

Shaqah

*“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*

Step Into the Springs!

It is never my intent to write a purely political article. However, it's an inescapable truth that so much of what goes on in the political arena has direct relationship to the Bible. Today, this fact is, once again, blatantly in front of us, as we see people in different parts of our world attempting to gain more say in the government systems which rule over them. While some have found what they feel is great success, the true outcome of what they have actually found remains to be seen.

Many long centuries ago, God sent His Son to this earth, and His work shows us why ideas even such as democracy are not going to be the salvation of this world. Jesus came as the King of the Jews, (Matt. 2:1-2) and to offer Himself to this world as the answer to the problems man's systems create. (Mark 1:1-3, Luke 19:28-42) If accepted, Jesus could have shown the world what a true and pure leader could accomplish if man was only willing to follow. Thus, He offered Himself, and allowed the world to do as they pleased with what He offered. What the gospels record for us is the democratic result!

Instead of becoming the ruler Who brought true peace and stability to a world which needed it so badly, Jesus was killed by the superpower of the day. This happened not because Jesus was considered a threat to their power, but because they would not even bother to spare his life by enforcing the laws man claimed to believe in. Pilot said, "I find no fault in this man." but Pilot not only allowed the will of what he perceived to be the majority that day, he directed his own soldiers to carry out the death sentence. It doesn't get more democratic than that!

People often want to make this issue an argument about whether the Jews were to blame for Jesus' death, or the Gentiles. The truth of the matter is that it was not fully one nor the other. The reason Jesus went to the cross was because the world, as a majority, did not embrace the most spectacular human to ever walk this planet, as the undisputed champion of mankind's greatest needs! They did not see the most peace loving man the world has ever known as the best leader they could ever imagine. This, in spite of the fact He carried with Him the miraculous ability to provide food from little or

nothing, calm violent weather, heal all illness, and even overcome death! Instead, the will of the people was to crucify Jesus!

Right now, and really ever since its inception, the world has grown in its love for self-governing ideas such as democracy. People often think of democracy as freedom and liberty, but it's not this for all people involved, if the majority say it's not. You see, the outcome of any democracy will depend on the kind of people who are casting the vote and making the decisions. Only if people are true lovers of peace, mercy, and justice, will a democracy stand a chance at being something good. Only if the base laws of a democracy affirm and guarantee freedoms for all, simply limited by the need for justice, does a democracy offer the opportunity for people to maintain a free and just society. However, democracy is never a guarantee, because democracy is nothing more than the will of the majority. No matter what laws are made at any time, it still depends on what the majority wants in each election, and in each generation.

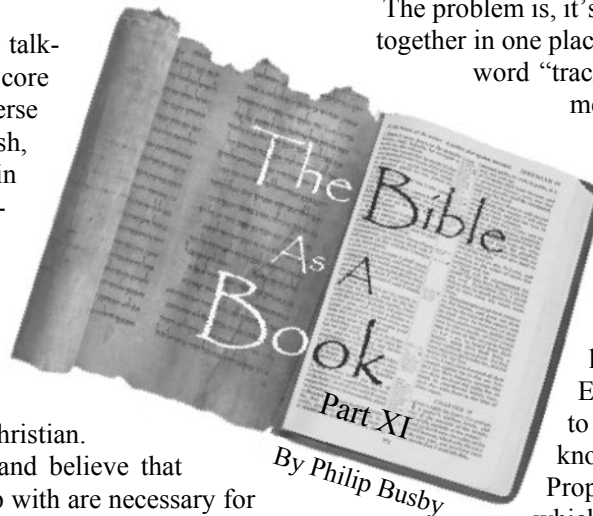
Jesus, speaking of what will happen in the days leading up to, and including His return, said, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Matthew 24:34 Almost two thousand years may have passed since Jesus was hung on a cross, and by man's reckoning many generations have come and gone. However, that is the point! Looking at man's reckoning is a mistake. What Jesus was pointing out is that the same generational thought pattern which rejected Jesus the first time will persist and culminate in the need for His return.

The preacher of Ecclesiastes tells us, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." Ecclesiastes 1:9 Never put your hope in the systems of man. Democracy will not save nor calm this world. Why? Because this world still gropes in the darkness of ignorance to what it truly needs, just as it did the first time Jesus walked this earth. Simply put, democracy is the will of man; and what this world needs is the will of God!

