



Shaqah

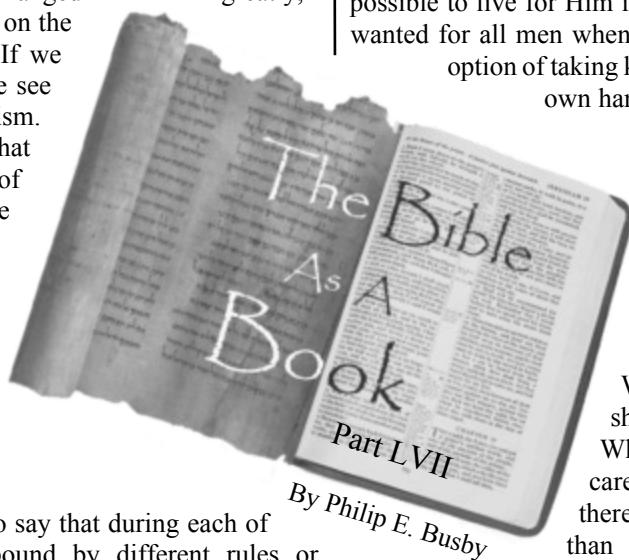
*“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”
Colossians 2:8*

In our last segment, we ended our direct look at not only the Book of Deuteronomy but also the Torah overall. This brings us through our study of the first five books of the Bible, and as has been covered over and over, these are the core of God's Word. They take us from the information which shows us how and why God created us, all the way through showing what man decided to do with his free will and how he is determined to live his life. These books also show us how God responded to each of these choices of men, and this brings us to the age we are in right now, which is one that has not really changed that much since the establishment of the chosen nation. Now, many would argue it has changed greatly, but that is simply our perspective on the issue of man's "advancements." If we look into the theology of men we see what is called Dispensationalism. This is the teaching of the idea that man went through a series of changing events which the Bible tells us about. It says we started in innocence, and after falling from that we entered into a time of conscience. It goes on to say, once the Law of Moses had been given we entered a time of Law, and when Jesus came, a time of grace.

In all, the basic idea is to say that during each of those time periods man was bound by different rules or standards by which we had to live and thus, be saved. That is the core ignorance of the theology because we have always been saved by grace, through faith, which is not of ourselves but the gift of God. (Eph. 2:8) Some would argue this is simply the basic truth and then there are those things expected of us on top of that, but that is incorrect. If it was not for the grace God offers us, which is His great desire that none of us perish and all come to repentance, we would never have a shot in the first place. (II Pet. 3:9) Some would say the repentance part is where the responsibility lies, but there is no variation in this or legalistic rules for how one repents. Samuel made it very clear to Saul one day that to obey was better than sacrifice, and that truth has been the bottom line since time began. (I Sam. 15:22) While things such as the Law God gave to the Jews can help us

understand what it is God wants of us and the separation from the things of sinful men He compels us to work for, even it was not a set of rules required for salvation.

Faith is the substance of the things we hope for and the evidence of that which we have not yet seen. (Heb. 11:1) The life faith can show us is real, and possible is the substance a relationship with God brings. It is also very evident to us, or should be, that more and better forms of that kind of life exists if we can just be free from the sin in and around us. This is what Dispensationalism is seeing. Actions God took/takes to make it possible to live for Him in this sinful world. This is what God wanted for all men when He created us, but God gave us the option of taking knowledge of right and wrong into our own hands. This is the option man took right off, and it only changed the fact that, in the here and now, we all live in a world where sin lives with us. What we choose to do about it is still up to us. We can choose to take part in the sin and care not for the righteousness and Holiness of God, or we can strive everyday. When we strive for righteousness, we show what kind of life we have chosen. When we ignore it, we show we do not care or flat do not want that life. Thus, there is no real rules for us to follow other than to strive, which is something we should want to do, not because it is a required element for us but because it creates the kind of life or causes us to have some of the life we ultimately hope to have forever.



Because there are those who truly want this, God was, of course, going to make a way for that to be eternally possible. Here and now we might not get the same opportunity Adam and Eve had in the beginning, but somewhere along the line there was bound to be those who chose to take of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This essentially would have created the same circumstances. While it might be a very long discussion concerning what would have happened to the group who never lost their access to the Tree of Life, for those who had, there would simply be the same exact circumstances of



needing salvation as there is today. The only difference from that to what we have now is that since Adam and Eve were the first and they took from the tree right off, there are none who did not lose access to the Tree of Life. In spite of this truth, before the flood of Noah's day there was still a separation between those who wanted God and those who did not. However, what really brought the world to the flood was the fact these groups started intermingling and the separation ended. (Gen. 6:1-3) Once that was the case there was truly no turning back to the way things were, but this too changed nothing except maybe the steps God had to take in order to ensure those who still wanted to follow Him had a chance to find and follow. At the time of the flood this required the end of almost all of humanity.

