

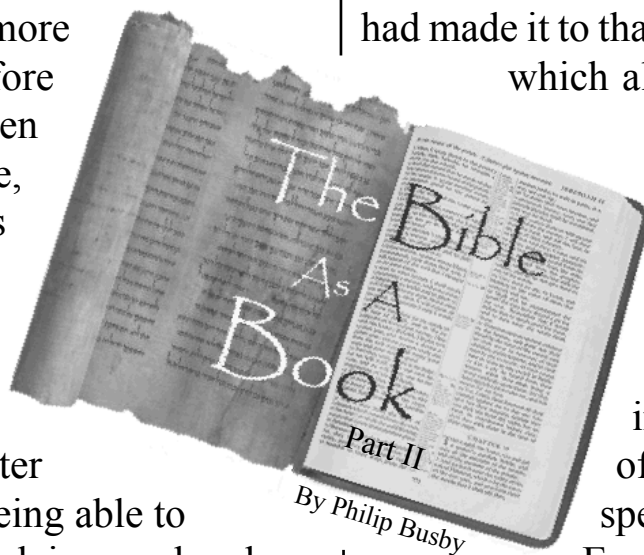
Shaqah

שפדאן

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ. Colossians 2:8

The next issue we want to look at in this study is the question of, why did God choose to give us a written Word? To understand the answer to this question, you must first be clear on the fact that in the beginning it was not so. Man

actually lived for more than two millennia before God ever gave a written Word; and of course, the written Word is what we are talking about here. Certainly, the Word was in the beginning with God just as John chapter 1 tells us. However, being able to hold the written Word in our hands as Moses did and as we do today, is something which Adam, Noah, and even Abraham never got to do. This is not to say these men never wrote down some of the things God instructed them, but certainly there was never an official collection of writings given directly by God until much later.



So, "Why did it take so long?" is really at the core of our overall question of why did God give the written Word at all? To understand this, we have to understand the way in which we were created. When God set out to create man on day six, He had made it to that element of creation for which all of creation was set in

motion. Man was not just God's pentacle creature in this universe; man was the reason for the universe. This is confirmed in a process which most of us see as one which speaks to why God created Eve; but in truth, it shows much more. It's always important to remember that God created Adam and only Adam. This has nothing to do with elevating man over woman. The importance of this is that there was only one human; and if God had not given a female to that male, there would never have been more than one. God created one man for an entire universe! Then God

specifically takes us through His thought process from there. God says, "...it is not good that the man should be alone;..." Genesis 2:18, but God also tells us what brought about that determination. God did not make this determination directly after making Adam. He did not make Adam and go straight to the making of a female. What happened directly following the creation of Adam is that God brought all the animals to Adam to see what he would call them. Adam gives names to all the animals, which means he had made the acquaintance of all the different kinds of animals. Then the Bible tells us there was not found, among the animals, a helpmate for Adam. This tells us more than just the fact Adam could not find an equal or even a being which would be of great assistance to him on a level higher than physical work. This confirms to us that the animals were not created to serve the purpose God created man to serve. If the animals could not even be a helpmate to Adam, they certainly were not up to the task of being unto God what God wanted man for!

God created man to commune with. We were also given something which, at the time, caused us to be made a little lower than the angels, (Ps. 8:4-8) but in the end can lead to a nature which is far more than any angel can ever be. (I Cor. 6:1-3) That is our free will and a temporal environment in which to enact it. The reason God did not give man a written Word from the beginning is that God intended to commune with man in a direct, and even daily way. There was no

need for a written Word in a world where the Garden of Eden physically existed and man was free to go forth and come back at any time. There was no need for a written Word in a world where The Tree of Life beckoned every man back to the place where God's physical presence came on a regular basis. Even if some men had not desired to commune with God every day in the garden, there would always be times when men would return; and when they did, God would be there waiting to physically talk with them. Never taking of the Tree Of Knowledge of Good and Evil would not have made us slaves, or held us back from being all we could be. That false idea is exactly why Eve chose to take the fruit; and unfortunately, there is far too much in Christian doctrine which feeds this false idea, even to this day.

