

Shaqah

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*“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*

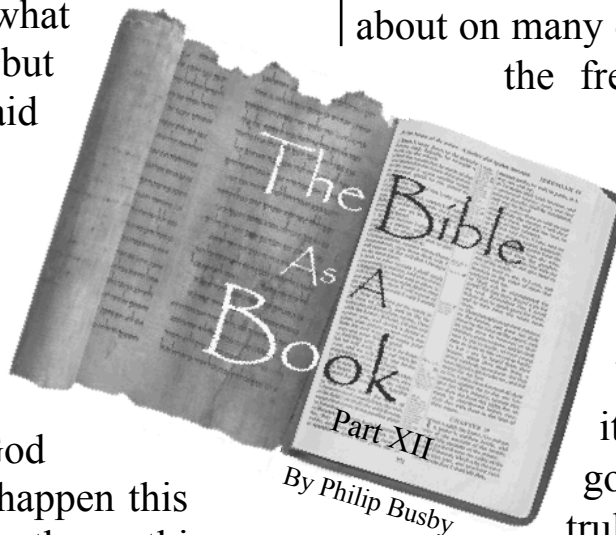
We ended last time by talking about the fact God did not send Moses to Pharaoh with the request to let the children of Israel go completely, but just that they be allowed to take a journey into the wilderness in order to worship God. Of course, we know what happened in the end; but what if Pharaoh had said yes?

At first, this question may seem like a bit of a stumper or just one which does not matter because God knew it would never happen this way. However, both these things are wrong thoughts. First, we should realize God does not set us up for failure. God did not put the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden to tempt man, (James 1:12-15) or because He knew if He did, man would certainly take from it, which is something some people believe was necessary. God put the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden to give man a choice. This is the same

reason God sent The Messiah to do the work of showing us it's possible, through God, to live again after death takes these physical forms. God holds the keys to our existence because He made us for a purpose. At the same time, as we have talked about on many occasions, we were given the freedom to choose if we

wanted that purpose or if we wanted to go our own way. All throughout scripture it's made clear, we have a choice between God and going at it on our own. However, in going our own way, we are truly on our own. By taking

of the fruit God told us not to take, we also lost access to the Tree of Life. The wages of sin are death, and it must be this way because the sin of the one or the few brings suffering to all. On the other side of things, eternal life is the gift of God, and that truly comes not from the Tree of Life, but through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)



The difference between eternal life and just living here indefinitely by taking of the Tree of Life, is that eternal life is truly eternal. In other words, permanent! Eternal life has to be something we only get if we are willing to turn from sin and allow God to guide us into His purpose for our lives. When God placed the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, it was there for anyone, no matter what man chose to do, as long as man did not totally turn from God by taking of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Again, this is simply because having the knowledge for ourselves makes us responsible for it. If God grants eternal life to just whoever wants it without judgment, we would be in much the same predicament as if, after sin, God had left us with access to the Tree of Life; and this would come with the added negative, we would have to live with sin and its consequences for eternity without a choice of any kind! Thus, God gives us a choice which allows us to go our own way and have what we desire to seek in this life, but not an automatic ticket of any kind which grants us eternal life. If we want eternal life, we must also want to obtain what God wanted for us in the beginning, because eternal life can only be granted if God's guidance and will is something we truly desire.

This truth guides what we see all through man's history and God's interaction with us! This is how we know God was not setting Pharaoh up by giving him a choice God knew Pharaoh wouldn't take. This is precisely why Moses was not instructed to ask for the people's complete

release. God gave Pharaoh a choice which may not have been comfortable, but it was one Pharaoh could see as livable. God was ready to accomplish His work through the children of Israel by committing His oracles to them, and that could not be accomplished in the land of Egypt. The best place for God to do this was out in the wilderness of Sinai where - yes - there were people, but not a truly known and historical group of people with false religious practices, which others credited to the area. This means, false gods and practices would also not be automatically credited with being the reason Israel found the Words of The One True God.

God wanted Israel to go into the Sinai Peninsula to accomplish this work, and that is all which was asked of Pharaoh. Pharaoh then had a choice which was a real choice, not one which set him up for failure. God did not ask for something which even politically was more than Pharaoh could reasonably give. Pharaoh would be questioned as to why he allowed the slaves to take a trip, but at the same time, Pharaoh was revered as a god himself. If he chose to allow the trip, surely he could ensure the Hebrews would return! Because God was serious about Israel returning, Pharaoh would be justified in his decision as his detractors watched them return. The other side of Pharaoh's choice was to do what we ultimately see him doing, which was to refuse time and again until he lost, not just the children of Israel all together, but his pride went all the way to him leading his

army into being drowned in the Red Sea! (Ex. 14) This certainly should have confirmed to Egypt their king was not a god, at the very least, not one of great power!