When we look at what Dispensationalism teaching tries to focus on, we see nothing more than these major points. However, the problem is that it teaches us those major points when God stepped in to make sure all still had and would have the chance to find Him, changed our mode of salvation in some form when, in fact, the only thing that was ever changing was man's sinfulness in attempting to live further and further from the knowledge of God. Thus, what we see in the transition from Adam and Eve living in the garden to after they took of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is not one from innocence to conscience, but one from having very little knowledge of right and wrong to having it all at once! This, of course, brought our separation from the Tree of Life, which we were warned would happen. On top of this, God would curse the ground for our sake, and this was specifically to put something in front of us to remind us of the situation we now were in. If God had not done this, man would have went out into a world that was not as organized as the garden had been but was just as lush and able to produce. Thus, if God had not cursed the ground there would have been very little man could have understood about his new state until he began to see the effects of old age. This would have been even worse back then because man lived for hundreds of years. This means the potential for many people to live and choose how they desired to live without having any notion there was anything wrong would have been very high. That is why God also brought pain to childbirth for the woman, as this was a warning about the way parents in general, but especially mothers, would weep for the sin their children had to endure in this world.

Now, I would like to elaborate more on all that but maybe at another time, because we want to look at the fact Dispensationalism teaches the next step was human government which came at the time of the flood. However, this term alone shows a major flaw in the theology, because the time of the flood of Noah's day was mostly about change God made, which was bigger than what He did at the time of the fall but for much the same reason. Not only did God wipe the earth clean and start over with just eight people, but He also changed the weather pattern of the earth severely. This was such a severe change, God went on to assure us that as long as He allowed the world to stand it would not deteriorate so badly that survival would not be possible for mankind. (Gen. 8:20-22) There was also assurance God would not destroy the world again with major weather events to the degree a plan such as the ark Noah had to build would be a constant necessity man would need to

be prepared to build. If one does not think this was about our physical ability to see the destruction of sin, there is more! We think of curses as something being taken away or making something harder for us, and to a great degree that is true, but what the flood had done was so bad in changing man's ability to easily live upon the earth, God gave man another food source. This was a curse because we were not designed to eat meat, but the truth of the matter from then on would be the need to eat animals when plant life was not able to sustain us. The animals would also now kill us, which was not the case before.

All this was a major change and stepped us further into the knowledge concerning how futile living for this life really is, not some point where human government was needing to be implemented! This is what Dispensationalism wants to ignore. What the flood ultimately did was nothing more than an extension of what God did with the curse of the ground in Adam and Eve's day. A huge extension mind you, but that is what it was. It did not change the "dispensation," but that is the point! Nothing has been changing about how we must be saved. Walking with God and understanding He will judge us for the actions we take is the basis of it all. Knowing He is a God of love and grace is why we are still compelled to do it in spite of the fact we have all clearly failed. You see, even Adam and Eve before the fall were not perfect. They simply were not responsible for much, yet! God always intended us to grow in our understanding of what it is to live and walk in purity no matter what. That is why God gave us a free will. It was always going to be up to us, not just to take or not take of the tree He told us not to, but to choose to strive to be perfect as He is perfect or ignore the purpose of our lives. (Matt. 5:48)

So as we move on to the giving of the Law, the theology tells us we move into a time of Law, and this is why we are talking about this theology here in this study. We have come to the end of our direct look at the Torah, and it's the books we now head into that make up the remainder of what we call the Old Testament. If we buy into Dispensationalism, we believe this means it was now important all men follow the Law in order to find or obtain salvation. However, if we know the truth, we see it totally different or should be able to. One of the key facts about this point is that the Law was not given overnight. Like the coming of the flood there was a process to getting to the giving of the Law. Dispensationalism says this is the time of promise, but it is nothing more than the step by step work God chose to do in order to continue ensuring His Word would never be lost. It was keeping pace with man's sinful downward slide. Thus, just as Noah had some 120 years to build the ark, and prepare the world as he could for the flood, so too, there would be in the giving of the Law a relatively quiet set of events that would take a long period of about 400 years to get to the actual Law being given. (Acts 7:2-6) It would start by God calling a man out of his home country to a place God had chosen as the place He wished to put His nation. This man would not immediately begin to build that nation or any of what we might think of as a foundation for a nation. No, Abraham would sojourn as a stranger in the land the entire time, and other than some wells dug by him, the only other property he ever really possessed in this land was the field he bought to bury Sarah in. (Gen. 23:16-20)