From the very beginning, God enacted the principles of physical existence; and one of those principles is that if you wish to avoid someone or something, it often can be as easy as turning to the left instead of the right. There would always have been people who chose to be gone for a great deal of the time and never desired to return any more than they had to. Just as it's true now, this would not have put them outside the view of God, for God can see every man no matter where he or she is. It would, however, mean that when those people needed the Tree of Life or when they simply desired to come "home," they would have to accept that the physical presence of God would be fairly unavoidable in the gar-

den. If man truly desired to never be again in the presence of his Creator, he would have to refuse to return to the garden. In doing so, he would have faced nothing different than he does now: and that is the truth of death!

Decisions, decisions, decisions, that is what our life before God is and always has been intended to be. It would have been much more comfortable for future generations if man had never taken of the fruit they were told not to; but the basic dynamics of where our choices lead have not really changed as much as many people believe they have. Once man took of the fruit God told us not to take of, we simply moved to the other side of things. We lost access to the Tree of Life. We lost access to the main point of having such a place as the Garden of Eden. We lost the kind of physical access we originally had to life, health, and God Himself! The physical access to God we once had is no more; and in this universe, it will never be again in the way it was before taking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Because man chose to disobey the voice of God, God can no longer walk so directly with man, or the Holiness of God will kill man. We truly see this illustrated later as God gives The Word to the children of Israel. God tells Moses to set bounds around the mount and not let the people or any of their animals come closer than those boundaries. God was going to come down on that mountain in a very physical way and talk

directly to the people in an audible voice. If they came too close to the presence of God, they would be consumed! (Ex. 19)

There is a very short list of things God cannot do, but everything on that list is there because He is perfect. The first item on that list is: God cannot tolerate sin. It would take a whole study on holiness to fully understand this issue, but the short-hand is that to be holy is to be set apart. God is set apart and perfect. He has never sinned or been unjust in any way. This makes Him not only able to judge our sins but obligated! Our fleshly existence gives us a freedom that even angels do not have. It gives us a place which can be set apart from God if it needs to be; and after man disobeyed God, it needed to be. Essentially, God allows man to live out his physical life by not coming down and communing with man in the way He originally desired. This is why Moses had to set boundaries around mount Sinai. God wanted to speak to the people directly, but the children of Israel could not approach too close to the physical presence of God, or they would die. When the day came, the people stood outside the boundary and God did speak to them The Ten Commandments. (Ex. 20) After the people experienced this, they were scared out of their wits. Thus, the people came to Moses and asked him to go and speak to God for them. They said whatever God told Moses, they would do. The people knew they were in no condition to stand before God's presence, and surely further en-

counters would lead to their death! (Ex. 20:18-19)

What is important to our study about this story though, is the point that Moses was able to go up! Why did he not die? He went even closer to the presence of God than the people! What made Moses special? The answer is in the fact that Moses cared about sanctifying his life continually before God. You do not come before the presence of God in the way Moses did without being invited by God; but God would only extend such an invitation to a man to whom it was continually important to walk in holiness, and had significant success in sanctifying his walk! The children of Israel could have stood at that mountain and heard the voice of God, and anyone could have been invited to go up to the mount, if they had been desirous and willing to prepare their heart and life! The problem was not that the people would die because no one can stand before God in the way He had come to that mountain. The problem was, they did not feel they could be or they did not want to put forth the effort to be, set apart (holy) from the things of this world enough to even continue to stand as close as they were. They did not want to sanctify their lives continually and be prepared to stand that close. God said they had spoken well, because that fear could be used to the advantage of causing the people to at least walk in the statutes God was about to give! So, Moses went up and talked with God to receive the covenant the people said they would follow. (Deut. 5:23-31)

What this story shows us is, not only is it hard to stand in the presence of a perfect God, but also that it's still possible. It's possible to draw closer and closer to God. Moses did; and if we jump back in time, we find that Abraham did as well. In a lot of the stories we see in the Bible, it's kind of vague as to just how the person in the story is hearing God's voice. Is God actually speaking to them? Is it more of an inner voice they are hearing? We don't always know. However, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, (Gen. 18:1-19:3) it tells us three men came by Abraham's tent. What is amazing is that even at a distance, Abraham seems to know these men were no ordinary travelers just passing by. These men were on a mission, but Abraham ran to them and begged them to stop and stay for awhile. Abraham not only wanted them to stop, but he killed a calf for them and set all the wheels in motion for having quite a banquet set before them. This only happened, even in Abraham's day, even with Abraham's wealth, for very special guests; and one of these guest was special indeed! Abraham had found it so important to have these men stay because he knew one of them was God Himself! How do we know one of the men was God Himself? Simply because the story tells us it was so. Genesis 18:1 says, "And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre..." If you read the entire account, you find that two of the men went on to the cities, and Abraham talked with God. If three men came to Abraham's tent and only two

