

# The Code of the Dove and the Holy Spirit

**Why did God choose to represent His Spirit with a dove? The answer—and its multilayered applications—can unlock one of the deep mysteries of our divine Helper.**

In biblical theology, we often consider a concept known as *the law of first mention*. It teaches that when a person, animal, color, metal or number is first mentioned in Scripture, it often sets the theme of that particular item throughout Scripture.

This is why the serpent that appeared in Genesis 3 as the tempter of Eve became the symbol of Satan or sin throughout the Bible—even in the Apocalypse, where the seven-headed dragon that gets hurled down is also referred to as a seven-headed serpent (Rev. 12:3-9). It's why the symbol of a lamb, based on the Passover narrative in Exodus 12, in the New Testament becomes the symbol of Christ, who is identified as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) and referred to as such 26 out of 27 times in the book of Revelation.

Another significant symbol is the dove, the gentle creature that represents the Holy Spirit. By applying the law of first mention, we can unlock many revelations about the Holy Spirit and His ministry to us who belong to Christ.

## The First Appearance

In the law of first mention, the dove is one of the two birds mentioned in the story of Noah's flood, which begins in Genesis 6. More than likely you're familiar with Moses' account of righteous Noah and his three sons who built a floating zoo and rode out a universal deluge. As the waters began to slowly recede, Noah sent two birds out of the ark: a raven and a dove.

Not only are these two birds totally opposite in nature, color and eating habits, but also there is prophetic insight encoded within the story.

First, the differences. Noah sent a raven from the window in the ark, and the raven flew back and forth until the waters were dried up, never to be seen again. He later sent a dove, but the dove returned to the ark after finding no place to rest its feet (Gen. 8:7-9). What's worth noting here is that a raven will eat carrion (the bodies of animals killed by other animals), but a dove will not. It has been said ravens will often follow packs of wolves to gain access to the meat the wolves tear apart. But when the dove went forth from the ark, it returned because doves will not rest on a carcass or eat decaying flesh, as 99 percent of their diet is seeds.

Eventually the dove brought an olive leaf back to the ark (v. 11). This is unique because the olive became a sacred fruit for the priestly ministry. Crushed olives produced olive oil, and the first pressing of oil was used in the temple menorah. Olive oil was also used in the ceremonial anointing of kings, priests and prophets (Ex. 30:25, 31). The olive leaf in the mouth of the dove speaks to us that out of the crises and storms of life, the Holy Spirit will bring us an olive branch, today's universal symbol of peace, in the midst of our conflict.

## **Jesus and the Dove**

At age 30, Christ was baptized at the Jordan River by his cousin, John. We read: "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him" (Matt. 3:16). This account of the Holy Spirit descending as a dove upon Jesus was so important that it is mentioned in all four Gospels (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32).

I believe one of the reasons the Holy Spirit assumed the form of a dove is because a dove has characteristics similar to those of the Holy Spirit. Doves are commonly white in color, and white in the Scripture represents purity or righteousness (Rev. 19:8). A dove expresses its affection by stroking its young and cooing in a soft tone. Spiritually, the Holy Spirit causes believers to be caring and loving for one another and even for those who are lost. The dove is a gentle creature and never retaliates against its enemies, while believers are told to turn the other cheek, to pray for our enemies and those who spitefully use us (Matt. 5:39-44) and to never retaliate. When the young of a dove are attacked, the dove will not attack but instead will cry out in distress. This concept is also seen in the words of Romans 8, as Paul wrote that when a believer does not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit will make intercession for her with groanings (vv. 26-28).

The parallels between a dove and the Holy Spirit continue when we understand that a dove can easily be spooked by strange noises. It is said that a dove will return to the same spot a couple of times when hearing a strange noise but will not return a third time to the same location. Similarly, God said to Noah, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (Gen. 6:3). The Holy Spirit can be vexed, grieved and even blasphemed (Eph. 4:30; Mark 3:29). When the Holy Spirit is purposely offended, He can eventually depart from a person, as He did with King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14).

It is also interesting to note that when most birds hover in the air, their wing tips point toward the back, in the direction of their tail feathers. On a dove, however, the wing tips point toward the head. This is unique when we consider how the anointing oil was poured upon the heads of the kings and priests in Israel. The oil was poured from one ear, across the front of the head, to the other ear. It was poured in the form of a Hebrew letter *kuf*, whose shape is similar to a dove's wings when it is hovering and its wings are opened.

Just as the oil descended upon the heads of priests, the Holy Spirit manifested as a dove at Christ's baptism and descended upon His head.

Years ago, the great evangelist Leonard Ravenhill noted that there are nine main feathers on the left and right wings of the dove. He pointed out that there are also nine gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10) and nine fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). There are also five main tail feathers on a dove, which can represent the fivefold ministry gifts of apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers (Eph. 4:11). The tail feathers of a dove are like the rudder of a ship—they assist in balance and direction in flight, just as the fivefold ministry gifts in the church bring balance to the body of Christ.