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we discussed how much we take for granted the fact God often provides for us in many ways we do not even stop to think of. This related to the fact Hagar and Ishmael had ended up out in the wilderness and how this happened by Hagar's own choosing. Hagar had wanted to go out and just let her son be free to become whatever became of him, but that was not God's plan. Hagar was told by God she was not to be distraught but take the responsibility of being Ishmael's mother; never walking away. She had made a big mistake leading her son out into this wilderness, but it was time for God to turn that around and get both Hagar and Ishmael on the path He wanted them to follow. As God got the cooperation from Hagar He needed, God provides what was needed for them to survive and make it to where they would settle down. Thus, we ended last time talking about where Ishmael lived and a bit about how the nation(s) that would come from him would come about. This wrapped up the life of Ishmael and brought us through Genesis chapter 21 verse 21.

As we go into verse 22 we totally shift gears and go directly to a story that is very important for us to remember in that it has to do with what we would today call political affairs. Today we like to sit around fancy tables in grand settings to sign documents in front of cameras and reporters. In ancient times we find that it was a little more basic in that it was usually two or more leaders, whether of a household and/or a nation, tribe, etc. sitting down and hashing things out. In truth, this is not really different from the way things still get done, because in spite of all the show, most diplomacy in our modern age is still done by two or more people simply getting together to focus and come to an agreement both sides believe they can live with. All the fancy show for the cameras is really nothing more than the end result of work done, often by people other than the leaders who put their names on the agreement, and in a far less formal way. One might be tempted to say that there is no less formal way to do business than to sit outside on the ground and/or just meet in the open field. However, as we begin the story in verse 22 we see that is the kind of arrangement between Abraham and the king of the Philistines who had alongside him his military leader.

This is by no means a minor meeting or insignificant because it might seem a bit informal to us. No, this was very typical in the day that instead of meeting in a place such as the king's residence or court of some kind, people who were meeting to make serious agreements would often find a place more neutral yet meaningful to the conversation. For a comparison of sorts one can look at the time this very same king was upset with Abraham concerning the incident with Sarah. In that incident Abraham was brought more into the king's court, and this did not just have to do with the fact they were there talking about the king having Sarah. (Gen. 20:1-16) No, it was about Abimelech acting like a king and talking to Abraham as an everyday citizen. The problem was Abraham was not an

ordinary citizen. Abraham was the man through whom God would work great things, and Abimelech had to find that out, which he was doing at that moment. By this moment in verse 22 Abimelech is far more aware of what he is facing, and it is really for that reason he has come to say what he wants to say.

While Abimelech was upset about the incident with Sarah, he did know enough at that point not to do anything drastic. He had the good sense to see he had already been judged by God for taking Sarah, and in the end had to have Abraham pray for his house before anyone in it could hope to have children again. After making his opinion clear as to being upset about the Sarah sister thing, Abimelech told Abraham that the land, meaning his land as a king, was before Abraham and he could live where he chose. This, of course, was true for Abraham according to what God wanted, but it was good to hear an earthly king understand he should give such leeway to Abraham. Now, at this verse we see a more proactive role being played by the king in that he comes to Abraham to talk. The fact he was there with his lead military man shows he was there to make this an all-around thing. It was not just a king saying something and hoping his military went along with it or maybe never knew it, Abimelech wanted Abraham to know his military agreed with it, or, at least, would abide by whatever they agreed to here.

The other important point in verse 22 is that Abimelech tells why he is here to speak to Abraham. Abimelech understood that God was with Abraham in everything he did. Now, this is a statement so big I can hardly keep all the points in my head as to what is important about it. First, it was important the king understands this and that he understands it to the degree it brought him to make an agreement with Abraham. As I said, the king was taking a proactive role in coming to Abraham not just waiting for something else to happen that involved the two of them and incurred the wrath of God. Abimelech was wise enough to know he did not want to risk that happening. What is interesting about this is that it shows the king was doing what a king should do. Abimelech knew he was putting his very kingdom at risk by not being more proactive in his dealings with a man he knew had God on his side. If Abimelech was going to rule in this land, he needed to be on good standings with such a man who was traveling and living so continually in and around his borders. The other part of this is that the king is humbly admitting something further here that he did not admit at the time of the incident with Sarah.