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Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip Busby

We ended last time in chapter 7 verse 16 by talking about how God shut the door of the ark. Now, depending on how you feel the ark was designed, you may or may not believe that God was the only one big enough to shut this door; but a more important factor than just shutting the door was making the door watertight. Noah was instructed to seal the ark on the inside and on the outside with watertight materials; but once they were shut in, Noah could only seal the door from the inside. For a door big enough to allow the passage of very large animals, this would have been a significant problem. God had instructed Noah to build, not a boat, but a watertight box which could withstand a significant beating. The true weak point would have been the one opening Noah was to put into the side of that box. Thus, God shutting Noah and his family in the ark is not just God shutting the door, but insuring that the ark was fully sealed and ready to withstand the torrent it would soon face!

This is another example of how much God works with us and not around us. God could have built an ark instead of telling Noah to do it. God could have taken Noah to the other side of the flood in any number of ways, including the actual jumping through time. God also could have destroyed mankind from the

face of the world using means which just killed man and could have left Noah, his family, and the other living things of the planet untouched. However, God did not do any of this. These are all facts which we should meditate on day and night if we desire to understand the nature of God and how He wishes to relate to us. (Ps. 1:2)

The ark was not an object lesson; it was a serious life saving device. Only one man had ears to hear what the Spirit Of God was instructing. (Rev. 2:11). God was going to destroy everything outside that ark with a very natural kind of catastrophe. Not just any plan, and certainly no last minute plan implemented by man, was going to save him. The destruction was very physical; but to survive, it was the ark God had instructed to build or nothing!

Man can dig. Man can plant. Man can water, but only God can bring the increase! (I Cor. 3:6-7) Noah had cut, hammered, applied pitch, and built the massive structure; however, he still needed God to do certain things in order for the plan to work. One of the most important of these was the final sealing of the door of the ark; and before the rain ever began to fall, because Noah was faithful to do his part just as God had asked him

to, God took care of everything which Noah could not have done on his own, right down to the detail of shutting them in! We don't always know if we can accomplish everything God has asked us to do, and the truth is, we often can't. There are things in this life which are outside our ability to accomplish on our own, but that is the way it was created to be. God did not want to send a flood and have us do projects such as the ark; but even under the circumstances man's choices lead us to, God continues to relate to us using the same principles He intended from the beginning. God is not in the business of destroying what He created us to be. God is in the business of maintaining it. That is why God had to give Adam and Eve the choice of the fruit which would grant the knowledge of good and evil, but also had to separate man from the fruit which gave life once man gained the knowledge! (Gen. 3:22-24) It's why God determined the end of all flesh had come before Him, yet gave Noah a plan of escape which Noah could build but only finish with God's help. This is why the end of the world will someday come; but before it does, Jesus will return to rule and reign for more than a thousand years on this very planet, while it continues its natural course. (Rev. 20:1-4) This is why when this heaven and this earth are passed away, there is prepared a place for all those who have desired God and His ways to live on for eternity without the sin and destruction which the mistakes we make here

and the people who do not desire God's ways bring! (John 14:1-3)

The next verses step out the events directly following God shutting Noah into the ark. We have been told more than once that the rain would fall for forty days and forty nights; but in verses 17 through 20, we are told a step-by-step sequence which shows us yet again a natural progression of the events which one would expect. There is no doubt that the flood would change the topography of the earth. However, it's important to remember that it was not God's intent to destroy the planet. It was God's intent to wipe the land clean of every living thing. God was wiping clean everything man had done up to that point; and when it was all over, Noah would have an untouched natural environment to explore. Nothing of the old social pressures, traditions, or ideas of earlier men would have to be followed or observed. Just like Adam and Eve, Noah's family could build from the ground up anything they desired, and they could literally remake the way man went about his life if they chose to.

