

Chapter Two

Queuing Again!

Adam and Eve disobeyed God. They were thrown out of the Garden of Eden and sent away from God's presence. Since then their family has grown large, and spread out over the earth. But just like Adam and Eve, people have turned their back on God and done whatever they wanted to do. God is not pleased.

Now, in a tree, a dove and raven are talking:

'We're in a queue again,' grumbled the big black bird, gazing round. A long line of animals, birds and creepy, slithery, sliding things snaked away into the distance behind them. 'Always queuing for something.'

'Oh, come on, we've only had to do it once before, and you certainly weren't around at that time. That was a long time ago. Besides,' added the white dove, 'don't you realise this is going to save your big black life.'

'Yea, yea, yea,' said the raven with a shrug of his shoulders. 'Right as usual.' He looked at the party of doves. 'Rather a lot of you, aren't there?' He did a quick beak count. 'Humph - seven families. How come we've only been allowed two?'

'Because we're called clean birds if you must know,' replied the dove. 'And before you get all uppity about that, it just means that we can be sacrificed as offerings, so be thankful that you're in the unclean section.'

'I am thankful, believe me, I'm thankful.' The raven changed the subject. 'Are we going to go on that thing?'

"That thing" looked like a very large black barge, about the size of a tanker, and roughly five storeys high. It had no windows, except a skylight at the top and only one door high up, in the side. It was parked in the middle of a field.

'It's a boat,' replied the dove stuffily.

'Strange place to put a boat if you ask me,' grunted the raven.

'Nobody did. God told Noah to build it there. And he told him exactly how to build it and how big to make it, and what wood to use and how to finish it. Noah's the older man you can see working down there.'

In the field below them Noah and his three sons were doing last minute work on the ark. A hundred and twenty years ago God had talked to Noah. He was heart broken over the state of the world. People didn't have one single good thought in their heads. They grabbed anything they wanted. They murdered each other. They were just evil. They'd ruined a beautiful world.

God was so upset that he said he wished he had never made the human race. He was going to have to wipe out all of mankind in a great flood, with the exception of Noah and his family.

God told Noah that he would rescue him. He also wanted pairs of each kind of animal and bird and reptile saving from this flood, so that when it was all over, they could restock the new world. He told Noah to start building a great boat, large enough for his family and all these animals.

‘Done well, hasn’t he?’ said the dove to the raven. ‘He’s built the boat just the way God told him. Mind you, he has really had some stick over the years. My family home has been in his dovecote, so we’ve seen it all.’

After all, if you build a boat four hundred and fifty feet long right next to your house, miles way from the nearest water, you are going to get some attention.

‘This place has been on the tourists’ sightseeing list for over a century,’ continued the dove. ‘We can see them coming across the hills for miles. Summer’s the most popular time, but there’s always someone here every week in the year. You should see the mess they leave behind. It’s good for us; we get a good living from the crumbs.’

‘No wonder you’re so fat,’ snorted the raven. ‘I’ve heard that the people think that Noah is mad.’

‘Oh, they’ve laughed and sneered. But they’ve had to listen to what Noah has had to say whilst they have been jeering at his boat. He’s told them they should stop all the foul things they’re doing, and live the way God says they should. Noah’s warned them that they will lose their lives unless they change. These visitors have gone home and have spread the news far and wide as they tell their friends and neighbours about it: “You should see his boat!” they laugh. “He’s built it in his back yard! And do you know what old Noah saying? We’re all to die in a flood if we don’t change our ways!” But none of them has changed. They simply don’t believe their Creator.’ The dove shook her head sadly at the stupidity of mankind.

‘I hear it all started with Adam and Eve. And then their children got in on the act. Didn’t one kill another?’ said the raven.

‘That’s what I heard,’ replied the dove. ‘Their first son Cain murdered his brother Abel.’

‘Why?’

‘Abel was a good man and I’m afraid to say that Cain wasn’t. It came to a head when both the brothers brought a special offering to God. Abel offered a lamb from his flock and God was pleased with it. Cain just brought of some of his vegetables, it wasn’t what God asked for and God was not pleased. Cain flared up and flew into a foul temper and God had to warn him that he was heading for serious trouble. It seems that he didn’t take any notice. He went away and stewed till he got so angry about Abel’s goodness compared to his own evil life that he murdered him when he got him alone in a field.’

‘Humph,’ grunted the raven. ‘What happened to Cain?’

‘God asked him where his brother was...’

‘Why do that?’ interrupted the raven ‘He must have known where he was. God knows everything, doesn’t he?’

‘Yes, of course,’ replied the dove, getting a little irritated. ‘God does talk to men and women on their level, you know. Anyway Cain told God that he didn’t know where his brother was. Actually it’s hard to believe but he said, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”’

‘If I was God, I would have wiped him out on the spot,’ announced the raven.

‘Good thing you’re not then. God was kind. He banished him and wouldn’t allow anyone to look for him and kill him in revenge,’ replied the dove. ‘But Abel was the first person to believe, trust and obey God. There were others after him over the centuries and now there’s Noah and there’ll be more when Noah gets us through this flood. Now let’s have a bit of peace, you old grump bag.’ And with that, the dove tucked her beak under her wing and went to sleep.