Abimelech was angry that Abraham had not told him Sarah was his wife, and as we talked about that incident, I pointed out how wrong the king was to think he could simply take any woman he wanted. That being true, most of us would still agree that under the culture of the day, and even now, the real wrong was Abimelech's point in that Abraham did not tell him Sarah was his wife. Putting aside the fact the king might

have wanted to kill Abraham for her, it was something one would think he should have just done. However, he did not, and the king paid the price for it. That's exactly how many would see it. Abraham failed to do something and Abimelech paid the price, yet the king comes and here states that he understands God is in everything Abraham did! You could just blow this off as the king being scared, and the words give us nothing to totally disprove that, but I do not believe that is the case at all. I believe Abimelech understood God was leading and directing Abraham's life, and even a thing such as he did with Sarah was turned against the person who wronged this couple due to that. Abimelech may or may not fear Abraham, but he certainly feared the God Who stood behind Abraham! This is what God asks of us, and so often we miss that point in dealing with other people. We think we can judge others and we fear others judging us, but none of that is relevant. Only God is relevant!

If we try and judge another it is only relevant to them if they believe there is some merit in what we say. If what we say is true and they are wrong, then changing their ways will be a good thing. If what we say is wrong and the person allows that to change them, then we will suffer the consequences of what we have done, but the person will only suffer the consequences of turning to something incorrect. For each the difficulty and/or the lesson learned is nothing but personal. The same goes for if we are judged by another. If we take it to heart and believe it has merit then we act on it. If it is right that is good, and if it is wrong that is bad. If we allow it to make us angry or have other negative emotions which cause us to act wrongly, there will be consequences to that. Simply put, if we look at all the dynamics of how this works, we should see the only connection between the person doing the judging and the person being judged is the interaction of knowing the other's thoughts. Outside of that, it simply does not matter what each other does or thinks. Sure if you are a close family, married to the person, friends, etc. there could be more long term to this, but my point is how God sees us, along with what we are or are not forced into. We judge others, but in the end we really only have the power to judge with our mouth. We can not force them into anything in truth, and we really cannot do anything about whether or not this has eternal consequences for them!

When we are judged, there is nothing another person can do to really force us to change. We might change in certain ways to save or reduce friction in a relationship, but acquiescing is not the same thing as being convinced. This is why we see what we do in children. We can often keep them from doing many things while they live under "our roof," and that is how it should be. One of the very reasons God put it right into the Ten Commandments that we need to honor our father and mother has to do with keeping peace in the house we live in. God has given the responsibility of raising children to parents. As children we do not see nor understand many things we should be able to see in the correct light once we become adults. Thus, it is largely impossible for us to really know if a lot of the choices our parents make really are right or wrong. Looking back we may be able to see many things our parents did that are just flat wrong, and we can find no excuse as to why it might have ever been correct for them to do. This is certainly true for some children who are abused, but those are the obvious examples. For most of us it really is not much of anything but

things we disagreed on.

We may still disagree totally with our parents, as adults, but that is another aspect of the commandment God gave. We can disagree with them, but once we are adults it's up to us how we choose to live. Maybe we will have success in life and maybe we will not. Maybe we feel our parents gave us good opportunities that helped us or should have, and maybe we feel they made things harder for us, but none of that matters. Seeing clear enough to really judge, especially the past, is a very, very hard thing for us to do. There are emotions at the time that we may or may not have understood, and now do not even remember being involved. There are circumstances we may or may not have understood at the time, and to this day are still not aware of. Every individual has their battles, and as parents we do not get to step aside from those personal battles in order to raise our children. We do not get to hit pause on the rest of the game we call life and think clearly to deal correctly in every situation. If we never have kids, as an adult we may not see this clearly, but it is still true and would be true of you if you became a parent. Maybe that is one of the very reasons you chose not to have children, but the point is, we are all just human, and unless we all choose to abstain to the point none of us ever have another child, there will be children to raise, and someone, whether those who gave them life or not, will have to do it in some form.

This is the truth of our existence, and it is why after leaving our parents to become adults we may not agree, and the commandment does not say we are still subject to their rules. However, we must still honor the fact this is how it works. If you get mad enough about that fact that you want to blame someone, then God is really all there is to blame because He created it that way. If you choose to reject God in your life based on that, then that will keep you from life eternal, and there is the real point in why God told us to honor the way He set it up. Just like us turning around to judge parents we felt did us wrong without giving credit to the fact they may have been doing the best they could, we can not allow our hatred and anger about any past event to turn us from the only hope this life has, and that is God. In greater ways than we can imagine, God set things up the way He did, does the things He does, and allows the things He allows based on factors way above our understanding. If we think we know enough to judge Him and we choose to do as Cain did, which is walk away, then there is no real hope for us!

This is at its heart the same thing we are talking about here with Abimelech. The man may or may not have agreed, even at this point, that he should have been punished for taking Sarah due to Abraham not telling him she was his sister. However, he had enough respect, and/or understanding, and/or fear of God to realize if God was for Abraham, Abraham was no one you wanted to be against. (Rom. 8:31) You see, in saying God was with Abraham in everything he did, Abimelech was not pointing out that everything Abraham did was correct, and there it is; the real truth of the matter lies there! When we judge we think only in the terms of right and wrong according to our understanding, but what about the simple fact we have all sinned and come short of God's glory? (Rom. 3:23) That point is a two-edged sword! It means we should look at ourselves to

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXXI

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."

