

THE EAGLE GOD'S SERMON IN THE SKY
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"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him" (Deut. 32:11-12).

The eagle is the most majestic of all birds mentioned in the Scriptures, and according to the Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, there are still twelve different kinds found in Israel. There is also the Egyptian vulture, which is one of the most repulsive creatures in existence. G. S. Cansdale says, "Palestine is rich in these birds [the eagles]. There are golden; spotted; lesser spotted; Bonelli's booted; imperial; tawny; Verraux's; short toed; white tailed; black bearded and Griffon. . . . Three species breed in tall trees, or more often, on cliffs. The others are passing migrants or winter visitors. They feed mostly on live prey, which ranges from young deer to reptiles and insects." There are numerous references in the Bible to these wonderful birds that were known for their strength, speed, beauty, and care for their young. It was generally believed among the ancient Hebrews that the parent birds deliberately broke up their nests and, carrying their young, dropped them, only to catch them again on their broad wings. This method taught the eaglets how to fly. Some scholars have said there is no evidence this idea was based on fact.

Dr. W. M. Thompson, who was one of the greatest authorities on Palestine, wrote, "The notion however, appears to have been prevalent among the ancients that the eagle did actually take up her timid young, and carry them forth to embolden them, and teach them how to use their own pinions. To this idea, Moses seems to refer in Exodus 19:4: 'Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.' The fact is not impossible; the eagle is strong enough to do it, but I am not aware that such a thing has ever been witnessed. I myself, however, have seen the old eagle fly round and round the nest, and back and forth past it, while the young ones fluttered and shivered on the edge, as if eager, but afraid to launch forth from the giddy precipice. And no wonder, for the nest is 'on high', and a fall from thence would end their flight forever.

"If Moses were not the author of Job, they seem both to have been familiar with this bird and its habits. One illusion is very

40

striking: 'Her eyes behold afar off (Job 39:29). The power of vision in the eagle is amazing; almost incredible. No sooner does a kid fall in the wilderness among the thick bushes, than some of these keen-sighted hunters after prey notice it from their pathway in mid-heaven, and, circling round and round, pounce down upon, and bear it away to their nest. This appears to be done purely by sight" (quoted from The hind and the Book, W. M. Thompson, p. 151, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons. London, England, 1910). Certain Bible verses imply that what Dr. Thompson admitted could be true was accepted as fact by Hebrew writers.

God's Undeserved Compassion.. . Amazing (Exodus 19:4)

"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself."

The mountain appeared to be consumed by fire; the smoke was stifling. When the earth trembled and an earthquake seemed to be imminent, the watching tribes of Israel were terrified. They stared at their leader Moses who, unconcerned, was climbing into the mountain to meet Jehovah. Perfect love had cast out any fear which might have been in his soul. He was an ambassador, an intercessor, an

THE EAGLE GOD'S SERMON IN THE SKY

official interpreter between God and men. Majestic and serene, he stood before the Lord and heard, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Ex. 19:5). Moses was overwhelmed with pride and humility. It was unbelievable that God had permitted this interview, for no man could be worthy of such favor. He remembered what the Lord had said: "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." He considered the new promise, "If ye will obey my voice and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." The Almighty had carried them; now He was conversing with them, but greatest of all, Jehovah was making a covenant concerning their future. God's kindness would continue to support them; they were of incalculable worth. How could the Lord be so wonderful?

When the patriarch remembered what had been done for Israel, he was intensely grateful. The people had been slaves for four centuries and were completely impoverished. None of the men had received military training, and few, if any, possessed weapons. How could it be possible to wage war against hostile people and win?

41

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THE EAGLE GOD'S SERMON IN THE SKY

41

The tribes were an unorganized multitude with no knowledge of how to survive in a wilderness. They had only the food brought from Egypt, and water was exceptionally scarce. Their problems were immense and complaints innumerable. The entire project of escaping to a better land seemed to be ridiculous.

Moses considered all that had happened and knew God had borne the people on eagles' wings and had provided everything necessary for survival. Eternal strength had been made perfect in human weakness. As the majestic bird of the heavens was said to carry its young on powerful, supporting wings, so the Almighty had supported His dependent children. The tribes were weak and unworthy, but they belonged to God as the eaglets did to their parents. Neither could fail their trusting offspring.

God's Unceasing Concern. . . Awesome (Deut. 32:11)

Moses was about to deliver his final message to Israel. He had considered the habits of the eagles. The words with which this study commenced were written on his heart. He remembered Jacob and said, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him" (Deut. 32:10-12). Thus Moses referred to the ancestor from whom the tribes of Israel descended. The personal history of the revered patriarch had been reproduced in the tribes. Throughout their journeys in the wilderness they were preserved by Jehovah, who had protected His children as the eagle did her offspring. There are five divisions which promote an understanding of the text.

(1) How Strange are the Ways of God "As an eagle stirreth up her nest." Sometimes God appeared to be unkind when trying to help His people. Unless the parent eagle destroyed its nest, the young might remain there forever and would never fly. Even human babies cannot live forever encircled by a mother's arms. They need to be taught to walk, talk, and mature.