The point of God using the situation of Pharaoh being so stubborn, to not only release Israel from Egypt completely, but also bring much of the wealth of Egypt with them, has to do with what Paul pointed out in Romans 8:28 “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Pharaoh could have simply granted Moses’ request and allowed Israel to go into the wilderness, and because God is more than just a “man of his word,” they would have come back to Egypt! Again, this may seem like something unworkable in the minds of many, but this is because we do not accept the fact, the problem with great truth is not that it will fall into the wrong hands, but it may end up being in no hands. The answer to the question of, what if Pharaoh had said yes? is not really a hard one. This question is clearly answered by reading what does happen to Israel throughout later centuries, as men began to rear, once again, a beast which had been slain.

Because of the sin of Pharaoh, Israel would not have to put up with the corruption of Egypt by going back to do a work there. Egypt would also not be a power house nation such as they had been, and that would mean Egypt would never be-

come one of the heads we see on the beast in Revelation. The beast in Revelation, with seven heads, is the beast man built. It represents the desire man had at the Tower of Babel. “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” Genesis 11:4 They wanted to build a tower to get on top of and see their future in the stars. People still believe in this today. They also wanted to build a city, for much the same reason Cain went out from the presence of God and built a city. (Gen. 4:16-22) They wanted to keep people together in order to maintain control and mold man after their desires. This kind of thinking is why Pharaoh and others in history have literally enslaved other groups of people. Man’s ultimate fear after the flood was that man would scatter over the face of the world and not be everything man could be if he put all his efforts together. This is why we see the words, “...let us make us a name...” Pharaoh did not want to let Israel go for much the same reason.

As we have talked about before, after God confounded the languages of men at the tower, groups of people went out and formed smaller groups which still followed the pattern. As is the case in the story of Egypt and the nation of Israel, these smaller groups often dislike and distrust those outside their group. (Ex. 1:6-14) People do not want others disturbing their ideas; and if possible, they

would like to force others to take their ideas on in one form or the other. Thus, man doesn't just desire to build nations, but empires. The beast in Revelation has seven heads, because while the beast exists all over the world, in many forms, there were seven great pinnacles of success. These are the empires which sprang from and/or, at the very least, held the territory which was the seat of the Tower of Babel. Because God was way out in front of man, Israel was there to influence each one of them.

In truth, this is a very big part of why God created a nation. God confounded the languages of man, which slew the original beast; but because man would insist on this course of action time and again, God had taken action which also insured the world would never again come back to a state where this idea could truly threaten to take over all mankind, as it threatened at the tower. This is why even the empires never achieved the world domination they desired, and also only lasted a time period before they crumbled, mostly just because of the events of the world at large. Each empire and nation is affected by outside influences which would not have existed if God had not confounded man's languages. One of the greatest outside influences on the nations of the world, and in particular, the empires themselves, is the nation God created to be in this world.

This answers the question of what would have happened if Pharaoh had said yes to the proposal of Israel leaving and

coming back after worshiping God. The Word was given to Israel, but was intended for the entire world. What better way for the entire world to be influenced by the Word's of God, than to put them right in the heart of the world's current focus. Even today, people look back on Egypt as a main cultural influence of the world. Its pyramids fascinate engineers to this day. Its religious organization and philosophy is still studied and marveled at. Men still dream of those highly organized days of a successful people and culture living along the banks of one of the world's greatest rivers! If Israel would have went out into the wilderness and received the instructions they received, then came back to Egypt, the Egyptian nation would have been the first to be influenced by God's Word through the Israelite nation. (Rom. 3:29-31) This would have been even more impacting than the fact Joseph was made second in command of Egypt many long years before!

Now, we must also consider the fact, if Israel had come back to Egypt, they would have had a God-given system of living which would have required Pharaoh to give, in other ways too numerous to mention. Of course, if he had been willing to let Israel go into the wilderness just because Moses asked, it wouldn't have been that difficult for the other things to come to pass, as well. By allowing Israel to go, Pharaoh would have shown a willingness to acquiesce to God in a way which would have given Egypt the good favor God had already shown Egypt was a great blessing in times past.