I have often, in my teaching, repeated the truth that God did not create the world through the process of evolution, and that a process like evolution could not have taken place before God created the world. This is very true; and even after God set the world in motion, fish never walked out on the land and became cattle. God created life on this planet to be regenera-

tive, but after its own kind. Man's ability to procreate was based on the choice God was giving to man about how many humans there would be. Man was not intended to die, and God originally only created one! The animals, on the other hand, as well as the plants, procreate as a means of survival. This is what Job was talking about when he spoke of a tree getting a second chance at life, but man simply vanishes. (Job 14:7-12) Animals and plants were always intended to go through cycles of life and death. It's what many people refer to as "the circle of life." Some plants, such as trees, can live for hundreds of years. In fact, we actually aren't sure just how long some plants may be able to live, but then there are certain insects which do not live longer than a handful of hours on average. Darwin, his predecessors, and his latter conformists were and are wrong, but that doesn't mean life is not very flexible and adaptive. It's this principle of starting over again which gives that flexibility. (John 12:24) This is why we can hybrid plants and develop different breeds of domestic animals. After the flood, the world was going to take the seed it had left and regrow the world. This was not the process we call evolution, but it wasn't the six days of creation where things just came to be all over the world in just a matter of seconds either.

People get confused and develop theories like the one which teaches there was a creation cycle before the one we

know now. These theories teach that God wiped the previous creation clean with a flood. Some even teach that Satan was in control of that world and that is why he is here with us now. That would be pretty inefficient of God to wipe a whole creation cycle away and leave the one big problem intact as He began again. No. I believe the Bible shows us through the story of the flood that this is a one time thing. God is not going to repeat our creation over and over. God destroyed every living thing from off the dry land, but He did not destroy the world as we know it, nor did He desire to start again as He did "In the beginning..." Even as violent and destructive as the flood would be, the waters would rise in a way which followed a very natural path. Because of this, the natural cycle would not be totally destroyed, and the world could reconfigure itself by using the principles God had already set in place during those original seven days of creation. Noah and his family would preserve human life as well as animal life. Again, God is not in the business of destroying His creation and just starting all over. God is in the business of preserving us. (Duet. 6:24, Luke 17:33)

These next verses are meant to show us just that. Verse 24 of this chapter talks about the water prevailing for 150 days. However, the sequence of how the water became so predominant took place in just forty. This is why verse 17 repeats the forty day fact. These verses speak again

to the weakness of the English language because through these verses we need more specific and descriptive words, but even English can bring understanding if we compare the words used. Verse 17 says the “flood” was upon the earth, and verse 24 uses the word “water.” “Flood” is like the word “rain” earlier. Here in verse 17, we are talking about the outpouring of water from the heavens, and the bursting forth of water from under the ground, as well as the water of the oceans retaking the land. By the time we get to verse 24, we are talking about the time period the water was allowed to simply do what water by nature would do once it all came together into one large sea.

Verses 17, 18, and 19 are showing us a sequence. First, verse 17 tells us the waters “...increased...” The land already had rivers and lakes of various sizes upon it; but in the natural course of a flood, even as we see it today, there is a rising of those natural bodies of water which precedes the catastrophe of water going where it totally does not belong! Now, I’m not suggesting that in Noah’s flood people simply observed the creek starting to overtake the footbridge. I believe Noah’s flood moved far quicker than that. The point here is to emphasize that in spite of the bonds God released which allowed the fountains of the deep to break forth and the oceans to retake the land, the water still proceeded in a natural way.

Water sought out and filled the low points of the planet first, just as it would in any flood. Noah’s ark was setting on very dry ground, not in the middle of a potential lake. The water had to increase from the lowest points of the planet up to where the ark was setting. We are not told just how long this took, but I suspect it did not take too long in light of the fact water would cover the highest mountains in just forty days. However, for at least a short part of the forty day and night sequence, Noah and his family set in the same place listening to the water fall on their roof. Then as the water got high enough, the ark began to lift off the ground. This had to be a very unsettling feeling to know you were now at the mercy of the waters flow, and the water just kept lifting the ark higher and higher as the water levels continually rose.

Verse 18 moves us ahead by using the word “prevailed.” This is because the water was no longer running into the low points of the planet. Verse 18 starts to cross the line of filling the low points, to covering the high points. This verse also uses the word “increased” with the emphasis of the word “greatly.” In other words, if there was any thoughts about the flood being some localized event which just affected those who lived in the valleys and lower hills, those thoughts should be fading about now. The water was not going to stop rising in time to spare even those who had climbed as high as they possibly could. The water was truly prevailing over the

land! The only place of safety was in that ark Noah had built, and God had sealed. Verse 18 confirms to us that as the water overtook the land, the ark stayed right on the surface of the rising tide!