## **A Code in the Covering**

Returning to the story of Noah, the ark was prepared with a special upper window. This window is mentioned twice in the flood narrative—once before and once after, when the waters were settling—and two different Hebrew words are used and translated “window.”

Before the flood, the window is called *tsohar*, a word meaning “light or illumination.” This was a literal window in the ark where light could stream in from the outside world and allow Noah to see out. This window was not glass but would have been an opening on the top level of the ark, most likely protected by wooden coverings.

After the flood, Noah opened the same window. However, the Hebrew word used in this instance is *challown*, which refers to the covering over the window rather than the window itself. The *challown* would have been made of wood and been designed to keep the rain out. When Noah opened the window, the light and illumination poured into a dim ark, and the dove had an

opening to flow in and out.

Studying this many years ago, I realized the ark was a picture of safety and security in a time of distress and trouble. This man-made window not only kept the rain from getting in, but it also prevented or withheld the dove from being free to get out and fly.

I can't help but compare this to some churches that place man-made barriers inside the congregation to protect the people but which often lead to man-made control, such as when the rain of the Holy Spirit is falling in locations other than their church and the leadership "closes the window" to prevent anyone from seeing or experiencing these outpourings. These barriers prevent the Dove, the Holy Spirit, from having free access to the face of the waters where new life will soon burst in the light of the Son of God.

There are so many spiritual hindrances, including the traditions of men, that can stop the flow of the Spirit. We must remove denominational coverings that have separated the outpouring on the outside from the people on the inside. Spiritual veils must melt from the eyes of our understanding, and this is accomplished through deeper illumination and understanding of the Word. According to Paul, when these spiritual veils are removed, then the Spirit is free to work, and "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

### **Time to Free the Dove**

You'll remember that in the New Testament, men served as money-changers at the temple. This is because the Roman government was in charge of the currency, but only Hebrew coins were permissible to pay the temple tax—thus the need for money-changers who set up tables in the court of the Gentiles and exchanged the Roman coins for local coins. Those attending worship from other nations often brought with them coins

affixed with the faces of men, gods or animals, which also were exchanged before entering the temple. These exchanges provided oil, salt, wine and animals for the various sacrifices—all purchasable for a price.

Money-changing had become a very profitable business, as the exchange rates went as high as 300 percent. And on the particular day Christ entered the temple, He would have first passed by the court of the Gentiles, where the tables of the money-changers were set. While passing by, Christ would also have observed doves being kept and sold in the area. According to Leviticus 12:5-6, the doves were a special offering after a woman gave birth to a child, and the offering was for purification.

At the moment He saw all this activity, Christ set His heart on purifying the temple compound, and He began overturning the tables of the money-changers and those who sold doves: "Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," but you have made it a "den of thieves"'" (Matt. 21:12-13).

We can assume that when the fragile wooden cages of the doves struck the floor, they broke, and suddenly the doves were loosed and began to fly. Imagine those freed white birds seen by casual observers from any high hill, such as the Mount of Olives. In my mind, I see many individuals who needed healing or a miracle watching the commotion from afar. As they came to the temple to see—or perhaps were carried there by others—notice what occurred next: "Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them" (v. 14).

When the house of God is cleansed from selfish, greedy and carnal leaders and the church no longer sits in its seat and attempts to control the movement of the Dove, releasing Him

instead within the body of Christ for ministry, then we see sinners converted, the depressed released, the sick cured and the people rejoice.

### **An Anointing of the Mouth**

Out of the flood waters, the dove returned to the ark with an olive leaf in its mouth. Of the hundreds of possible tree leaves to reappear after the earth was covered with water, the dove found the leaf of a tree created by God to produce olives. When crushed, the olives from the olive trees produce thick yellow oil, which we've noted was used to anoint the national and spiritual leaders of Israel. This is the leaf that came back in the mouth of the dove.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is not a cloud, a fire or even a dove, but rather a divine presence whose authority is released through the mouth—through preaching, teaching, singing and prophetic utterances flowing like oil from the lips of those upon whom the Spirit has rested.

The prophet Zechariah described two olive trees on the left and right side of the menorah whose olive branches are like pipes pouring out golden oil. They are identified as the two anointed ones standing by the Lord (Zech. 4:11-14).

Thus, the dove represents the Holy Spirit and the olive leaf the anointing that flows through the spoken word He gives. He is still like unto a dove!

---

**Perry Stone** is the best-selling author of numerous books, including *How to Interpret Dreams and Visions* and *The Code of the Holy Spirit*, from which this article is adapted. He directs one of America's fastest-growing ministries, the *Voice of Evangelism*, and lives in Cleveland, Tenn., with his wife, Pam, and their two children.

---

✖ When a rabbi in Jerusalem told Perry Stone that, according to Jewish tradition, speaking in tongues was something the high priest did in the holy of holies, Stone set out to discover lesser-known details and insights concerning the Holy Spirit. The result of that journey is his latest revelation-packed book, *The Code of the Holy Spirit*, available online or in bookstores across the nation.