We ended last time by going back to the timeline history of where our study has brought us to in looking at who was the ruler of the Roman Empire. Thus, we talked about how the Roman throne passed from the very familiar to Bible students, Cesar Augustus, who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth, to the less familiar Tiberius, who was in power at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, and finally to the unfamiliar to most not into history, Caligula, whose rule would affect the Jewish nation and its relationship with Rome. As was specifically mentioned at the end of our last segment, Caligula would come to power with a great amount of wealth at his disposal. However, that is exactly what he would do - dispose of it! It took Caligula no time at all to spend himself into debt buying lavish things and wasting money on any number of foolishness. This would quickly lead to his need to raise capital.

Now, if anyone has ever tried to do such a thing, even on a minor basis, or watched as someone tried, such as an organization or place of business, one knows how desperate things can get if an easy source of financing is not found! The problem with government is that it does not actually make money, so there are no loans in the true meaning of the word to be had where the promise is that once the business or person turns a profit or begins to make money again, the loan will be paid back. No, the best a government can do is take a loan from one source at the time in the hopes it can simply raise the money from another source it does not feel it needs to pay back in order to pay off the first source. Other than that, there is simply the taking of funds from the main sources governments have to take from. Depending on how you look at it, this can be collecting the money from those they govern and outright theft of things of value, or it can just be considered theft overall by some.

Probably the key most would look at for when a government is stealing versus collection of reasonable funds a government needs in order to operate would be the consistent collection of a percentage of what everyday commerce under that government's auspicious creates. This is the old you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours way of looking at things. Every day I go out to run my business or work my job and the government makes that possible by maintaining the roads, utilities, and other infrastructure needed for me to do this. They also provide the law enforcement and military protection needed to have a society. This does not often work out as clean as it looks on paper, but it is the basis of the theory behind how government is suppose to work. Of course, even if a government is doing "right" by all its citizens, this does not mean it does so by all those who are near or far. This point is why we see many wars and other battles of various degrees throughout history. Often as governments grew in power so too did their thirst to

reach out and take from those outside their domain.

This might be done for the simple sake of obtaining the spoils of war and/or to obtain new territory. There certainly has been no shortage of times governments were in need of funds and went out solely for the sake of getting those funds by invading a neighbor or weaker power. As dangerous as this can be to bringing on greater war one did not wish to face, there is nothing more dangerous than turning to be harsh on those under your jurisdiction in order to outright steal what you believe you need. Unfair taxation can be bad enough, but if done over time it is amazing how far a government can push it before the citizens get upset enough to rise up against the ruling authority. This rising up would likely happen faster if it were not for the constant question in the minds of the people of what will replace their government if it is brought to ashes? This is what democracy is suppose to help guard against. The people do not have to all-out burn the current government to the ground in order to change who is governing.

This can work well if set up in a good way, but - long story short - even this is far from a perfect solution. In any case governments often get away with a long-term theft of its citizens if they can keep the people from believing it is just one overbearing ruler dictating laws, and/or do it slow enough to give people time to get used to the idea of living on less so the government can have more. These were both points Caligula did not have on his side! To be short about one of the points, Caligula had spent himself blind, and there was no way he had time to mess around when it came to getting more funds. Thus, raising taxes over a period of time was not an option for this ruler by the time he woke up and, at least, came to the knowledge he no longer had funds to just spend at will. To the other point about not having a specific dictator just reaching out and taking what he wanted? That too was impossible for Caligula to avoid. Sure, Rome had a Senate, but for clearly three rulers now they were not looked at as the true ruling power of the land. The emperor was the man who could do as he pleased in spite of them, at least to a great enough degree that the people would see it as all his fault one way or another.

Of course, Rome was a republic, and while we should not confuse that term with being no different than democracy itself, it is designed with the idea the people can change their ruler(s) if they choose each time they get a chance to cast a vote. The problem was that the emperor was not part of this. Certain local officials were, and the Senate was said to be, but the emperor was above this being voted out of office thing. To make matters worse, even the idea behind a republic versus a pure democracy is that in a democracy the citizens vote in order to make the laws, at least in theory. In a republic there is a clearer understanding that the people are simply voting for the people who will make the laws. As Caligula stepped out to seek funds to replace the mismanagement of his treasury, he pretty much

had no way of hiding that this was all his doing. Now, I do not say that to suggest the man cared if he was blamed or not. Nor do I mean to suggest he had the wisdom to see he needed a less obvious way to squeeze funds from his people. However, the other problem this man had was that as a ruler of such a vast empire, there was not much outside his rule to go out and plunder from with the excuse he was on a great campaign of some sort.