Then we come to verse 19, which doesn't just use the word "prevailed" and then talk about "increase." Verse 19 no longer talks about increase at all, and the emphasis word moves to apply to the word "prevailed." On top of that, the emphasis word goes from "greatly" in verse 18 to "exceedingly" here in 19. What does it mean for the water to prevail exceedingly? Well, growing up and still today, my family lives in a part of the country which has to be irrigated in order to grow crops and even grass for grazing animals. The ground can be so dry at times that when you first release the water out onto the land, it doesn't make it very far from the ditch. This is because it soaks into the ground much faster than it can flow out of the ditch. Before the water can move on through the field, it has to overcome this imbalance by saturating the ground. Once it does, the water has prevailed over that ground and can flow out into the next dry spot, and so on, until the entire field is watered.

This process is not unlike using a dry sponge to mop up water. At first, the sponge will virtually dry the surface by soaking up the liquid; but if there is too much for the sponge to hold, you will have to wring out the sponge before you

can soak up any more. In verse 18, the water had begun to prevail over the dry land by having saturated the ground and filling the low spots. As you move into verse 19, the water was exceeding those issues and truly began to swallow up the land leaving only the high spots. The water exceedingly prevailed so much that it covered every mountain top, not just in the region where Noah lived, but "...under the whole heaven..." Now, it's likely that every man died long before the waters prevailed to this point, but it was not God's intent just to destroy man. It was God's intent to force the world, from the lowest valley to the highest mountain, to begin anew. No part of the planet would have an advantage over another part of the planet when it came to starting over. The natural processes would have to reconstruct every square inch; and this brings us to a point for discussion which goes back to something we talked about last time.

There was great violence in the fountains of the deep breaking forth, and some of the direct damage may be visible today in what we call canyons. However, there is also the issue of continental shift. Evolutionist believe the world just went crazy somewhere along the line and a world which was all one cohesive land mass tore itself apart into the various continents we see today. Now, again, we cannot say for sure that the continents were originally connected, but I believe it's likely. Today, we know what the world looks like, and it's fasci-

nating the way you can put the continents together like puzzle pieces. It's very easy to believe that the hollows you end up with when you do this, were originally large inland bodies of water, and/or the landmass which filled them was broken up by the flood. Something we do believe we know is that the earth's surface is made-up of plates which can move in reference to each other. These plates did not just take off one day because of primal changes our forming planet was going through; but it's highly possible and likely that these plates moved significantly during the time of the flood. Water is heavy - to say the least - and its force is undeniable. In fact, it's hard to believe that the world's dry land surface did not substantially change during the flood, especially in light of the words in verse 20! Noah likely walked off the ark into a world he had never seen before.

Verse 20 brings us again to one of those times in the Bible where we must make a choice. We can either believe what the Bible says or we can believe it's a book full of all the over dramatics of a fish tale! There are those who argue the flood was not worldwide, but if you want to argue this, you are not basing your argument on the Bible - pure and simple. The verses which end chapter 7 are once again full of that emphatic emphasis I have talked about before. All these verses come together in a statement which was to be unmistakable even if translated

into a much weaker language such as English. Verse 19 talks about the fact all the highest hills under the whole heaven were covered. Then verse 20 goes on to tell us the water not only prevailed over the land in that it covered the highest peak, but it went fifteen cubits above that. A cubit is about eighteen to twenty-four inches, so even if we take the lesser approximation of a cubit, fifteen cubits is two hundred seventy inches, or about twenty-two and a half feet. The water did not simply make it to the top of the highest peak because violent waves of water were able to splash over the top from time to time. For it to be a non-worldwide event, Noah's flood would had to have been in some low lying basin of the world. If this were true, there would have been higher ground all around Noah which would never have been covered, and it certainly could not have been covered over the top of the highest peak. There is no way you can believe what the Bible says about how this flood happened, and why this flood happened, and still make sense of the idea it may not have been worldwide! The water truly prevailed over all the earth to the point that even the highest parts of dry land were now beneath over twenty-two feet of water!

As we move into verses 21 and 22 we are being told about what died just in those first forty days of "rain." In these two verses, there are two general descriptions used to tell us what died.

