב), a flesh eating bird, would find the remains of dead animals to feed upon. So, if the raven had returned with the remains in his beak, Noah would know that the waters had receded. The raven returned however without anything in its beak, and so Noah did not learn anything about the state of the earth. In *Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 33, Part 5*, the rabbis say that the raven was chosen as an experiment by Noah in a different light, that the blackness of the bird is a reference to *Tehillim / Psalms 105:28* where the psalmist writes שָׁלַח הַשֶּׁשׁוּבַי וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ, “*he sent darkness and it became dark.*” and say this is a figure of speech, meaning that if one pins one’s hopes

on something black, one is likely to receive darkness in return (*i.e. not achieve one's objective*). So the idea here is that darkness (sin) produces more darkness (sin), and thus Noah did not learn anything about the state of the earth. Remember last week in *Midrash Rabbah Bereishit, Parashat 2, Part 5*, the rabbis describe the actions of the wicked as “empty,” whereas the actions of the righteous are called “let there be light.” The raven being black represents unrighteousness, and his returning empty, the point may be that sin (darkness) doesn't help one have understanding, there is only emptiness.

Noah seeing that the raven had failed, waited seven days and then sent out the dove. The dove (הַיּוֹנָה) which is known for its ability to navigate. When used as a carrier, the idea is the dove knows it has been dispatched for a purpose, and that it would return with some information. We don't know if this knowledge was known in Noah's time of the carrier pigeon, but there is a context here between the dove being white, and the raven being dark, the separation of “seven days” prior to the sending out of each, that draws us back to the idea of righteousness (white) and unrighteousness (dark), clean and unclean, etc. Noah, in sending out the dove, as a symbol of righteousness, would have possibly been convinced that the bird would return to the ark even if there were places on earth where it could make its nest. We read in *Bereshit / Genesis 8:11*,

***Bereshit / Genesis 8:11***

*8:11 The dove came to him toward evening, and behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth. (NASB)* וַתָּבֵא

אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לַעֲרֹב וְהָיָה עַל-הַיַּיִט טֶרֶף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי-קָלַו הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:

The idea here is that the raven and the dove are symbols of the unrighteous and the righteous, respectively. Notice how in the biblical text, we are not told that the raven was received back into the Ark as the dove returns back into the Ark. If the parallel may be drawn to these two types, where the Ark is a place of refuge, salvation, and holiness for God's people in the midst of the flood, note the importance of not bringing the unrighteous thing back into one's abode. In addition, the unrighteous person is not interested in such things as salvation, holiness, righteousness, and justice.

On the other hand, the dove that returns which represents righteousness, its returning with a freshly plucked olive leaf illustrating for us the “*faithfulness*” on behalf of the righteous, returning to a place of holiness and bringing gifts. So the concept here in the Torah narrative is of the righteous who are faithful and are a part of the covenant which is characterized as one who turns from sin and returns to God’s ways.

In the Aramaic Targum on *Tehillim / Psalms 78:38*, the rabbis translate Asaph’s words saying, לז מטול דלבהון לא מהימן מכוון עימיה ולא הימינו, *78:37 Because their heart was not faithful to him, and they did not believe in his covenant. (EMC)* There appears to be a distinction being made between being faithful and believing in the covenant of God. What is the difference between being faithful to God and believing in the covenant of God? Being faithful and believing in the covenant is related to being obedient to the covenant agreement that has been made between those who have made a covenant with one another. According to the Scriptures, the faithfulness of God is true and He has shown us His faithfulness over and over again. The author of *Hebrews 6:18* states that the Lord God does not lie, nor does He break a promise that He says He will fulfill. Every covenant He made is kept. In the Scriptures we read testimony after testimony of God’s faithfulness and we know this to be true in each life that has been changed in the Messiah Yeshua. A statistical analysis of the Tanach and the Apostolic Writings reveals that the accounts of covenants between the Lord God and His people occur approximately 277 times in the Scriptures. *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:9* states ט וַיִּדְעֶתָ כִּי-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים הָאֵל הַנֶּאֱמָן שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֶסֶד לְאַהֲבָיו וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתָו [מִצְוֹ-תֵיךָ] תִּיּוּן “*Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.*” (NASB) Asaph however mentions that the people were not faithful to God and neither were they faithful to His covenant. Faithfulness to the Lord is connected to the one who loves the Lord, loves His ways, and walks and serves Him according to His Word, meaning that the person who is faithful is obedient to the commands because of His love for the Lord. The one who does not love the Lord is not interested in obeying the commands. There are those however who state that they love the Lord but refuse to be obedient to the commands saying that grace covers all. This is a form of “*sloppy grace.*”

We should not be sloppy in our service to the Lord, because that does not bear the testimony of a faithful people.

Asaph states that the people were unrighteous and rebelled (MT), and provoked (Targum, LXX) the Lord and did not keep His testimonies (נו: וַיִּנְסוּ וַיִּמְרוּ אֶת-אֱלֹהִים עֲלִיוֹן וַעֲדוֹתָיו לֹא שָׁמְרוּ:). How important is keeping the testimonies of God? What does it mean to keep the testimonies? When thinking on the meaning of a testimony, we are reminded of the Torah mandate that the testimony of one witness is insufficient, it must be established by two or three witnesses (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 19:15*). In *Devarim / Deuteronomy 19*, the testimony is a verbal confession of what happened. In the Psalm, Asaph says they did not “keep” (שָׁמְרוּ) His testimonies (וַעֲדוֹתָיו). What is a testimony that is kept?