Thus, the man began to tax everything. For example, he taxed weddings and he also taxed prostitution. He began to auction the lives of gladiators and reinterpret wills so the estates went to him instead. He also took the spoils and gains centurions had made through plunder and accused the highway commission of mismanagement requiring them to raise funds to pay money back to him. All these things were not just about upsetting citizens either. He was literally harming commerce as a whole. It is said he taxed and stole so much that his disruption of commerce, and specifically agriculture, may have led to a brief famine which likely did not have to happen. The main point here is that this man did not rule with wisdom on any level it would seem, and while those rulers who would come after him seem to have no immediate financial crisis on their hands, Caligula had shown not just what a foolish emperor was capable of causing, but he had shown how much power the emperor's position really held. If there were any real delusions in the minds of the people and even other governing officials that Rome was a democracy or true republic with the ability to end the rule of such a foolish leader, they would have gone after this man's reign one would think.

What does this have to do with our study here you might ask? Well, it has to do with the fact the thoughts of needing to be, even believing they were entitled to be, a sovereign nation was never very far back in the minds of the Jews. It should be no secret to those who study the Bible that Pilate was in Jerusalem at the Passover the year Jesus was crucified because it was known the Jews at large were always on the verge of some rebellion. This, of course, had to do with the thought pattern the Jews had developed, which is also something we all do. We tend to take the promises God gives to those who serve Him and want to claim they apply to us under any circumstance. In truth, we understand at some level we have a responsibility to do something in return, but that is why we want to come up with all kinds of religious protocols. If we do this and/or that and avoid this and/or that we will be worthy to receive. It can be put in many different ways, but it all boils down to the same idea in the end. The problem I have pointed out so often which makes things hard for us to really see the truth clearly is that the devil does not go for the 180 degrees off from the truth way of doing things. Instead, he goes for just a few degrees off the truth, and while it is certainly enough to do the trick it also muddies the water greatly for those who are looking for a clear line between what they should and should not do.

Now, this is not the matter of claiming everything exists in some gray area and there is no true black and white. There is clear-cut black and white but what we fail to take to heart is what Jesus told us about the strait and narrow. Narrow is the way that leads to everlasting life, and broad is the way that leads to destruction. (Matt. 7:13-14) To put it another way, there is one thing that is correct and everything else is wrong! What this means is that there is a vast plain of things one can do when in

the wrong. It can be anything from a lifestyle where it would seem obvious to any decent minded individual you could not be further from the truth of what is right, to one that is only slightly off center, and both are wrong. This is why people have a hard time believing God will send "good" people to hell. What we do not understand is that while the right is narrow there is one distinction to getting off track which is still important no matter how good or bad we think we are; we chose not to follow God! There are people living in all kinds of ways due to their understanding of the truth and level of growth in how to serve God with and in their life which are, in fact, all serving God. Then there are a great number of people who would be quickly identified as people who are good, clean people who must be living for God who are in truth not!

James 4:17 says "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." You see, as one has the opportunity to learn more and more truths of God, the responsibility to live by them grows. The problem is that as people feel they are greater in the knowledge of God they also tend to feel more empowered to make decisions for themselves. Instead of understanding the greater responsibility to live in the true ways every moment and do the harder tasks God asks us as believers, in spite of what others may seem to "get away with," we feel we should be able to make more of the rules for ourselves. We think we should be able to say this is best on the basis of the place and time we live in. This is the religious thought pattern the Jews had so often fallen into, and in no greater way was that true than with the religious leaders. This attitude dictated that no matter how far down the nation had fallen they still should have the ability to be autonomous from other powers. This was their right as God's chosen nation. However, in spite of the fact this is what God wanted for the nation it was not what was best for them at all times considering the inability man has to continually walk in the truth.

The Jews truly belonged where they were on many occasions not because it was great or what God wanted for them, but because they needed to take the time to focus on God and His ways. As they did this the literal need would arise for them to have more and more autonomy in order to serve God, and when that came, God Himself would show the way to free them from other powers or simply bring it about. The interesting thing about looking at man's wrong thoughts in such matters is that what we see is for a time this same thought pattern among the Jews led to different actions for different groups. This is the instability that following the truth keeps us from, and that is what Jesus meant by knowing believers by their fruits. (Matt. 7:15-20) Fruit is not produced overnight. What will actually come to harvest and what will fall to the ground, fail to ripen correctly, get eaten by bugs, etc. is a wait and see kind of thing.