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Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip Busby

Last time, we talked about the fact, here in the ninth chapter of the book of Genesis, God is establishing a covenant with all mankind as well as the life on this planet. We also talked about how this affected God's interaction with man. God has never desired to stand afar off, He has only done so in the ways and at the times He has because man has utterly rejected His presence, and went right on sinning without concern. As with all things, this is man's core problem. Man likes to blame God for everything which goes on, even though it is we, who have rejected His guidance. People blame God when He takes action, and people blame God when they believe He should have and didn't! Just as Eve believed God was holding out on humans, by thinking God didn't want us to take of the fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because, as the serpent put it, "... and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:5, people think they can make better choices for their own lives than God can.

The truth is, we can not, and it's just that simple. Thus, what we need to do is seek at all times and in all ways how we may find the path God wants for us. Finding this comes down to the simple truth of seeking to have a continuous relationship with God, in spite of all this world throws at us. This is why the Bible talks so much about faith - which is a relationship with God - and the fact, faith is necessary to our being chosen by God. (Heb. 11) We should seek to un-

derstand why and how God interacts with us in spite of our sin, and because of our free will. In doing this, we can learn what God truly wants us to do, and we can ask Him to intervene in the ways which are truly asking for His will to be done. (James 5:16) This is the part people don't like, because God's will, no matter how much better it is than man's will in any situation, can often be something we don't obviously see as the best path. We also do not like the fact, it's often not the comfortable path. Sin is synonymous with death and destruction, not life and comfort. As we live in a world of sin, we must understand, when God acts, especially, our flesh will not always like what we get; because adding comfort to this life, is not what God ultimately is doing. Defeating sin in our life is what is necessary to gain the true victory. The bottom line is, we must have a relationship with God, which also includes total trust and the understanding He truly is God! This simple fact is what causes so many people to wrongly interpret the word faith as meaning blind belief. The truth is, God wants to communicate with us and teach us; but because we are children in our understanding, letting God work takes a lot of trust on our part!

Verse 11 of Genesis chapter 9 re-emphasizes the point, God is establishing a covenant with man, which man can depend on as he lives his life, even throughout the generations to come. No matter what man chooses to do, the principles in this cove-

nant will guide God's response. This is God attempting to communicate with us in a way which should help us understand what is going on day by day. Verse 8 makes it clear God talked not just to Noah, but with his sons which were with him. It's very unlikely this wording is here to tell us the women were not there; but by pointing out that all representatives of each individual family was there, it's making it clear the whole family, which had survived the flood, was hearing these words. Noah had done the sacrificing which brought God down to speak these words, and we don't know what his sons, wife, or his son's wives thought about this. However, that did not matter, these words were not just for Noah, they were for all of them to hear directly from God, and know the covenant of life for human existence.

Verse 11 goes right into the specifics of the covenant itself, and in this verse we see two parts, which at first may seem, to some, to be just one. First, God tells them man will never again have to worry about a flood of water destroying all flesh. This does not just mean some will survive as they had this time through the protection of an ark; it means God will never take the action or allow the action to take place, where a flood of water could threaten the life of the entire world. The importance of this is not just in the idea God will not do it, but God will never allow it to happen even by natural events. The people standing there ready to live life on this planet once again, were going to tell all their children about this event. We see proof of this in the fact almost all cultures around the world have a

great flood story of some kind as part of their ancient tales.

Before the flood, I'm sure there was no shortage of people who believed it was not possible for water to flood the entire world and destroy everything living. People may have been foolish, but they were not ignorant of the world's physical principles. I'm sure the worship of the earth, sun, moon, and stars was already a part of what man did, and even better than we "scientifically know" today, they knew stuff about how things worked! People had seen the physics of water working on the earth. Water did not fall from the sky before the flood, and they likely never considered it a possibility. At the same time, what they had seen was the fact water seeks out the lowest point. Remember, Noah built his ark in the heart of human civilization, which existed right in the middle of the Mesopotamian valley. Even if the place we call by that name today is not actually the exact place on the planet where it was before the flood, it must be very similar. The "Euphrates" is even named after one of the four branches the main river, which originally flowed through the Garden of Eden, broke into. (Gen. 2:10-14) Noah did not land in what we call the Mesopotamian Valley today, but it's the place man migrated to in order to build his "civilization" once more, because they believed this was a familiar place.