I ended our last segment by talking about the fact the Torah is the core of the Bible we should all immerse ourselves in. If we are non-Jewish, this is not because we should begin to use the law as a religious practice. This fallacy of wanting religious practice instead of actual righteousness is what has led men, who claim to be followers of Jesus, to create “new” church ceremonies and rituals which they believe are important to being a Christian. They also go so far as to teach and believe that many of these rituals they come up with are necessary for salvation. However, as we talked about last time, this is the wrong reason the Torah is specifically important even to the non-Jew. It's not about building religious practice, it's about learning the foundation upon which the rest of the Word is based, and applying the righteousness it teaches, to our personal lives.

Immersing ourselves in the way the Jewish culture was to be setup is the only way we can hope to understand what follows in the remainder of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Only in understanding what the Jews were supposed to be doing in the first place, do we understand what God was telling them about what and how they had went wrong in latter times. It's only by understanding what the Jewish nation was established to do and look like that we come to an understanding of why God took the actions He did in different situations throughout their history. I mentioned before that getting the ceremonies of the law correct was/is more important than doing them at all. This, mainly because the ceremony is not what saves any person, not even the Jew. Instead, they teach us the path of salvation.

If the ceremony is done wrong, the Jewish nation could be no more benefit to the world than any man-made pagan culture and religion. If God was going to give religious practice which taught righteousness, He needed a people who would follow with strict adherence, so when they are pointed to for an example, the object lesson we see lines up with what God truly has at work. If we look at the story of the Hebrew Bible, we see it was rare that the Jewish nation ever had the ceremonies fully in place and just the way it should have been. This leads us to an understanding of why God had to take the actions He took, and still shows us the major point the whole exercise was meant to show in the first place. The Jews are the chosen people of God! While other people and cultures get away with downright egregious actions, God's judgment resided over what Israel did/does at all times. “Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore. For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.” Psalms 37:27-28 What we see by reading Scriptures such as this one, is the truth that God is merciful yet judges those who serve Him because if He did not, we would never learn the way! (I Pe. 4:14-19)



The problem is, it's difficult to get a large group of people together in one place and keep them on one track. I use the word “track” because a track is a set course and meant to be followed. That is the point of giving Israel an exemplifying law to perform. It was not an improvising kind of thing. It was not a “changing with the times” idea. It was a set course which year after year, and century after century, was meant to be done just the way it was laid out to Moses in and by the Torah. Every year and every generation was/is to maintain the ceremony and strive to know how to do it in its purest form. Prophecy about judgment and actual events which caused Israel grief, are seen over and over because over and over new generations of Israelites had trouble staying that course.

The problem of it being difficult for groups of people to stay on a set course is clearly shown in the church as well. There was understandings of past generations which came from using God's Word for the lessons it teaches, and which caused righteous standards to be set in many churches. People followed these standards, but because many did not maintain the Bible-based teaching and reasons for these standards, some, if not all of them, fell mostly out of use. One might ask why people do not at least stick to them simply because they are tradition? Well, that's a good question, and the answer is that some people do; but if the true meaning of the standard gets lost, it's easy for those who are not so willing to stay with tradition to accuse those who do of being backward or stagnant.

The other aspect of this is that the righteousness of God is always in conflict with the sinful ways of the world. This makes following righteousness not the most comfortable thing to do, and it's certainly not going to follow with what is popular year by year. People want to be in the “in crowd.” They want to be up with what's new or at least what they perceive as new. They are easily swayed by being told they are being left behind in old, stale teaching when there is new understanding to be had. This kind of accusation is exactly what we talked about earlier in this study when talking about the reasons people came to call the Bible, “Old” and “New” Testaments. It's true that older does not directly equate to better; but as we learn the truth, we should be willing to shed wrong practices no matter their age. The practice of simply replacing older ways because there is something new and more popular to be had, is no more the right way to go about growing in righteousness, than constantly sticking with older practices just because they are old. God wants us to grow, which is a building process, not one of constantly replacing one thing with another. The nation of Israel shows us this, and that is why so many false teachers want to convince us the Jews are just stuck in the past!

Through the history of Israel, we see that a new king, or the fact there now was a king, instead of the original - no king - way Israel was established, would change many things. At times, the people would integrate pagan cultural practices of

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip Busby

As we come to verse 7 of the ninth chapter of Genesis, we see an end cap statement to what we have been studying. Verse 7 is not word for word what God said in verse 1 of this chapter, but it's close. In-between the two verses, God told Noah and his sons that they could now use the animals for food. He also laid out the ramifications of this change to them. Most of us today think little about this change of man going from pure vegetarian to being given permission to eat meat. However, for Noah and his family, who had never likely violated the no meat instructions of God, this had to seem a very big change!