Some would take what I said above and think it means we can not know believers by their fruits because I talked about seeing people we would certainly think are the people of God and finding they do not actually listen to God. However, this is the deeper truth. Fruit being a long-term thing will show if there is growth or a stagnation into religious protocol that does not produce much of anything in the end. Long term will show if there is stability in what one believes or if it lofts around with every changing wind, and that point applies here. For the common Jew the thought that they were to be the chosen nation

and live on their own and by their own laws meant they would often not yield to governing authority that were not Jewish. This is why there were many uprisings among the Jews which ruling powers such as the Romans worried about. It was easy for some leader of a rebellion to find others who wanted to take up arms, and just as easy to get a great number of people feeling it was their God given responsibility to not live peacefully under a non-Jewish power. However, that was the common Jew. For all the conflicts this kind of activity brought throughout the history of the Jews under empires and other governing powers, this time around the religious leaders had become fairly settled in their power and positions.

This meant they would typically say nothing much in support of a rebellion until or unless they believed it would benefit them in a better way than having the status quo which they got under the Romans. This point we see in all we have talked about concerning the way these leaders responded to the great opportunity Jesus offered. As much as this status quo with Rome made it a perfect time to receive Jesus and learn from Him, these religious leaders were not going to risk giving a man a chance who only seemed to threaten their positions and religious authorities at the time. As we have covered, Judaism was officially recognized by the Roman Empire, and that gave the religious leaders far more power than they had under other governing authorities in spite of the fact it likely did little for the everyday Jew attempting to live by the Law. The problem is that the more comfortable one becomes the more power one tends to think they have. This is what led to the persecution of the believers in Jesus with no thought for how the secular world might see it. This continued to be done even as this financial situation and the reaching out of Caligula to rob money and harm commerce across the empire came about. This is where we see the real truth in men's hearts. They would not yield to Jesus, yet bad economics would bring about the thoughts and situations necessary to get the religious leaders a step closer to joining and supporting much more of the rebellious attitude among the Jews.

This would not be the total militant ready for action kind of attitude the common people had, but it would be the boldness to start seriously complaining and questioning Rome for its actions. While there was a comfort the Jews felt under the Romans, I think it was hard even for them to see at the time how much this had to do with comparison. What I mean by that is, the Jews felt more empowered under Rome than they had under other rulers, but that did not mean they held the sway or commanded the respect of Rome even as greatly as many other people in the empire would and did by just being who they were. Discrimination against God's people is real in this world of sin, and that will not change until God brings this world to an end. What the Jews experience, day after day, year after year, century after century, is pretty much the full force of this discrimination which the world is capable of dishing out. This means the Jews of this time had no real good gauge to look at and know that as much as it seemed they were accepted in the empire it was not to nearly as much of a degree as many other people would have simply considered commonplace. More importantly, the Jews were more vulnerable than others due to their need to follow God's Law, which was/is in and of itself contrary to the world's philosophies.

Now, lest I make it seem here that I am putting the Jews

down or painting them as the main troublemakers, just understand that what I mean by pointing out the Jews' tendency to think of themselves as, shall we say, "too good" to stay under the authority of a secular power is to simply say, that is what motivated them to act. For other people the very oppression the Jews faced on a regular basis would be enough to motivate them to rebellion, so we need to understand calmly living under any authority for the Jews was a difficult thing to ask. This means that while what might have seemed a simple financial crisis for most of the empire would come and go without much more than short-term damage, the Jews had the hardest time seeing it that way. If Rome was not going to be a stable power that at least brought the kind of advantages a government with halfway decent laws would bring, it was much harder for the Jews to live under than any other people. The Jews having become about as comfortable as they could ever be at the time, made it seem an even harder situation to bear than what it might have at other times.

All this thinking made the financial crisis a much bigger issue for Roman and Jewish relationships than it should have been, and it is why it is important we see it as the beginning of the downhill slide these relationships would suffer. There would be some of the same back and forth between the Jews and Rome that there had always been with various rulers, but post Jesus this situation brought about a thinking in the minds of even the religious leaders which brought the nation closer and more determined to rebel against Rome. This would be further heightened by the simple fact those who suffered the most under bad rulership also suffered most from their personal contact with others every day. The religious leaders sat comfortably in their homes in Jerusalem, and even outside of that city they had special status as religious leaders. The common Jew on the street was accused of things and suffered the consequences of such every day. This put financial crisis alongside an everyday struggle for them, and it came to a head in Egypt where Jews were being accused of not being faithful to the emperor. Now, Jews were often accuse of such things just because the Law God gave the nation causes them to be faithful to God rather than man. So what made this time different? Well, this time a common accusation took a worse turn than usual due to the fact the Jews were almost always successful business people, and I am sure they became outspoken against Caligula's theft of wealth.