My point is, people, before the flood, were well acquainted with the fact water ran to the sea, and did this because the sea was basically downhill from most everywhere. The idea of there even being enough water to overcome the land, in its entirety, was not

something which likely crossed their minds. There is no evidence they had any kind of written words of God before the flood; and in any case, because they had become so corrupt by not following God, the people of Noah's day wouldn't have read it anyway. The point of this is, they did not likely know the world started out covered with water as we know from Genesis. It's clear they also did not believe the fact Noah told them God had said it was going to happen. No matter what we think we know or don't know, we must, as individuals, always seek and listen to God's voice, to know the actual truth!

Thus, on the other hand, Noah and his family may have been privy to the Genesis story, especially if they had held the traditions of those in the family line of Enos, we just don't know for certain. (Gen. 4:25-26) What we do know for certain is that God told Noah it was going to happen, and if any of the eight who survived the flood had any doubt as to it being possible, that doubt was gone by this time we are talking about here in Genesis chapter 9. Noah and his family had witnessed water being capable of cutting off all life on the planet. They knew it was possible beyond the shadow of a doubt! God wanted it to be clear, He would not do it again; and even though it was physically possible, He would not allow it to ever happen again.

The second point in verse 11 is that there never again would be a flood to destroy the earth. This may seem like a repeat, but as with so many things people think this about in the Bible, it's not. God had just stated, all

life would not be cut off by a flood; but here, God is saying the waters will never again be used in a way which irreparably harms the planet. The flood had changed things in a way the curse of the ground, in Adam and Eve's day, had never done. Noah and his family may or may not have noticed this effect as yet, but as they went out across the world, which God told them to, they could not help but see it firsthand! To understand why it's important to see this point, we need to consider the fact that God said before the flood, the end of all flesh had come before Him. (Gen. 6:13) God's intent was to cut off those things which were living, but everything living depends on the planet. This is why God put the elements in place such as light, the day and night cycle, and the water in the sky which we call atmosphere, before He put life on the planet in the first place. Before any life was brought forth, God commanded the waters to gather into oceans, and allow the dry land to appear. The elements which God intended to use as support for the life He was to create, were congealed for the purpose. When God cut off the life on this planet, it wasn't with the intent of destroying the planet itself; yet it is a fact, flooding water brings destruction, and great flooding water brings great destruction!

If God had not made both things clear in His covenant, people may believe the continuance of life was safe from the destruction of water directly, but wonder if water might still have the ability to continually erode the planet's livability? This would be of great concern as man witnessed rain and the fact it can still cause flooding. Would

man have to constantly be prepared with an ark, stocked with a year or more supply of food and water, in order to survive? No, because God said He would not allow a flood to cut off all life again. However, would man have to be afraid that flooding water might continually destroy such things as the earth's ability to grow food people depend on? No, because flooding can wash away everything in a particular area, but that is truly all it is - a washing. When God sent the flood in Noah's day, the fountains of the deep burst forth. (Gen. 7:11) The workings of the planet went in a direction God had constrained it from doing during creation. When we see flooding today, this does not happen. The water is simply doing what water normally does, which is seek out the lowest point. While this, at times, can cause devastation which can take a long time to see recovery from, God wanted it to be clear, water is not a force to specifically fear as something which has the ability to devastate the planet and/or the way creation works as a whole, day by day!

This goes hand in hand with what we are told of God's determination in the earlier verses. As long as the earth remains there will be the ability to use its physical properties in order to survive. (Gen. 8:21-22) God will not allow the world to go off its axis and roll into or away from the sun. God will not allow the planet to tear itself apart. Man's life focus, after the flood, would not need to be on trying to find a new place to live because this one's going to blow at any minute. God has it all under control, and because of the words we read in chapter 8, we know even man, with all his destructive ability, will not be allowed to make the planet completely unlivable. Simply put,

God was telling us, while the flood did significant damage which changed the world, the incident did not permanently change the physical dynamics God put in place at creation - part of which is that water will allow the dry land to exist.

Now, verse 12 tells us something we love to tell our children, but as adults we do not consider as much as we should. While the covenant was about the fact God had put the physical dynamics of the planet back on a permanently stable course, God did change one thing about the physics of water and light interaction which would continue alongside the fact water can fall from the sky. This is a fact much like the fact that during the creation cycle, God created light before He created the sun, moon, or stars. Physically, we don't see this as possible. Light needs a physical source; but not only did light not need a physical source before God created that physical source, God divided light and darkness into day and night before there was one. That's a real stumper, but that's because all we know about the working of physics is what we see, and what we see is what God brought to completion. (Gen. 1:31) Verse 12 tells us God is about to change something about the creation in order to create a token of the covenant He just laid out, and verse 13 tells us the token is the thing we call a rainbow.