Remember, Noah and his family had just come through a very traumatic event. There are many people who might not even be able to handle such a drastic change in their lives. People living in the early days of the United States often left everything they knew to go west, where there were vast parcels of land they could claim as their own if they could farm it and use it. Some Americans never wanted to have any part of this activity, because the thought of leaving what they knew as civilization to go out into the great unknown was just too daunting. Others excitedly went, only to turn back after realizing just what a thing they had gotten themselves into. Some never turned back, but did not survive the experience for various reasons. Leaving your comfort zone and those things you depend on, the daily routine and stability of what you're used to, especially to go into a vast unknown circumstance where much of even your everyday life must be improvised for a time, can be more than some can handle!

Noah and his family did not just leave a place they knew in order to go out and try their hand at something different. They did not just go a distance from what they thought of as home, with the ability to turn back if they changed their minds. It was not just that they had to meet new people and build new relationships with strangers. Noah and his family were the only humans in the world, and no matter where they roamed, home no longer existed! Now, unlike Adam and Eve, Noah and his family had not been placed in a garden. They also were not recently created. They knew what had led up to them being the only people on the earth, and all of this could have been absolutely paralyzing to think about. If there was ever a moment when it might seem to make sense that one should just find a small place to curl up and wait for death, this was the moment; but God did not want that to happen. The fact they had seen a world where man had gotten so bad God had to wipe the planet clean, was reason to think maybe man should stop living. God had to make it clear and does make it clear in His Word, that living is what He wants us to do. It may be devastating to think about how

bad man has messed up this world. At times, it may seem hopeless, knowing it's all going downhill, until one day God will put an end to it for good; but we must never lose track of the fact, living is what God created us to do. It's sin which is the orchestrator of death, and God who brings life! (Rom. 6:23)

Does this mean we will live in the same manner as the rest of the world? Absolutely not! First, we should know where and when we live. It's foolish for the true believer to build things here which we believe are going to last forever. It's foolish to live our lives as if this is the only shot we are going to get at living. The true believer knows eternal life lies beyond the death of our present physical forms. However, if we respect life, we should be drawn daily to a desire to live and promote righteousness, because we know unrighteousness is what causes devastation in and of life. It's not the job of the one who knows God to lie down and simply wait for death. It's the job of those who know God to continue telling of what true life can bring. While here in this world, this does not mean we will be happy all the time. It certainly does not mean our flesh will be satisfied; but we should seek to live for, and before God everyday, being careful not to entangle ourselves with the things of this world. (II Tim. 2:1-5) Remember, communion with God - is life - in its purest form! (John 14:5-7)

We see in Noah's life the fact our physical comfort is not necessarily part of the scenario here in this world of sin. Noah had just taken a very hard ride to get to the other side of this flood. Now, God was telling him something which they were previously not allowed to do, was something which might be necessary for their future survival. The animals would be hostile and their death would be a part of man's life. It had to be somewhat discouraging to see - right out of the gate - that the flood had not solved the world's problems. While it had cleaned the earth of sinful man's corruption, it was another step down on the path to this world's inevitable end. Life had just gotten harder, and it's likely that Noah and his family wondered if the next devastating event might lay just around the bend. God wanted it to be clear, to them, and to future generations which might judge them, God was the one who said the world was still theirs for the using. Man was still the being for which this was all made. God would not have given the plan of building the ark and sending Noah through the flood if this were not true. Noah was not to lay down and die. He was to be fruitful. His family was still free to multiply, and these two things went hand in hand with God's desire that humans still take advantage of the world He had made.

It's interesting how personal God makes verse 7 even though there was almost no one else He could be talking about. God says, "And you..." God wanted the one righteous man who was alive on the earth to be fruitful, and God is not just talking about building a house or planting crops. God is telling Noah, he is the one who can set the agenda for where man goes from here. Just as Cain went out from the presence of God and built not just a city, but the concept of city and government rule, Noah had the opportunity to lead mankind in a direction more reflective of what God wanted man to be from the start. Noah was the patriarch of the world. As such, he needed to be fruitful in righteousness, especially as man took advantage of the fact he could still multiply and bring forth new generations!

