

DEVOTION: The Rainbow of Promise in the Storms of Life



In the initial weeks of the pandemic lock-down, rainbow pictures and prints appeared in many windows to support our NHS and key workers and as a sign of hope. Many are still there to this day, but the very **first rainbow** appeared in the sky in the days of Noah.

It's difficult for us to picture the solemnity of that moment when the first rainbow appeared. After so many months of lock-in, the response of Noah and his family when they came out of the ark was worship: 'Then Noah built an altar to the LORD' (Gen. 8:20). He went from building an Ark to building an Altar! Noah and his family worshipped God for their deliverance from the catastrophic destruction of the Flood. It is then, that God promised never to repeat this judgment and He confirmed that promise by placing a beautiful multi-coloured sign in the sky; a sign which few of us cannot resist stopping to gaze at.

Before the Flood, the earth was watered by a mist (Gen. 2:5 & 6). But the Flood brought a drastic atmospheric change, allowing falling water droplets to form, each of which acts as a prism. When sunlight enters a raindrop, the light is first bent as it enters the surface of the raindrop, is then reflected off the back of the drop, and is bent once again as it leaves the drop. This splits the sunlight into the varied colours of the optical spectrum. When conditions are right – which is when the angle of reflection between the sun, the drop of water, and our line of sight is between 40 and 42 degrees – we see this spectrum. It is most commonly listed in Isaac Newton's sevenfold order: red (inside), orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet (outside). Newton was the first person to demonstrate that white light is composed of all the rainbow colours.

As if this were not beautiful enough, at times a secondary rainbow is formed. This occurs when some light is reflected twice inside the raindrop before leaving. Amazingly, because of this mirroring effect inside the raindrop, the colours of this second rainbow are in reverse order. Apart from Genesis 9, the rainbow appears three more times in Scripture.

When we compare these, we see a three-fold meaning that applies to the storms of life we all encounter.

First, Noah saw the rainbow **after the storm**. While a storm rages, our foremost thoughts are to find shelter and hope the damage isn't serious. Like Noah, we must patiently wait until it's all over before seeing the sun again. It is then that we are reassured by the rainbow that every storm is temporary and that no matter how much damage it does, it could always be worse. We all face the storms of life from time to time. As my dear mother used to say, 'It will pass.' Your storm too, dear friend, will pass.

Second, the prophet Ezekiel saw the rainbow **during the storm**. Ezekiel's visions of God in Ezekiel chapter 1 begin with a violent storm of horrendous wind and fiery lightning, demonstrating God's judgment power and blazing glory (v. 4). Then came four 'living creatures' (vv. 5–14). Next, was the mysterious picture of a wheel within a wheel (vv. 15–21). Then, in vv. 22–28 we find described an 'expanse' over the heads of the 'living creatures' that dazzled like crystal, 'sparkling like ice and awesome'. Verse 26 of Ezekiel 1 tells us, 'above the expanse ... was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man.' This could well be an appearance of the pre-incarnate Son of God. Then we read, a 'brilliant light surrounded Him. Like the appearance of a **rainbow** in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around Him.' This was a complete eternal rainbow circle all around Him, and 'This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.'

Ezekiel saw the rainbow during the storm, and one unlike any other, to which his response was to 'fall face down' in humble submission. Let's remember that during the storms of life, God is on the throne and our place is to humbly submit to all that He is doing. God is in control!

Not only do we see the rainbow **after the storm** with Noah, and **during the storm** with Ezekiel, but we also see it **before the storm** in the book of Revelation in the New Testament. Like Ezekiel, the apostle John had a vision of God's throne in heaven and wrote: 'And the One Who sat there [on the throne] had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A **rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.**' (Rev. 4:3). The Greek for rainbow is the word '*iris*', which appears only here and in Revelation

10:1 and was used for our word, 'rainbow'. In classical Greek it refers to any bright halo surrounding an object, including the iris of the eye.

Again like Ezekiel, John saw a rainbow encircling God's throne, announcing God's completeness and perfection. This multi-coloured rainbow is dominated by a soothing emerald green. As a symbol, then, of peace and God's faithfulness to His promises, this rainbow assures John before the horrendous judgments that follow happen, peace will finally come, God's people will be rescued, and God will be glorified. The rainbow assured Noah, and it reassures us, that God is always faithful to His promises.

When we see a rainbow from earth we see only a part, but Ezekiel and Revelation show us that there is more to come! In eternity the rainbow is complete and it encircles the throne of God. Now we see only in part, but then we shall see fully (1 Cor. 13:12). How wonderful, how beautiful, how glorious, that will be for those who have turned to Christ, trusted in His finished work on the cross, and taken Him into their lives as Saviour and Lord. 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him' (1 Cor. 2:9).

So the next time you see a rainbow, be reminded that God is always faithful to His promises, that the storms of life will pass, that God is still on the throne, and that a wonderful eternity awaits those who can say of Jesus Christ, in the words of Galatians 2:20, 'He loved **me** and gave Himself for **me**.' In the words of 2 Corinthians 1:20, 'For **all** the promises of God **in Him** are "Yes", and **in Him** "Amen".'

David Parker