

# Sabbath January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - Religious Liberty

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## "THE NEW YEAR AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY"

How do we enjoy religious liberty and what does it entail?

What is God doing at the beginning of the year?

That we enjoy religious liberty is part of God's plan for us, and He lets us taste the privileges of that freedom when we live it faithfully.

Genesis 8:13-20

### I- GOD DRIES UP THE WATERS OF THE DELUGE

*"By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry."* - Genesis 8:13 (NIV).

The Bible describes that it was in a new year that God dried up the waters of the flood, on the first day of the first month.

God doesn't do anything by chance or accident. He created a harmonious, well-structured world, and everything followed a well-defined plan, nothing was left to chance. What would happen if the Sun moved even a little closer to the Earth? The planet would become unlivable, and scientists say that everything would burn up. Conversely, what would happen if the distance between the Earth and the Sun were just a tiny bit greater? The Earth would plunge into a deadly cold. Heat and cold have been calculated in advance by God. So there's a reason why God says in his word that it was in the New Year that God dried up the waters of the flood.

Let's have faith that in this New Year, God can dry up the waters that have flooded your past. We can trust his word. Indeed, a flood can manifest itself in many ways, in other words, serious problems. Even so, God can dry them up if we trust Him.

### II- NOAH REMOVES THE COVERING FROM THE ARCH

Noah removed the covering from the ark. What is surprising, however, is that this ark had a window. Genesis 8:6: *"At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the ark."* God always speaks to men and gives them advice through his prophets. And here, Noah is the instrument He used to communicate to men at that time. Removing was part of God's instructions and Noah did it. And when he looked outside, he saw that the earth was dry. God reassured Noah that he could remove the roof. The ark had a window, but in this New Year, it wasn't through a window that Noah had to look; he was told to remove the ark's covering. God acts by drying up the flood waters in the New Year, but our task is to remove the roof. We must rise higher to reach and remove the roof. What is it about the covering or roof that prevents us from seeing heaven with the eyes of faith?

We'll never be able to see heaven as long as there's a roof over our heads. Yes, even if we aspire to reach heaven, as long as there's a roof over us, we won't even be able to see it.

*"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*- Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV).

If we are willing in this New Year, we can remove the roof in our lives that prevents us from seeing the sky. What do we need to do to lift ourselves higher? Let's enlarge our trust in God and strengthen our relationship with Him through personal prayer, prayer meetings with the church, reading the Holy Scriptures and the books of the Spirit of Prophecy. If we lift ourselves up using these means, God will give us the strength so that, through our relationship with Him and with His power, we can remove the roof in our lives.

It is said in Genesis 8:14: *"By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry."* and in Genesis 8:13: *"By the first day of the first month (...), the water had dried up from the earth."* The question is: when, precisely, had the earth dried up? Was it the first day of the New Year, or the twenty-seventh day of the second month?

In verse 15 and 16: *"Then God said to Noah, 'Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.'" Noah, his family, and all the animals were able to get out of the ark on the twenty-seventh day, which was when the earth was completely dry. Why then, when he removed the covering from the ark, did he see that the surface of the earth had dried up? He saw it with the eyes of faith, which is how God taught him. It was by faith that he built the ark. If it rained in torrents during the night, it's unlikely that the land would already be dry the next day; it makes sense that it would still be muddy, given the great amount of water during the Flood. However, when Noah looked with the eyes of faith, he saw that it was dry. God may have already dried up the Flood waters of life, but there may still be dangerous mud ahead. However, open your eyes of faith, and see that God will certainly dry it up. Look at your future with the eyes of faith, for even if you see mud, problems threatening you, if you trust in God, He will intervene to solve them. Think of your problems as already solved, according to this promise: "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and you will see it fulfilled." - Marc 11:24.*

### III- GOD GIVES US RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Genesis 8.18,19: *"So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it." (NIV)*

Here we have a lesson on religious liberty: When we are faithful to God in our lives. Everything was destroyed when Noah left the ark. They had no tent and no house. And the first thing Noah did was to build an altar to the Lord. Indeed, that's why Noah was taken out of the ark at that time, so that he and his family could serve God according to the instructions that the patriarchs and prophets received at that time. It was the father of the family who was the priest at that time. The story doesn't mention that they built an altar inside the ark. You could say that they had no religious liberty inside the ark. This doesn't mean they couldn't pray to God, but their freedom to do so was limited. They couldn't build an altar there, but God brought them out when the land was dry to enjoy religious freedom. Here we see that Noah lived this religious freedom faithfully.

Here's what happened when Noah built the altar: *"he took some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it."* Imagine only having seven oxen, seven sheep, and seven pure birds left. It's frustrating to still have to take from these few that are left to offer to God. These animals are in danger of extinction. On top of that, they were to be offered every day, not just once. And yet, today we see that these species are not extinct. In fact, these pure animals have become increasingly numerous. There were only seven at first, but when Noah lived his religious freedom faithfully, God made the result unimaginable. To this day, God

continues to pour out his blessings. If our country takes advantage of this religious freedom, and everyone serves God with faith and faithfulness, according to the instructions God has given them, and not according to what each person may prefer, God will certainly bless our country, and the seven will become much more numerous, because we have given God what is rightfully His. When we take from our possessions, our money or wealth, to offer to God, He is ready to make us prosperous.

I would like to conclude by reminding you of the story of the four men who took their sick friend to see Jesus, in Mark 2. They wanted with all their heart to bring this friend back to Jesus. Because of the large crowd, they couldn't get in through the door. They had problems that prevented them from coming to Jesus, the source of healing and solution. They had an idea! They took the roof off the house, just as Noah took the roof off the ark, and they were able to come closer to Jesus Christ. Thanks to this idea, which was to remove the roof that prevented them from seeing Christ, their friend was healed.

I will recover, and so will you, and so will our country, if we are willing to rise higher to remove the roof and draw closer to God, and if we take advantage of religious liberty by remaining wholly faithful to God. In this, we do not do as we please, but God's will, like Noah who listened and obeyed God's instructions with faith. We need to listen to God's Word every day. Regardless of the church we attend, whatever our occupation, I hope our life principle in this New Year is to listen to God in his Word, to read the Bible, to study God's instructions about true religion and religious liberty. May God give us eternal life.

And may God's word be fulfilled in our lives.

Amen !!!!!