Verse 7 is also where we see God telling man not to stay all in one clump, as Cain had taught them to. God says they should "...bring forth abundantly in the earth..." Many people take these words as meaning they should have a lot of babies, but that is not what it means. It means they should have babies in a lot of places! The next words confirm this truth. If bringing forth abundantly was about volume, the next line makes this the most repetitive verse in all the Bible, because it says, "...and multiply therein." They were not to stay in one place on the planet and there build a city. That kind of activity is what spoiled the world before the flood. God was telling them to go out into the world and use it to do the activities of their lives. As they spread out over the face of the globe, it would be in those places where they could have their families. Multiplying should not be the focus of their lives just because it was not prohibited; and staying in a safety zone altogether, was not the right plan for having children!

Today, one of the biggest worries of parents is that their children will not get enough socialization. Personally, I spent many of my school years in homeschool; and even as a child, I heard about this time and time again. People would actually feel sorry for me, and I'm not talking about just people of the world. I'm talking about people in the church. Even ministers at times! People are obsessed with socialization. Instead of seeing socializing as one of the activities people do in life, many people look at socializing as life. It's scary just how obsessed we are with being with other humans, yet think nothing of ignoring God altogether, when God is the One we were created to commune with! While people believe socialization is so important, they completely overlook the damage socialization among humans can and often does bring. Especially, when it is forced upon us! We think we know the answers to all life's problems, but just look at the way school turns out. School was not established to socialize our children. Children go to school to learn how to read, write, do arithmetic, and the like. This seems to be lost on many people in spite of the fact today's schools are in a constant struggle with how to keep kids from joining gangs, abusing substances, and being bullied - quite violently, I might add!

How do we protect those who, for reasons we cannot explain, just don't "fit in"? It's not that they're "socially retarded," as many people like to claim of those who are not part of a large social group growing up. These kids are right in there because their parents don't want them to be that! So, what is the problem? The problem is that humans, no matter how much they say it with their mouths, don't really want to accept the truth that people are diverse and complex. While some personalities get along very well in certain settings, others are very uncomfortable, and do not fit the puzzle society is trying to put together. Society wants and even demands that people be part of a herd, and it's shocking to me that so many who claim to be Bible believers don't see this as obvious! Especially, considering the fact sin ends up ruining what little moral benefit such a system can bring.

The bottom line is, people want to stick together because they don't want to depend on God and commune with Him. A relationship with God which is personal and real is just not something people obtain and value on a regular basis. Even many people who claim to be Christians would have no idea how to live if they did not have a church of some kind as their focal point for serving and knowing God. This is contrary to God's Word. All people will be affected by those around them; and thus, we should not let all those people be unbelievers if we do not have to. That being said, we cannot make being together our focus, because socialization is not the goal. Church is for sharpening one another and admonishing one another in love. If people make it a focus instead of a possible enhancement to their already existing walk with God, it becomes very worldly. When worldly society talks about socialization, they are not talking about righteousness. They are talking about forcing people to adapt to whatever society decides they should be in order to be of value to the group as a whole. Men love this, and that is why very shortly following these verses in Genesis chapter 9, man turns to building a tower and a city.

God wanted the people of Noah's family to be willing to break this trend and go out away from those activities which bring about the sinful social pressures society creates, so they could learn what God wanted for their individual lives. Every human has value, and it does not matter if you see that value or not - it's true! It does not matter if the person fits well into this social group or another. It doesn't matter if they don't seem to fit into any social group you know of. Each individual is exactly that, an individual. Their value does not derive from what they lend to a group, it lies in the fact they are created by God as an individual!

As we go into verse 8, we find ourselves back in familiar territory. We are about to see God tell Noah the specific part of the determination God already made in His heart. Remember when Noah was commanded to go forth from the ark with every living thing? Remember what he did first thing? Noah built an altar and sacrificed clean animals unto God. After the Bible records that action on Noah's part, the next words we read are God's determination about how He will

proceed with mankind and the earth, which differs from the course He had taken, up until then. As we talked about in covering those verses, God was not changing. God is always the same. What changes is us, and God is always doing what is best for us. Thus, as we change, God will go about using the best ways to reach us where we are. Up until the time of the flood, and through the flood, God had destroyed or affected the earth in order to get man's attention off this fleshly world and onto what He created us for in the first place.