Verse 21 describes what died as everything which moved upon the earth. It lists more specific categories, but the bottom line is that everything which was not tied down by a root system died by the events which verses 17 through 20 describe. This included everything from the smallest of bugs to the largest of mammals. Nothing was small enough or large enough to escape. We can also add to that statement that nothing was smart enough to escape, for the list includes man himself. There may have been people who hiked to higher ground. There may have been people who survived the rising water because they were already out on the sea or had a large enough boat to withstand the initial turbulence, but no plan brought anyone through those first forty days. Everything which was created to move upon the dry land, including man, died because of the “rain.”

Verse 22 describes what died as, all the things which were dependant on dry ground and had the ability to breathe air straight into their lungs. God made birds to fly in the air, some can even float on the surface of water, but none of them were able to survive those first forty days. The only animals which do not extract their oxygen from water that were able to live beyond those first days were full time water dwelling mammals such as whales and dolphins. This brings us to yet another point of discussion. Why was it so important for everything living on the land to be destroyed, but not the things in the water? The answer to this

question, I believe, is based on the fact man had not truly touched the world which God had made under the water by the time of the flood. Remember, again, that God did not give man permission to eat animals until after the flood. I know some people today consider themselves vegetarians, and still eat fish. However, God only gave specific plant material to humans for food at the time of creation. (Gen. 1:29) So, fish was not on the menu.

Of course, there is also the issues I have mentioned before. This does not mean humans didn't eat animal flesh before the flood. The disobedience of man against the things he knew were right is what caused God to send the flood in the first place. However, even if man was eating a few fish, fishing would not have been a large scale operation. Even in a post-flood world where man loves to eat fish, we are only beginning to explore and affect the none dry land world. Certainly, today men have over fished several species and even drove certain species to extinction; but these things did not happen until man gained the knowledge necessary to build much better boats and tools. It took post-flood man centuries to obtain these things, and it's not likely that pre-flood man had anything close. Then there is the fact that only very recently has man obtained the technology to actually explore the water and the depths beneath. What little man may have done in the way of swimming, sailing, and fishing before the flood, did not even scratch the surface of that part

of creation. On the other hand, the land was a place man had at least learned how to manipulate. God had planted a garden for man, to give him a home and show him it was possible to groom the world into what one might specifically enjoy. Man had certainly not filled the world and subdued it by the time of the flood, but he had begun that work. With the flood, God was wiping man's footprint clean - so to speak. When Noah got off the ark, there was nothing left of how man had started and what man had started. Everything had changed from what he knew before. This fact is why we do not know things such as where the Garden of Eden was; and it's likely that even thinking in terms of "where" it was is ridiculous, considering how much the entire face of the planet changed through the flood!

With that thought in mind, we very appropriately have come to verse 23. This verse does something similar to what we saw in the earlier verses. It may seem to be describing the same thing over again, but again we see the use of some different words. Verses 21 and 22 talk about death. They talk about the end of life, breath, and the pursuit of happiness! Verse 23 talks about something a little further down the line. It talks about "...every living substance..." being "...destroyed..." In the violence of the water coming down and up upon the face of the ground, there was more than just death, there was destruction! The plants

are not really part of the description of the earlier verses, but they are part of this verse. Every living substance which lived on the land was destroyed. That is profound! In fact, it's so profound that it seems to me this fact should be harder to imagine than the fact the flood was a worldwide event. To say everything died is to leave a lot, but to say every living substance was destroyed is just amazing! Then if there is any doubt in your mind that this verse means just what it says, it goes on, not only to list the basics again, but also make the specific statement that "only" what was in the ark with Noah "remained" alive and apparently intact. The flood literally tore the place apart!

I talked before about Noah's ark being more than just a collection of living animals, but a mini ecosystem in and of itself. This verse emphasizes that truth. All the plant life and all the animal life which resided on the dry land stopped living and growing. It stopped producing and procreating. It all ceased to exist in a "living" form. So again, the bottom line here is, from the largest mammals to the smallest organism, anything which could not survive that kind of stoppage in its life cycle was gone in just forty days, unless it was on that ark with Noah!

Until next time, Shalom!