Now, before we just move on past verse 12, let's stop and look at the word "token." God had just promised the water would never again do unnatural things to destroy the planet, and now He is doing something which today we know must have been a change to the way water, at least in droplet

form, interacts with light. The reason roses are red and violets are blue is because God loves you, and made different things only reflect back certain wavelengths of light. Your brain interprets the color of an object based on what wavelengths are coming back to your eyes from that object. Many people believe black is the color which contains all the colors, because as a child when you used all your different color crayons to continually color over and over the same spot on the paper, you ended up with black. However, this is because all the crayon marks together are absorbing virtually all the light, and little is being reflected back to your eye. When all the light is reflected back, you see white. This is why the science teacher would make a pinwheel divided into sections, each colored with a different color. When you do this, you are reflecting different wavelengths of light back to the viewer's eye, using different sections of the wheel. When you spin the wheel, all the different waves are still being reflected back, but because of the motion, they are being reflected back at quickly differing points around the wheel. Without getting too technical, this mixes up the wavelengths you see coming from any particular point on the wheel, and because you are unable to distinguish one wavelength from another, the wheel appears white!

Rainbows are due to something much the opposite of the spinning pinwheel. The light coming from the sun contains all the colors "mixed" together. Rainbows are not an object in and of themselves, but you are seeing light reflected back to your eye by an object - or to be more correct, we should say objects. Rainbows appear because even though water is clear - meaning it can gen-

erally be seen through - independent water droplets do not simply allow light to pass through them. Nor do they simply reflect what is out from them, such as the still surface of a body of water would. Instead, light goes into one side of a water droplet and the different wavelengths in the light are bent at slightly different angles as they reflect off the back of the water droplet. Thus, we say, water has the ability to "refract" light, making different wavelengths contained in white light, independently visible in the form of consecutive bands of color.

This is not something specific to rain as we understand it scientifically, it's simply the way water in general works. Now, some may argue, light always worked this way, and that is likely true. There is no reason to believe something such as a glass prism could not always have been able to divide the colors up for our viewing pleasure, much the way a water droplet does. However, it's not likely water held this same ability before God made this token of the covenant. Some would argue man had just never seen a rainbow before, because rain had never fallen out of the sky, but this is unlikely considering the fact we are told what did happen before rain. In Genesis 2:6 we are told, "But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." If water went up from the earth in a mist, there would have been rainbow effects visible on, at least, some days. Even if the mist happened overnight, you would still have to admit something drastic changed about the nature of things if none of the mist ever lingered until the morning. Sunshine is mostly responsible for taking such moisture concentrations out of the air,

and a little bit of sunshine at a low angle to the horizon, hitting water droplets in the air, is a perfect formula for making the rainbow effect visible to people on the ground.

No, the fact a rainbow very often appears after a rain shower, is due to something God put in place specifically at this time. Again, science would simply have you believe this is nothing more than a physical principle, but it is a physical principle which God put in place specifically as a “token” of the covenant He made with all living things, and the planet itself. It was done by changing the way water reacts with light, when water is divided into small particles. This is truly special when you stop to consider the covenant was about the fact God would not allow life to be cut off, nor the earth destroyed by great amounts of water acting together. Water would have to obey the principles it was given by God, and God would put a new principle in place which in no way is harmful to us, but does allow us to see water in a whole new light!

We should also stop to think about the fact, because God made the rainbow part of the physical principles of this earth, and not something He has to turn on and off as with a light switch, we know it to be exactly what God said it is. It is, “... for perpetual generations: ...” God will not continually change or disrupt the physical principles of this universe for the sake of turning man’s focus onto what we need to see. God makes this clear again in verse 13 by saying, He sets His bow in the cloud as a token, not just to every living thing, but as a covenant

He makes with the “earth.” Other places in the universe may be very hostile toward humans, and the puzzle of how to live there or simply gather the resources which exist there, will be up to man to solve if he can. However, as long as God allows this earth to remain, it will be our home. We may have to put on a jacket to go outside the protective structures we build, at least at some points during the year, but all the materials needed to manufacture those structures and jackets are right here with us on the planet. This planet will have its weather and that weather will be dangerous to us at times, but life will continue to survive here.