What we see in the previous verses after or during Noah's sacrificing, and before God specifically starts to talk to Noah and His family, are words which tell us God's thoughts. What we are going to see in the next few verses, starting in verse 8, is what God directly told Noah about these determinations. This has relationship to something God told Daniel. Daniel was greatly beloved of God, and he had sought to know all there was to know about the future of man, and more specifically the Jewish people. God didn't want Daniel to think it had anything to do with not fasting long enough or seeking hard enough. Daniel had brought his body to the brink of sickness and maybe even death with the fasting and seeking he had already done. Daniel would have done more if it was possible, but God told Daniel he had seen enough. There is a time for everything, and Daniel had seen everything which could be revealed up to that point. (Dan. 12:1-13)

The earlier words about what God said in His heart, after the flood, were revealed to Moses as God gave His written Word to be preserved by the Jewish nation. That is why we have them today, and it's important that we read them. However, at the time of Noah there was only a small part, or aspect, to these determinations of God, revealed to Noah. The following verses are what Noah needed to know and what Noah, or more importantly, those who came after him, for a time, could handle or was best for them to know! In chapter 8 verse 21, God determines He will never again smite every living thing. God will never again bring world-wide destruction in order to get man's attention, or correct man's course. Man will do what he does, God will interact without taking away man's free will; and if the end of all flesh truly comes before God again, as it did before the flood, then it comes. When it does, God will not "smite" every living thing; He will simply bring this world to an end.

Verse 8 of chapter 9 tells us God spoke to Noah directly, and Noah's sons bear witness to this because they were still right there with their father. Verse 9 starts us into the actual words. God says He will "establish" a "covenant" with all mankind, starting with Noah and radiating out to all future people. Again, we have come to that issue of talking about how so many are familiar with the covenant, or at least the fact there is a covenant God made with Abraham and his seed. However, very few are keenly aware of the fact the covenant with Abraham specifically through Isaac, to Jacob,

which was solidified and specified at the time of Moses, is actually a covenant inside a covenant!

Some of us remember singing that little song in Bible class about Father Abraham having many sons. "I am one of them and so are you..." Church people love to debate who is of father Abraham and who is not or has been rejected, but there is no disputing that we are all sons of Noah. It simply does not matter what you subscribe to or don't for that matter. It does not matter what god, kind of god, or no god you believe in. The covenant God is establishing with Noah in these verses applies to you, and it doesn't stop there! Verse 10 makes it clear the covenant also applies to the animals. With every animal which rode with Noah on that ark, and every animal which lives on the earth, God is establishing the same covenant!

Why would God make a covenant which included the animals? Well, it shows us again, life is a precious thing! Just because animals are not humans, it does not mean they are out of the care and consideration of God. It was important for God to remind humans of this in light of the fact human/animal relationship had just changed. In setting man's course, God was not just considering human life, but the world as a whole. This is emphasized when we look at the fact the flood had not destroyed all the plant life in the way it had the animals. Plants are meant to go dormant, spread seed, be cut back, and still survive. Plant life was greatly disturbed, to say the least, but not truly cut off like the animals which would not have survived without the ark. That being said, we know from God's determination we were told earlier that seed time and harvest would continue, and God would not continue to curse the ground for man's sake. (Gen. 8:21-22) Thus, God's determination is really about all life on this planet.

God created man with a free will, but there had been something lost in the minds of men. In fact, the root of many problems today as people walk through life knowing God exists, is that many still miss this simple piece of information. God has a free will as well! This may come as a shock to some, but what makes God perfect is not that He is restrained by some cosmic cords of perfection. What makes God holy is not that He cannot interact with other things. God is Holy because He maintains Holiness. God is perfect because He has never done anything wrong. God may have given man a free will to do what he desires in this universe, but God never said He wouldn't interact with man. Even exerting His will at times. The flood clearly shows us this.

Now, it's true that if God came down and totally exerted His will on us, we would be overwhelmed in an instant. Thus, God is not going to do this because God is perfect, and doing this would not be fair to the fact we have a free will. The issue of God being able to exert His will on a creature He created with a free will is complex, and not one we may see clearly. However, having an understanding that God can exert His will on us actually brings us to think about the free

choices man made and makes, in spite of what God asks. God wanted man to go out over the world and live his life, but man chooses to stay clumped together. In doing this, man chose to exert human will not just contrary to God's will, but over other humans. Man chose a path of rulership of men over other men. Man desires a king instead of taking everything to God. We see this in the establishment of Israel, as God did not give them a king, but knew they would desire one eventually. (Deut. 17:14-15, I Sam. 8:6-10) By taking this path, man, by his free will, has opened the door for God to interact in ways He may never have done under different circumstances!