(2) How Watchful are the Eyes of God "fluttereth over her young." The eagle stays close to her babies to attend to their every need. When the prophet Hannani spoke to King Asa, he said, "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to

42

shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9). A similar idea was expressed by David when he wrote: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. 34:7). Whether it is believed or not, God is always close to His children.

(3) How Strong are the Arms of God "spreadeth abroad her wings." The frantic movements made by the falling eaglet supplied the first lesson in how to fly. The gravitational pull was thwarted and overcome as the young bird began to exercise its inherent gift. Yet, while all this was taking place, the parent bird watched and was ready to catch her baby on strong supporting wings. Throughout every emergency, whether in or out of the nest, she was equal to each demand made upon her.

(4) How Decisive are the Intentions of God "taketh her young" The young birds could never understand the motives of their mother. Inexperienced, they would interpret her behavior as thoughtless, irre-

THE EAGLE GOD'S SERMON IN THE SKY

sponsible, and unkind. Job might have asked in adversity, "Why did God allow this to happen to me?" The eagle knows how to teach her young to fly, and without her expertise, disaster would destroy the family. Similarly, the Lord knows how to protect His children, and this was reflected in the Lord's prayer when He said, "Those that thou gavest me, I have kept" (John 17:12).

(5) How Sufficient is the Provision of God "beareth them on her wings." Unlike the cuckoo, which has no affection for its young and deposits an egg in a borrowed nest, the eagle is watchful and protective. When necessity demands action, the bird responds. When danger threatens, the wings of the parent bird become a place of refuge. Like Jehovah, the bird might delay her rescue efforts, but she is never too late to help her endangered offspring. When the patriarchs considered these facts, it was easy to understand the sermon in the sky. The Lord's handiwork in creation revealed wisdom, majesty, and compassion. The same fact was emphasized by the Savior who said a falling sparrow was always seen by the watchful eyes of its Creator (see Matt. 10:29).

God's Unchanging Condition.. . Admirable (Isaiah 40:31)

"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" Many years had passed, but even in a changing world, some things remained unaltered. Eagles continued to

43

nest in Ismel's mountains and were watched by the prophet Isaiah. He was aware of the difficulties confronting his nation and realized the citizens of Israel were discouraged. He asked them a very important question. "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles" (Isa 40:28-31).

Evidently the prophet had watched those powerful birds flying above the hills. Their majestic wings used every current of air and storms as means by which to fly higher. Isaiah suggested to his listeners that if God could impart such wisdom and strength to birds, He could give similar understanding to men and women. His utterances proved to be fascinating to people of all ages; His reasoning was challenging. He spoke of flying, running, walking, but people usually reverse that order. It is said that babies must crawl before they can walk and walk before they can run. Isaiah had other ways of explaining spiritual growth. "They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings as eagles." Excitement and compelling enthusiasm are evidence of spiritual awakening. Many young Christians become so energetic they try to change the world overnight. Nothing is impossible as they forge ahead with plans which sometimes are disastrous. The patience of God seems to say: "Give them time; they will descend from that lofty position and with a new purpose will run and not be weary." Spiritual maturity is reached only when believers keep step with the Almighty "They shall walk and not faint." When Enoch did that, he was ready to be taken into heaven.

Every child of God covets that capability. Unfortunately, some people are impatient and fail to wait for the Lord; others are discouraged and remain motionless when the Savior urges them to advance in faith. Blessed is the man who keeps step with his Maker. It is easy to hear His whispers when the believer and the Master walk side by side. The poet wrote:

THE EAGLE GOD'S SERMON IN THE SKY

I tell Him all my sorrows;
I tell Him all my joys:
I tell Him all that pleases me;
I tell Him what annoys.

44

He tells me what I ought to do;
He shows me how to try:
And so we walk together,
My Lord and I.

God's Unheeded Caution.. . Awful (Jeremiah 49:16)

The prophet Jeremiah had great reasons for denouncing the nations that were a constant menace to the Hebrews. They lived in a city which is now called Petra, where caves in the lofty hills were compared to the nests of eagles. The prophet said to those arrogant aggressors, "Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill; though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD."

Today that city that was carved out of the red cliffs by the Nabatean people is a solemn reminder of the veracity of God's words. Petra was impregnable; access was only gained through a narrow split in the earth where one man could hold the pass against an army. During the ministry of the minor prophets, the Edomites lived in caves high in the formidable hills, and the rocky fortress produced a sense of invincibility. The defiant people laughed when they heard the warnings of the prophets. They forgot that Jehovah who held earthquakes in His hand could easily shake them from their impregnable stronghold. Many years later when caravans and cameleers decided to bypass the city, Petra died for want of commerce, and its inhabitants disappeared among the nomads of the desert. Today the king of Jordan, assisted by international organizations, is planning to make the place one of the world's greatest tourist attractions.

The eagle is now considered to be an endangered species. Hunters frequently killed these wonderful birds to retain them as trophies, but that practice is no longer permitted. If the feathered monarch of the sky should ever become extinct, mankind would lose one of the greatest examples of the Creator's skill.

45□

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