The testimonies appears to be a reference to the miracles of God that He had performed, and the promises that He had kept. In the keeping of the testimonies, this appears to be a reference to one who bears witness in his body what the Lord has done, but living for Him, the most important being the moral imperatives found in the Torah (see *Romans 12*). In addition, the testimonies that bear witness to what the Lord has done are also found in the traditions, such as Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. The testimony is a visible reminder of God’s supremacy and power to deliver; the Lord has given His testimony in the Scriptures, thus we find the importance of studying God’s word and applying His word to our lives. Keeping the testimony is the Proclamation of God as Lord and Savior. In *Isaiah 43:8-13*, the prophet depicts the nations as forming a legal assembly to proclaim the superiority and saving work of their gods. However, their case proves groundless since their gods are blind (eyes that do not see) and deaf (ears that do not hear). The idol gods of the nations were made of common materials and their makers were men. The Lord God whom we serve was not made by human hands, He is the creator of all things. Thus, the message of the nations is nothing but a lie (*Isaiah 43:10-12, 44:9-20*). The nations have no case since their gods are unable to support their claims (*Isaiah 44:11*). Israel takes on the testimonies of God as a witness (*Isaiah 43:10-12, 44:8*) to proclaim His power as Lord of all, and that apart from him there is no salvation (*Isaiah 43:11*). The point and importance of the testimonies is found not only within the traditions, but also in the way one lives his or her life before God. This is the meaning

of the phrase *“the testimony of Yeshua”* that is mentioned four times in the book of Revelation.

In *Revelation 1:2*, John refers back to the first verse, which says that God gave Yeshua the Messiah this special message; and the Messiah in turn sent it to John by an angel. In other words, the book of Revelation is *“the testimony of Yeshua.”* *Revelation 12:17* states that the true Ekklesia has this testimony and keeps the commandments of God. Notice the parallel here to Asaph’s words, the unrighteous generation rebels and provokes the Lord by not keeping His commands, His testimonies, whereas, the righteous have faith and keep His commands. Note also this is the parallel we are finding in the raven and dove narrative following Noah’s flood. This is the meaning of what Yeshua said in *John 15:14*, *“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”* (NASB) The commandments of God and Messiah’s instructions are one and the same. In *Revelation 19:10*, the angel quickly restrains John from worshiping him. Instead, the angel said, *“Worship God! For the testimony of Yeshua is the spirit of prophecy.”* As we have studied previously, *“Prophecy”* can either refer to foretelling the future or it can be a reference to inspired preaching. Note how the phrase the *“spirit of prophecy”* in the Aramaic Targum and the rabbinic literature is always within the context of studying Torah, living righteously, and the presence of God resting upon His people. This statement is rich with rabbinic and Torah context that takes us right back to the Asaph’s words, the people rebelled and provoked God and did not keep his testimonies, whereas the righteous people do not provoke God and live in the testimonies. Note how the raven, a symbol of unrighteousness, returned empty handed because the deeds of the unrighteous are empty, whereas, the dove returned with a fresh plucked olive branch. Based upon the Tanach, we know that olive oil also represents the Holy Spirit. Therefore from this narrative, we can also see the connection to the Lord who gives His Spirit to His people to empower them in overcoming sin in their lives. Note also the dove that descended upon Yeshua after having performed a mikvah (baptism) before John in the Jordan river.

This is what John meant in *1 John 5:11* *And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.* (NASB) Eternal life in the Messiah is characterized by righteousness, truth, justice, holiness, and being led by the Spirit of God. The testimonies of God are



undeniably a reference to the Torah, and the importance of God's people to observe the Torah commands, precepts, statutes, and the traditions that cause us to remember the promises and the power of God. The Lord God has historically, time and again, revealed himself to Israel and redeemed them from the oppression of the enemy. God's revelation of himself to Moshe, the giving of the Torah, the abiding presence in the tabernacle, and His redemption of Israel functions as a witness, and our living these things today, not only in the moral imperatives found in the Torah, but also in the traditions, we are proclaiming the evidence of God's power to redeem, deliver, and save lives. The testimony is equivalent to a proclamation of truth of our Father in heaven and of Yeshua the Messiah. Our lives today present historical evidence attesting to God's power as creator and sustainer, redeemer, deliverer, and savior. The most important point is that obedience to the command is a function of the Lord working in our lives to empower us to overcome sin. This is what I believe is meant by the Apostle Paul's words in *Philippians 3:9-17*.

### ***Philippians 3:9-17***

*3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 3:11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 3:12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 3:13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 3:16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk*

*according to the pattern you have in us. (NASB)*

Notice how Paul says that he looks for the righteousness of the Messiah through faith as opposed to the righteousness that is of his own making derived from the Law, so that he may know Him (Yeshua) and the power of His resurrection and of the fellowship of His sufferings. Notice how Paul is describing these things, the power of the resurrection in our life comes by faith. What is the power of the resurrection in our lives? Is it not to overcome sin? The power of Lord God gives us (the power of the resurrection) is for overcoming sin in our lives. He goes on to say that we are to press onward and to keep living by the same standard to which we have attained. The standard of living is according to God's Torah, in righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth. The point that Paul is making is not that the Torah (Law) is bad, but rather a question on the motivation or attitude for obeying God's word. Notice how Paul also says "*and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you*" (3:15). The thoughts and the intents of the heart will be revealed, whether they are motivated for self righteousness, or doing what each man thinks is right in his own eyes (sloppy grace), or for the glory of God. This week's Torah portion speaks to us how destruction was brought upon this earth because of sin. The Lord however has the power to deliver His people in the midst of even the greatest dangers. Within the creative process, the Lord is showing us how He separates the righteous from the unrighteous. Notice how even in the destructive process, the Lord is also separating the righteous from the unrighteous. This is illustrated not only in the destruction of the flood account, but also in the events following with the dove (righteousness) and the raven (unrighteousness). The question for you today though is, "*Are you a raven or a dove?*"