What makes this point interesting is that God wanted us to interact with Him in the first place. It was, and still is, His greatest desire we come before Him and commune with Him. In fact, it's the path of salvation that we take advantage of the relationship (faith) He is offering each of us as individuals. (Eph. 2:8-9) However, man chooses to set up a society where much individual thinking and action is inhibited by the rule of the group, or top individuals. They did this just as Cain had done it. They wanted to inhibit God from interacting with man, and they did not think about this covenant God made with Noah and all of us, including the animals. Instead of sending God further away from man in general, their actions set-up a circumstance where God had the opportunity, even the obligation to be more directly interactive. Because God set us up to be free, and other men believe they can take that away from the individual, combined with the fact individuals yield their free will so easily to other men who have no right to take it, it becomes God's righteous responsibility to step in from time to time and in certain ways! We certainly see this at the Tower of Babel, as well as the rekindling of that beast - which were the empires such as Assyria, Babylonia, etc. You may recall that Babylon fell to the Meds and Persians the very night God's handwriting was on the wall! (Dan. 5:1-31)

If you subscribe to dispensational teaching, you likely believe, or are at least familiar with the idea that after the fall in the garden, and before the flood, man lived in a dispensation of "conscience." This is to say man had no direction save the knowledge of good and evil he received by taking the fruit. People should be skeptical about the idea that after the flood this teaching says we moved into a dispensation of civil government, which is not much different, because man was still just doing what he thought was right, for the most part. Why would God send such a major event such as the flood, and then let there be such a considerable time before He enacts what the teaching calls the dispensation of "law"? This question comes about because we are looking at it as if God only interacts with us once and a great while, then leaves us on our own in-between. God never wanted man to take of the fruit, but man did. Because of this, God set curses in place to help man remember that he had made a mistake. Not just in taking of the fruit, but in hiding from God when

He came to them afterward. Man needed to seek God more and more in order to get back that closeness he had lost. He needed to make the effort to show he desired righteousness, and that desire would have brought God back to each of us to teach us once again. Man was not simply left to his conscience. Just look at the story of Cain and Abel! (Gen. 4:1-16) The world followed the course it did because man turned away from God, and rejected God. Even setting up things he thought would keep God out of his life!

We should be clear on the fact man was not just groping in the darkness doing what he could with what little he had left after falling into sin, and again after the flood. Teaching a dispensation and calling it "conscience" is basically accusing God of leaving us on our own, instead of taking the responsibility for the mess we choose to make! When man's ways finally brought the world to such an intolerable place of total corruption, God was forced to act! He did not send the flood because there was anyone asking Him to. He sent it, because just as His Holiness caused Him to draw further and further away due to the fact man did not call upon Him, His Righteousness would cause Him to act when man had gone too far in destroying each other, and life in general on this planet! Thus, God destroyed the world and all man had made on and in it. After that was done, God's righteousness determined it could not be done again, and this brought about the covenant of Noah!

This covenant is not just to say God will never again wipe the world clean; thus, man has a free ticket to be as corrupted as he pleases this time around. It's because God is not willing to ever again wipe the world clean, and start again with just a handful of people who chose His path of survival. God will never allow it to come to that place of corruption again without doing things which stave it off! This is the reason there was a covenant made with Abraham. God established a nation which He could directly interact with the world through, and Jesus is a part of that story. In the end, Jesus will come back to sit as the direct ruler of that nation, and rule the world from Jerusalem. The devil will have no part in this for a thousand years; but when he is loosed again, he gathers men to attempt the same failed act which brought about the flood, the covenants, and specifically Jesus' return in the first place. Thus, the change which takes place after that will need to be, and will be, monumental! (Rev. 20:7-21:4)

Until next time, Shalom!

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the nations around them, or simply go over to those practices instead of the feast days God laid out. They would forget the Torah and the fact that, if nothing else, the practices God gave had historical meaning to them as a people. This is what got Israel in trouble time and again, along with simple complacency which leads to backsliding on things you once did with fervor! Adopting pagan or worldly practices, as so many churches still fall to today, is certainly not the way to go. Pagan practices can always morph and change, even if all it does is follow in a circle until what was old is new again! This cannot happen with the ways of God. Again, God wants us to grow, not just wander around in circles; but no matter where we are in the growth process, it's all founded on the same basis, which is what the Torah gives us. This will never change, and the Torah's principles become no less important to us, no matter how much we grow.