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went on to the cities, where did that third man go? The answer is, He stayed with Abraham and is the reason the story tells us, "...but Abraham stood yet before the Lord." Genesis 18:22

Abraham never asked these men who they were, nor are there any introductions. Why? Because Abraham knew he was in the presence of God, in a very special way. Abraham was one of God's sheep; and he not only knew God's voice, he recognized Him from a distance! Abraham had such a special relationship with God that God actually talked with Abraham in a form which resembled a man. Now most people readily accept that an angel can do this but not that God does! However, this is not unlike what Adam and Eve experienced in the garden. Genesis tells us, even after they had taken of the fruit, "...they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day:..." Genesis 3:8 Now, I know there are many people who would disagree God ever walked on the planet in this way, especially after that Genesis story; but Abraham's story begs to differ. Of course, God was not in the flesh in the way Jesus came to this earth, and that difference is certainly part of the point I am driving at here. Unfortunately, I don't have the space to go too deep into that, but suffice it to say that when Jesus came to this earth, He did not just come in the form of a man. Jesus came in actual human flesh just as we are in flesh. This is part of the reason why He was born as a baby as

opposed to just appearing as a man like the three men did in Abraham's day. Jesus came this way because it was another way for God to come directly to us without His holiness consuming every man who was not prepared to stand before a perfect God. Flesh is temporal; and therefore, we say "mortal." The Tree of Life could have sustained this flesh indefinitely; but as we talked about earlier, even from the beginning, we find it did not have to. Jesus coming in the flesh gave man a chance to touch God in the most physical way possible and not be killed. This dynamic is so powerful, it even gave God the opportunity to be tempted in the way we are tempted by sin. (Heb. 4:14-15) This is why Satan came to Jesus, after Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights, to take his best shot at getting Jesus to sin. This would have been an amazing victory for Satan, but it did not work. (Matt. 4:1-11)

The real proof that God coming in the flesh was God putting Himself on more of an equal footing with us is the simple fact a cross and nails were able to take Jesus' life. Sure, we could have been easily stopped from killing Jesus' body, but God utilizing His power to overcome us or judge our actions was not the point of Jesus being born in the flesh. Being vulnerable to the same kind of things we are vulnerable to was the point. Jesus was here to stand among us just as any of us stand; but being God Himself, He was offering us something very special! God was offering Himself to physically be our King and Lord in a way which was more tangible than even what Abraham experi-

enced that day. Jesus was powerful but still mortal. Jesus was not going to force Himself on anyone, but the opportunity He presented was astonishing! This is why when the time was right, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem being proclaimed as the Son of David and, therefore, the rightful King of the Jewish nation. That was on the tenth day of the first month of the Biblical calendar. However, by the evening of the fourteenth - which is Passover - He had willingly given His life on the cross instead. From there, what we need to understand is the truth of Hebrews 9, where we are told in the twenty-seventh verse, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment..." Because Jesus lived this life in the flesh as a man, and did it in perfection, the judgment part was no problem. Jesus simply got up and walked away from the tomb they had laid Him in; and they did not even know it until the morning of the sixteenth - which is First-fruits. This process is why we say Jesus has defeated death, hell and the grave. In doing what He did, He has proven the ultimate point: and that is the fact death is no problem for God! This is true even when death is presented to God Himself! He has gone through what He allows us to go through by taking us away from The Tree of Life; and He, in doing so, has proven we cannot only live again, but ultimately, God can use death as a way to lift the veil from our inability to stand before His presence and not fear death!

This should change our perspective on how we walk this life, even though, for now, it remains true that we physically walk this world in sinful flesh which will have to be shed someday. As we do, we must do what every human has done. We must use this time to choose if God is what we want in our lives. The question is still the same as it was in the garden, but the time is much shorter than it would have been. Do we want to have access to the presence of God in the way pre-fall man did? Do we want to utilize that access to live for the purpose we were created to live? If the answer is yes, God has shown us the way. If our answer is no, there is no reason for us to go anywhere after this life besides a place where we will never be able to stand in the presence of God again!