If we are tempted to doubt God because we see things such as violent weather taking life and doing what we see as damage to the earth, we should consider a fact humans are only now very slowly learning. In many cases, the weather we experience is the planet making adjustments to accomplish exactly what God promised. In spite of our attempts or non-concern for destroying life, and livability here, the planet will take action in order to be what life needs it to be. You do not have to be a proponent of “Global Warming” to see the planet is reacting to what is happening on it. We experience climate changes of both warming and cooling, along with other different patterns of changing moisture, wind, and the like, because the planet is reacting to our actions. It's true, we contaminate the water we depend on by dumping our garbage, but the fact garbage breaks down, and often, in high volume, is carried around by water, has to do with the planet's ability to clean

itself by re-congealing those materials back into the environment. This is bad for us in the short-term and can seriously limit the number of people and life in general which can survive in a certain area or across the planet all together, but it's good in the long-term that the planet has this ability. Where we really make our mistakes are when we produce and use artifacts made of things and/or which produce byproducts that will take thousands, if not millions of years for the earth to break down. This is especially true when we do not even intend the need for such products to be permanent or even long term. Such materials should be limited to use for things we want to last a very long time, not used to make something as temporary to our lives as packaging, and the like!

In verse 14 God explains, when the new phenomenon of clouds coming over the earth to drop rain happens, it will contain the new token of the covenant. Now, some will argue this is untrue, because they do not see a rainbow every time it rains. This is also an interesting part of what God did, and is why Paul tells us to look at every man as a liar while always believing everything God says. (Rom. 3:4) God makes it clear, He is making this covenant with all living things and even the entire planet, for that matter, not just mankind. Just because you can't see a rainbow every time it rains doesn't mean it isn't there! Rainbows are visible because of what water droplets in the sky do in refracting light. This means it's all about angles. Many different cultures have different legends and stories about what rainbows mean and what they are about. One of the most well known of these stories comes to us from the Irish! They

believe, or at least like to tell their children, there is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. This is clever for the same reason you see a rainbow at times and not at others. You cannot get to the end of a rainbow, at least as you see it. You can know exactly where you think the end is, but when you get there, if the rainbow is still in the sky at all, that point will no longer be where the end is!

The truth is, you have to be at the correct angle to the light source to see a rainbow. As the light is reflected off the back of the water droplets, you have to be at the right place compared to the light source for the reflection to be coming at your vantage point. You may make it to where another person sees the end of the rainbow, but it will not be there for you, and it's not just the end of the rainbow you can't get to. Another popular item about rainbows is that people wonder what is on the other side. The fact it's all about angles is why, as you move toward a rainbow, it moves away from you. You just can't get to the other side of one; and the reason, at times, you cannot see a rainbow after a rain shower, is due to the fact it's already on the other side of something. The rainbow is often over the horizon from your vantage point. If you could fly above the ground, or climb a tall hill, you might just achieve the correct angle to see that rainbow just over the horizon. Which means, very often, when the rainbow isn't viable to those in the valley, it's seen by those on the hilltop, and/or those things which can fly. God truly made this covenant with and for all the earth, as well as all it needs to sustain life!

In verse 15 we are assured God made the rainbow a permanent fixture of the physics of this world, so man does not have to worry about what he worries about with false gods. As I said last time, this covenant is for all people no matter who you are, what you believe, or even what generation you live in. No matter what false religion you have been taught, this covenant is for you. You can believe in God or not, but no matter who you are, you do not have to take a sacrifice to the top of the tower, temple, or whatever structure you believe in, to offer it in hopes the gods or some god will keep the planet livable. God already made a token which automatically and continually comes with the clouds and the rain. The only way this God given token could cease and be forgotten is for God Himself to change it. Again, speaking to the argument of rainbows not always being visible, even the sunlight reflecting off the moon creates a unique rainbow of its own? God will not forget what He has promised and neither should we!

Verse 16 is another one of those verses which seems like just a repeat of information, but this is one of those rare times when I want you to take a verse completely out from the surrounding verses and look at it. What God said, He said to Noah and His family as they stood just outside the ark with the altar Noah had built to sacrifice on. However, even if verse 15 is not literally the last verbal words they heard God speak before there was some kind of break between this conversation and the dialog which begins in verse 17, it's still true the words of verse 16 stand alone! I'm not sure

there is a way to express this in words. I think you either see it or you don't. By the end of verse 15, the covenant has been made, and it has been sealed with a token imbedded in the physical principles of the world. Verse 17 goes back to specifying God is talking directly to Noah again, but verse 16 is the verse which is truly spoken, not just to Noah and His family, but as if God is speaking out to and across all generations!