Israel was not, and is not, the ones wandering in circles, or stuck in the past. Because it's difficult to get and keep a large number of people on track with the truth, Israel has experienced many setbacks. The word "setback" is actually a very good description, because if they were going to get things right, after jumping off the track, they needed to go back to the beginning and rebuild their lives and nation using those things they were originally commanded. This is what any true believer studying God's Word has the opportunity to do, by reading the Torah. If we just read the latter parts of the Bible, all we see is the result of many mistakes made, and what God had to do to correct or deal with the fact man makes so many mistakes along the way. This truth starts right up front with what happened to Adam and Eve. It's the reason we have to keep going back and referring to that story, time and again. What God originally wanted is still where true believers are heading, but it's not why we have the world we have today. Understanding starts with knowing how God creates us in the first place, and then seeing how we have inhibited things, to put it mildly!

What the nation of Israel is experiencing in these latter days is not rejection, but a time of prolonged exertion which is causing there to be a deep and heartfelt longing for what they should have. We should understand, God is constantly working to mold a people who will be serious about performing His laws. This is also something we see right up front when looking at Israel's establishment. In the Torah, we see Israel wandered in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years past the time they originally needed to spend traveling through. They did not, as a majority, trust that God could give them the land they had been brought out of Egypt to obtain. Many believed it would have been better to stay in Egypt than to come out into these circumstances which they felt would lead to certain death! Because of this, God said they would wander until the generation which might have reason to long for Egypt was gone. (Num. 14:26-35) It would be their children, who only remembered Egypt as their childhood, or never knew it at all, which would go into the promised land. The memory of those left would mostly or completely be of the time spent in the wilderness, and those would not be good times. God needed a people who, instead of saying, "We'd rather go back to Egypt

than risk our lives going into Canaan," would say, "I'd rather risk my life going into Canaan than to stay in the wilderness any longer." This would give God the opportunity to show them they were not risking their lives if they put their trust in Him, because walls, such as Jericho's, could fall without a shot fired! (Josh. 6:20)

Plain and simple, these stories and the understanding they bring have applicability to all believers whether Jew or non-Jew. We may never fight the battle of Jericho in order to enter a physical promised land, but there are plenty of things which need to come down in our lives! The Word was not just given to the Jew, but through the Jew, to all those who seek righteousness and the will of God. We understand what is happening to the children of Israel and why, by looking at the Torah which shows us what they should look like. This helps us see what God is attempting to do in our lives, and why we get the responses we get. People like to complain that God, at least sometimes, doesn't make sense. People have even written books on the subject. However, if we would spend the time to learn what God wanted out of His chosen nation, then look at the result due to their following or not following what God said, we would see more clearly how God operates, judges, and why!

Having the opportunity to specifically study the Torah and get a picture of what God instructed Israel to do and look like, is a unique opportunity. It's also why so many people wrongly think they can judge the Jewish nation for not looking like they should in so many ways and at so many times. Most of us don't really have much of a clue, especially those young in the Lord, what our lives should look like. We often feel lost because we feel like someone trying to put together a puzzle without knowing what the picture is supposed to be. However, knowing the picture is not the point. The journey with God is the point!

I have certainly annoyed my fair share of people by correcting them when they say Adam and Eve were created in perfection, but it's simply not the case. I don't even understand why believers say such a thing, considering Adam and Eve didn't make it very far before they did the one thing they were told not to do! If they had been perfect, they would not have done this at all. Jesus showed us this when He walked this earth! (I John 3:1-8) Adam and Eve were created in innocence, not perfection. This means they did not have a lot of knowledge; therefore, they were not responsible for it; therefore, there was little they could do to sin. (James 4:17) This is what God wanted for us. He wanted us not to worry about the picture or how long it took us to put it together. God wanted us to just enjoy the journey of learning and growing with Him. It seems like in today's world, if people even begin to nibble at this truth, they are often and immediately thrown off course by the false idea that because sin complicated our lives, the puzzle no longer matters at all. "We'll never be perfect again, so why try?" and "I don't have to worry about what my flesh does because I'm living in the freedom of the spirit!" are things people think and say. They stop putting the puzzle together because, A. they don't know what the picture is, B. they realize we will never finish it in this flesh; and C. because it's true we

don't need to worry about those facts, people believe it all translates into, "Striving for God's righteousness is unnecessary in this life," or "has no value!" In truth, that is the value of our lives, and it always has been! I have often wondered how many people will be told to depart from God on Judgment Day because they thought they were "saved" by a sinner's prayer, and they just cared nothing for how they lived or about maintaining a continual personal relationship with God from there?