Abraham knew God was walking by. Moses was able to go into the mountain and meet with the presence of God. Disciples recognized Jesus for who He was and gave up everything to follow after Him. These men had tremendous opportunities to walk with God; but since there is no longer a Garden of Eden, what if God never walks by our tent? What if God never comes to a mountain during our lifetime? How do we know God? How do we hear His voice? There, of course, is the fact that in some cases, men in the Bible were listening to a prophet. These men of God often were the source of kings hearing God's direction. However, this comes with a danger. There is a story

in I Kings 13 which tells of a time, after the kingdom of Israel was split into North and South, when God sent a prophet from the Southern Kingdom of Judah to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This prophet was to tell the king of Israel that his ways were evil. Now, God had instructed the prophet not to eat bread or even drink water while he was in Israel. The prophet was to go up by one path and take another path back home to Judah. This prophet did what he was supposed to do in that he went, delivered his message, and turned to go back by a different way, not eating or drinking the whole time. However, there was another prophet which already lived in the place where the first prophet had been sent. When this other prophet heard that a man of God had come from Judah, he had his sons saddle his ass; and he found the prophet from Judah as he was returning home. Then he told the prophet from Judah that God had spoken to him by an angel and told him to bring the prophet from Judah back to his house. Unfortunately, the prophet from Judah believed this prophet and returned and ate a meal with him. As they were eating that meal, the lying prophet stood up and prophesied against the prophet from Judah about his disobedience: in that he had eaten and drank in Israel. He prophesied that the prophet from Judah would not be laid with his fathers when he died because of this disobedience. After the meal, the prophet from Judah left the house to return home and a lion met him in the way, slew him, and his body was buried in Israel by the prophet who had lied to him!

The bottom line of all these stories, and many more in the Bible, is that each individual must have a personal relationship with God in order to know what they are hearing is from God. This fact is one of the things which would have been different if we had never fallen into sin. When Eve met Satan in the garden, she did not mistake him for God, or think he was speaking in the authority of God. This is - in no small part - due to the fact, it would have made no sense for Satan to have attempted to fool her in that way. If there was one thing Eve knew, it was the presence of God. She did not listen to God very well, and she ultimately did not obey God's instructions; but it was in no way because she thought she was somehow doing something God wanted or had changed His mind about! Today, the devil gets away with a great deal of things, including getting people to think he is speaking in the name of the Lord. If a prophet of Israel lied and got a prophet of Judah to believe such a thing, you know the devil must be good at it. Our true line of defense against this is the fact that if we call on the name of the Lord, He is there, (Rom. 10:12-13) and if we draw close unto Him, He will draw close unto us! (Jam. 4:7-10) The truth is that God has not left us nor forsaken us just because we may not be able to walk physically with Him anytime we want! (Heb. 13:5) This is why Jesus told us God's sheep know His voice! (John 10:27-28)

What is true of every person who has ever known right off it was God speaking to them is, they had built a relationship.

Doing that takes effort on our part, and that has not changed from the day God created Adam to the very day you are reading these words. The more we are willing to sanctify our lives before God, the closer and more sure we can be that what we are doing and what we are following is the true Words of God! In fact, a relationship with God is so important that the Bible even uses a special word for it, and that word is "Faith." The Bible tells us, without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) Nothing takes us back to the basics of creation more than that; but how does faith come? "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

The only way to build a relationship with God is by hearing the Words of God. This is what Adam and Eve had the chance to do in a very physical way; but even after the fall, we see men coming to a place where God speaks to them in a very physical way. How did they do this? By knowing the lesson Elijah was given. One day Elijah went off to those same mountains where God spoke to the children of Israel and gave Moses the law. God asked him what he was doing there? Elijah's answer was that he greatly desired the things of God, but the children of Israel had destroyed the things of God. They had torn down God's alters; they had killed all the prophets until Elijah felt he was the only one left; and to top it all off, they even desired to kill Elijah! Elijah couldn't see how anyone would ever

know God again with all this seeming to be true! So, God instructed Elijah to go out of the cave where he was hiding. Suddenly, there was a great wind that "...rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks..." but the Lord was not in the wind. Immediately following that, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After that there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire! Then Elijah heard something. It was still and it was small. It was a voice! It was God's voice! (I Kings 19:1-18)

If He wants to, God can break rocks with the wind, If He wants to, He can send earthquakes and fire. God can do anything, but He chooses to commune with those who love and desire Him. It does not matter how alone you may feel at times. It does not matter how hopeless life's circumstances may seem. Nothing is the way it is because the God we serve is too small to change it all in the blink of an eye. However, His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. (Isa. 55:9) God's intentions for our existence are much higher than anything of this life, but we have to seek it. Don't get frustrated as you study God's Word, no matter how much you may believe you just aren't getting it. God gave us a written Word so that no matter the events of our lives, we can always hear His voice and receive the still calmness it can bring!

Let's stay in God's Word!