It's like the words to a song or poem even in the English. It could be done just the way the one hundred and thirty-sixth Psalm is done. We can even couple the last four verses of that Psalm with it, and it would go something like this, "And the bow shall be in the cloud: for his mercy endureth for ever: And I will look upon it: for his mercy endureth for ever: That I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature: for his mercy endureth for ever: Of all flesh that is upon the earth: for his mercy endureth for ever: Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever: And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever."

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 4

(Gen. 41) This time, that favor would bring the opportunity of being the first to be influenced by God's Word and leadership. Egypt was ripe for the work of God. As the world flowed in and out of the great nation of Egypt, they would have seen Israel. Instead of being a place which held slaves in a land next to them, Egypt would have been the gateway to finding God's people and the blessing they exuded! Because of Egypt's proximity to the land God had promised Abraham's seed, this would have even remained true after God moved the great nation of Israel to the land of Canaan. What a spectacular honor this could have been! (Gen. 12:1-3)

Another aspect to this is the fact Israel, in the law of God, was given no king. This was because God was to be their King, and I'm not suggesting Pharaoh would have been Israel's king, but Egypt could have been seen as Israel's guardian in the world. In fact, as you read the story of Israel, throughout the years, Egypt was still looked to as an ally of Israel. (Isa. 36:1-6) As we look to later events such as during the time Israel was being harassed by Assyria (which is the second head of the beast in Revelation), and later Babylon (which is the third), God allows Israel to be in this kind of role. As Israel was held captive in Babylon, the Word shows us, not only did God use Israel to influence the king of Babylon, God judged Babylon's king and the empire as a whole because of the position they held over Israel, and in the world. (Dan. 4) This is

seen most predominantly in the fact God ultimately brought the Meds and Persians into power, and deposed the Babylonians because of the final measure of disrespect Belshazzar showed when he ordered the cups from the Jerusalem temple to be brought in as party-ware for his banquet. (Dan. 5)

This was also seen in the fact Jerusalem's temple was rebuilt by specific order of the Persian king, who had learned to respect God in, at least, some ways. (Ezra 1) It's shown again at the time of The Messiah. God did not free Israel from the Roman empire before He sent The Messiah, and Pilate would be the one who would have to make the final call on whether to crucify Jesus or not. (John 19:7-16) All these things had to do with accomplishing God's will, and none to the credit of any man or people, because God accomplishes His work in spite of what man chooses. However, what it does show is how God has worked with what today we would clearly call "world leaders," through the nation of Israel. When these leaders have followed, they have been rewarded with grace, and when they have refused, especially at times when God was ready to move, they paid the price! This is why we see the words in the book of Exodus that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. (Ex. 7:10-17) It's not that God specifically reached down and made up Pharaoh's mind for him. It's because when God was ready to take action, Pharaoh chose to see only loss instead of the blessing it would have been! This is a mistake we make as individuals, time and time

again, in our lives. Thus, we should take time to thank The Lord that His mercy endureth forever! (Ps. 136)

What all this demonstrates again is a fact we have been looking at in this study, overall. We understand the later parts of God's Word by looking at the beginning words, and the later parts also help us see things we did not necessarily see when we read through the beginning. This is the growth process, not the replacement process most people believe in. We do not rightfully approach the Bible with the attitude of God changing, we rightfully approach the Bible with the understanding God does not change. (Heb. 13:8) By looking at what we think God is doing in one part of scripture, and seeing what looks like a contradiction to another part, we can stop and consider what is truly going on. In doing this, we come to a much deeper understanding of the truth as a whole, instead of a fractionalized view which keeps us confused. We throw out our previous thoughts and maintain the true parts of God's Word we have learned by reading the beginning. As we realize God's later reaction does not support thoughts we developed on our own, we see the true ways of righteousness which God has always had and which we simply did not understand.

It's a truth, and one God setup His Word to deal with, that when anyone approaches the Word for the first time, they come at it from the standpoint of where

they currently are in life. This is what we were talking about earlier in this study when discussing the fact it would be an impossible job to teach the entire world to be the core culture, Israel is meant to be. At the same time, we have the Word, which all of us can, and should study for ourselves. We will read through it and see it through our own eyes, but while reading it we will obtain new perspectives we did not have before. Each time we go through the Bible, we will do it with a greater understanding and from a more appropriate perspective than we did the time just before. In having this better adjusted approach, we will see new things which will grow our understanding, instead of continually believing something new overwrites something old. All the while, we will be gaining ground we may or may not even realize we are gaining in the way we walk and talk everyday in this world. Of course, as we continue on this path, we will each grow at different paces and in different segments of our lives; but one thing's for sure, those around us will notice!

Let's stay in God's Word!