Finally the day came when God told Noah it was time to move his family onto the boat.

The last minute preparations on the ark were almost finished. The final coat of pitch had been slapped onto the sides. Food for the animals had been collected and laid out in the right stalls and cages on all the three decks inside the boat. All that remained was to load up the animals.

'Hey - hey - hey - we're moving!' squawked the raven, waking the dove. 'It must be boarding time. I don't think I really fancy this. Hope it won't be for too long. What if Noah hasn't got enough food? What happens if the lions get hungry? Or the vultures get irritable? Suppose I get seasick? It doesn't bear thinking about.'

'So don't,' replied the dove, firmly. 'Let's go.'

Family by family, the birds and animals flew or filed up the ramp and were led to their quarters by Noah and his sons. Noah's wife and his sons' wives came aboard with the last of their belongings and stores. Then God closed the door and sealed it. Noah and his family were safe and secure.

For at the same moment the rain began to fall, and poured down without stopping for forty days and nights. Torrents of gushing water spurted out from deep under the ground. Soon the ark was afloat. What had been dry land was buried under a sea that reached high over the top of the mountains.

Day after day the ark drifted on this new ocean. Noah and his family remained locked inside, unable to see what was happening outside, till one day, suddenly they felt the boat jolt and shudder, and then settle still. The ark had grounded on something solid. Noah knew the waters were going down.

The ark had come to rest in the mountains of Ararat. As the water level dropped, the tallest mountain peaks appeared.

After waiting forty days, Noah fetched the raven from its cage. Opening the skylight, he sent him out to look round for him. The raven loved his freedom; he didn't bother coming back. Instead our bird soared through the clouds and floated along the air currents till the water went down and he could find a place to land.

So Noah took the dove and sent her out to scout for him. But the water still covered the fields so she couldn't find a place to perch. She flew back and circled the ark, cooing loudly, till Noah heard her. He opened the window and caught her and brought her back into the warmth and safety of the ark.

Noah waited another week and then sent the dove out again. In the evening she brought back a present for him: a small twig from an olive tree.

Its soft green leaves were just unfurling. The water level had dropped below the tops of the trees, and they were sprouting again.

A week later Noah sent the dove out again. This time she stayed out!

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The raven and the dove were circling high over the ark as they did every morning, hoping that this would be the day that Noah and his family would leave the ark.

‘Do you think they are going to stay in there for ever?’ muttered the raven. ‘You left the place a week ago.’

At that moment Noah lifted back the hatch of the ark. Standing up as high as he could and leaning out as far as he could, peered down the mountain into the valley. He could see the water was gone. But then he climbed back inside the ark and closed the hatch.

‘Well, now you see him - now you don’t,’ said the raven dryly. ‘Why isn’t he coming out?’

‘Waiting for God to give the word, I expect,’ replied the dove. ‘Anyway, the soil is still waterlogged. See you tomorrow, raven.’ And the dove flew back down to the valley.

‘Yep,’ said the raven to himself. ‘Same time, same place.’

Every day the two birds wheeled overhead, waiting. But nearly two months passed before God told Noah that it was time to leave the ark. Now the soil was dry and the grass was growing. The animals could be released to restock the world.

Over a year ago God had sealed up the door in the side of the ark. Now Noah was opening it up.

‘Look! Look!’ cried the dove.

‘At last they’re coming!’ shrieked the raven, doing a double somersault in the air and regretting it quickly, as it made him feel rather dizzy.

They watched as Noah and his sons hauled the large ramp into place.

‘It looks like they are coming out of a tomb,’ said the dove thoughtfully, as humans, animals, birds and reptiles streamed down the ramp, out of the darkness of the ark into the sunlight of the new day and into a new world.

Noah and his family sang as they made their way down the mountain. The birds of the air sang. The animals ran round in joyful circles, celebrating their freedom. Grateful Noah built an altar and gave offerings to God.

God didn’t plan to destroy the earth again. Whatever people did, he was going to let the seasons come and go, and work on earth continue, till he finished with the world as it is. Noah’s children were to marry like Adam and Eve before them, and have families of their own. Their children were to spread out over the earth, and look after it.

God had one more thing to say to Noah and his family before they started their new lives. He made a covenant, an agreement with Noah, his family and with every living creature – the birds, all the cattle, every wild beast, in fact everything that came out of the ark. God promised that he would never flood the earth again. Then he gave a sign of his promise:

Clouds as black as ink rolled up from the horizon and the sky darkened. Rain began to fall.

‘It looks just as if the flood is coming again!’ gasped the raven.

Then the sun burst through, shining through the black clouds. Suddenly, a brilliant multi-coloured bow spread over the sky, from one side to the other.

All living things stopped in their tracks and stared at its sparkling, dazzling beauty.

'That's God's sign! That's God's rainbow!' shouted the dove in delight.

'When he sees it, he will remember the promise he made to us all.'

'It's impressive,' gulped the raven, quite awe struck.

'It's the sign of peace,' cooed the dove.

The raven put its head to one side: 'Race you to the end of it.'

As both birds soared into the air, the animals spread out over the grass and through the trees. With the warmth of the afternoon sun on their backs, Noah and his family started to search for a place to build their home.

Life had begun again.