For at least the here and now, and for the people as a nation, the Jews were given a picture of what the completed puzzle was to look like and be maintained as. Again, this brings us to the reason so many people believe they can judge Israel, and it plays a part in why God has had to deal with Israel so harshly over the centuries. God gave His Word - including the Torah - through the Jewish nation, to the entire world. Thus, everyone who reads God's Word can also know a lot about what the nation is supposed to look like! What people do not realize is that they should be thankful, not judgmental, about the fact they were not given such a tough job. What we need to do is look at the example, and then turn back to our own lives to see where we are going wrong. Now thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, we are assured that we do not have to complete the puzzle or even a large percentage of it, in order to be saved from this life of sin. (Gal. 3:21-29) However, if we have no interest in at least working on the puzzle, which is what our existence and life is about, there is no need for us to go on after physical death ends things here. Being what God wants us to be is the only real reason for living in the here and now. If we don't care about it in the here and now, what reason is there to go to the place where that is the complete focus of existence? The answer is simple. There isn't!

Now, a question all this understanding brings us down to is, as a non-Jew, who is not performing the actual religious practices of the Law, and who does not physically share even the historical meaning of many of these laws, where do we go to see the foundation and starting line of our specific course? The answer to that is simply found by following the Torah back to where Israel began! I have talked a lot about the fact not everyone who desires the ways of God has ever been asked to go and be a part of Israel proper; and it certainly is not that other groups of people, whether claiming to be God's people or not, should try to mimic the Jewish law. This is true, not just because it's something God tells us is not a requirement, or ever has been a requirement, for salvation. It's true because the law makes it clear there are many practices which are not even just for the Jew in general and those who sojourn with them. There are practices which are exclusive to specific tribes or groups, such as High Priests, within the nation; and things like the temple are not to be duplicated on just any hill or mountain near you! However, all that being true, the nation of Israel could not hope to be the tool God wanted them to be, if at the core of what they are supposed to be there were not the same founding principles as those all true believers should stake their lives on!

We have already covered, at least once in this study, the fact God brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Sinai Peninsula; but it's interesting to go back and see what Moses originally was sent to Pharaoh to ask for. If we pay attention to the story, we know Moses was not originally told to ask for the whole pie Israel eventually got. Moses originally went to Pharaoh asking that the children of Israel simply be allowed to go a certain distance into the wilderness so they could worship God in a clean place. (Ex. 5:1-3) This, of course, was for a couple of reasons. One, the Egyptians were renowned idol worshipers. Their land was truly contaminated by these practices. If God had come down to a place within Egypt to talk to the children of Israel, we would not say He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, there would be vehement debates about whether God gave His law to Israel or to Egypt. People would claim Israel was nothing more than a break away group from Egypt. The fact this idea needed to be shaken off right from the start, is one of the main reasons God allowed Israel to be servants in Egypt instead of just a people who lived alongside the Egyptians. Along with this confusion would also be the fact many would credit some false Egyptian entity with giving the law, instead of The One True God. We know all this is true because just the fact the Jewish nation was officially taken captive by the Babylonian Empire much later in their history, causes many people to claim Jewish culture and/or law was adopted from Babylon.

The second big reason God could not come down in a place like Egypt, is because as much as the Words God was going to give directly to Israel was for the world as a whole, it needed to come through the nation God had established for the purpose. The words had to be spoken to them first, then taken out to the world. This truth is exactly why, even many centuries later, Jesus came as a Jew, to Israel, and called Jewish men to be His disciples. He also instructed that the gospel go to Jerusalem and all Judah, then to neighboring Samaria, and then into the utter most parts of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

The Jew was to possess the Word as a caretaker. This is why we have been talking so much about the fact the Hebrew Bible should really never have been called the Old Testament, and it's important to understand the New is also Jewish. The minimum acceptable circumstances for giving the children of Israel the Word, was that they go out into the wilderness to worship God in a clean place. This, of course, was taken as a slap in the face to the Egyptians, who told Moses the Israelites could worship without leaving Egypt, but when you're wrong you're wrong. There was no way to get around the fact Egypt was not a clean place for this extraordinary event to take place. Of course, we know the end of the story is that Israel not only went out of Egypt to worship God, but they were set free from Egypt completely. However, for one moment we should stop to think about the fact God is not a manipulator. He did not make this initial offer strictly on the basis He knew Pharaoh would not take it; and this begs the question, what would have happened if Pharaoh had said yes?

Let's stay in God's Word!