In the news, of late, is the story of UN workers in Afghanistan being killed by

Muslims who claimed to have done it because a man in the United States burned a copy of the Quran. This has brought, again, the cry of "incitement"; and arguments are being made that the man who burned the Quran should be punished in some way and/or there should be new laws passed which would limit free speech.

The arguments against the man are many. The most basic argument is, it was known before the burning took place that such an action could cause others to react violently, and that is why this kind of freedom of speech should not really be free. Some suggest even at the heart of freedom of speech there is not the freedom to do things when you know it may cause harm, and in the case of telling people to go out and harm others, this is certainly true. However, because there truly are no laws in the U.S. under which this man's actions can be rightfully tried and convicted, there has come an outcry claiming, at the very least, people around the world, and especially in the Middle East, need to have it confirmed to them, this man doesn't represent the whole of America. They say we should make it clear we, as Americans, condemn this man's actions.

All kinds of arguments against freedom seem to be striking a cord more and more, even in the minds of Americans, and what is suppose to be the already free world. This is truly odd considering all the protests and attempts to overturn governments going on

A Burning Question

By Philip Busby

around the world in the name of human rights and freedom! It's scary how so many are upset

about a man burning a book, on the basis murderous men claim it was their reason for killing people. If the murderers' statements that they did this because a man in the U.S. burned a Quran, causes you to worry about letting such people know the majority condemn this man's actions, you're looking at the situation all wrong. This kind of thinking and reaction doesn't stop violence, it encourages it! Of course, it's true, in burning a Quran this man certainly offended many Muslims, just as the burning of any writing considered holy by any group would offend those who are in the group. However, the real point is, a man burning a Quran is an offense to those who care about the Quran, but killing innocent people should be an offense to everyone in the world whether they care about any book or not!

No one should be forced - as some have suggested - to make it clear this man who did the burning does not represent us all. Whether to support or condemn this man is going to be a personal decision each individual has to make. Forming your own opinion is one of the most basic freedoms people deserve; and even God, Who knows exactly what is right, wrong, good, and bad at all times and in all situations, does not force us to agree with Him. If you feel the man was totally wrong in his actions, then the right course of action on your part is to use your freedom of speech to give your opinion as to why you believe he was wrong, in order to encourage others not to

take the same action! In such a time as this, when those fighting to protect freedom and justice are in places, doing jobs which make them so vulnerable, I whole heartily agree, everyone should be thinking about them, above their own desires. At the same time, you don't have to agree with the man who burned the Quran, to understand the danger to yourself and many, many others when we allow murderers to start us talking about the beginning of the end to the very freedoms brave individuals are fighting to protect!

The problem is, if people around the world are going to embrace, understand, and defend true freedom, they need to be brought to understand why it would be wrong to assume this man represents us all; and at the same time, why, because of that, we will not make laws which criminalize such behavior, even when we disagree with it. In a free society, it's the right of people to hate the Quran, in the same way it is the freedom of a Muslim to choose to believe Jews, Christians, or anyone not Muslim is an infidel. It's even the right of anyone who desires, to believe infidels or the like should be forcefully converted to their religion or die. What is not anyone's freedom to do, is forcefully convert or kill anyone based on these types of opinions, and we should all pray, every day, this is not unacceptable just because the majority simply does not believe that way, right now!

Religious people, of all kinds, know what it is to be offended, and taking away freedom from society may make certain things better for certain people, but for the

majority, it makes things much worse. It can be, and in many cases is, a vigorous debate as to who is taking away the freedoms of another in the exercising of their own freedom. However, someone going out and legally obtaining a copy of any book, then burning it, is not taking away the rights of another; and no matter how offensive this act may be to others, it should not be a crime. On the other side of this issue is the hard fact that killing other people on the basis this kind of action offends you, is!

Jesus once talked about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. (Matt. 23:24) It's not that the gnat isn't offensive, but it makes no sense to worry about swallowing a gnat, which flies into your soup, if you are willing to ignore something as big and intrusive as a camel! This is what is happening in this situation, and we should stop and ask ourselves, why do we care so much about condemning and even changing freedom of speech laws because a man burned a book? The true crime is not being done by the one who gives their opinion no matter how right, wrong, or even downright stupid we think that opinion is. The true crime is done by the one whose actions unjustly cause actual harm to another person. While we can be disturbed, this man did not heed warnings, his actions may put others at risk, the loudest cry here should not be about the burning of a book, it should be the fact that killing people, just because they, or someone else offended you is not something the world will and can tolerate!