To make matters worse, the prefect of Rome serving at the time in Egypt, a man named Aulus Avilius Flaccus, was said to be cruel to the Jews. On top of that, this prefect had been appointed by Tiberius. Not only that, Flaccus had a history of opposing Caligula's family as well as connections to groups who did, in fact, oppose Rome. Needless to say, Caligula did not trust him, and due to this, in 38 A.D. Caligula would send Herod Agrippa to Egypt to take a look at what was really going on. This was met by the non-Jews with great disdain as they saw Agrippa not as a Roman ruler but as the king over the Jews specifically and thus, they were not happy. Flaccus would try to please the non-Jewish population under his rule, as well as attempt to gain favor with Caligula by violating one of those things other religions could absorb even if they did not like it, but which Jews could not. Flaccus would place statues of Caligula in the Jews synagogues. This caused great riots to break out, and for his foolishness Caligula would remove Flaccus from office and have him executed.

As events continued to unfold in 39 A.D. Agrippa would accuse Herod Antipas (the Herod Pilate sent Jesus to during His trial) of conspiring with foreign powers against Caligula. Apparently there was some truth to it as Antipas confessed and Caligula had him exiled. This brought all his territory together with Agrippa's, making Agrippa an even more major ruler over the Jews' main habitation. Back in Egypt in 40 A.D. riots broke out once more in Alexandria, which were nothing more than a continuation of an unresolved problem as Greeks accused Jews of being the ones not loyal to the emperor. Showing even greater foolishness in response to all the unrest among the Jews, Caligula ordered a statue of himself be placed in the temple at Jerusalem! This action would have great similarity to the actions of the Greeks which caused the rebellion that led to Hanukkah. Being wise enough to see the parallel or just the political stupidity of such a move, the Roman governor over Syria had the implementation of the order delayed. There was obvious and legitimate fear of civil war if such a statue was placed, and about a year later it would be Agrippa who would convince Caligula not to go through with it in the end.

However, these moves all show us how much the religious leaders were very careless in their actions against the believers in Jesus. At the same time much of this was boiling to a head, they were out literally persecuting and killing Jesus' followers in the name of preserving the purity of their religion. It could be said they were so focused on driving ahead they forgot to look back. While they reached out in relative comfort to persecute the growing number of people serving Jesus, a secular ruler came very close to desecrating the temple once again, and the common Jew, being under great distress, were as restless as they ever had been. They may have thought they had preserved their ways by killing Jesus and going after His followers, but the events show us how much the nation was actually on the brink of losing it all by the time Jesus came. In truth, Jesus came at the exact right moment to prevent all of this, but now here they sat so close to destruction. All these events with Caligula, most likely would still have led to the first all-out war with Rome if it were not for the assassination of Caligula in 41 A.D. With him out of the picture there was at least hope a new ruler might be different, but only time would tell.

Time marched on, but the uneasiness created by Caligula's actions, and even his thought about putting a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem, had to make those who were determined the Jews should not submit to a foreign power just that much more determined! Those who had thought about it before, now were likely moved to the side of wanting to take a more proactive role, and those who had not thought about it so much, now thought about it. As one might imagine by what we have been talking about, the revolt against Rome would not come from the religious leaders, who were the closest thing the Jews had to actual governing rules which were not outside the nation, such as the Herodian line. It also would not come as an all at once uprising as most uprisings do not. No matter what history records and is prominent in the record of how a revolt or revolution came about, it so often is not the start of the bloodshed. Major uprisings are just the result of a building of problems, many of which worsen over time. These incidents were enough to spur action on

the part of those already on the brink of doing so. All there needed to be was enough people ready to do something to get it started, and no doubt others on that side of the fence would come to join in.

This is what happened in the year 46 A.D. An uprising contained mostly to the area of Galilee would take place. It would be led by two brothers named Jacob and Simon. What is important about this relatively small, mostly regional uprising is that unlike other times when it was more about a flash in the pan kind of thing, this uprising was more calculated. After the events of the previous years there was also going to be more general support for such a revolt among the Jewish people than there had been at other times. There is limited information about this uprising, but it has all the good parts of an uprising that would lead to greater actions needed as a catalyst to war. History tells us the uprising was spurred by anti-Roman sentiment. This while sounding standard enough to how Jews felt should be understood from the light we have been discussing. It is one thing to have a general feeling that freedom needs to be obtained, but when it rises to the level of being recognized in the moment, as well as history, as anti-government sentiment of some kind, it is in comparison to the time. This was not just about a few Jews being convinced by a messianic type leader or seemingly great man to take action when no one else would. This was about two brothers taking the leadership role in a fight that had become very public opinion. History says the uprising was driven by the Zealots, which were a group of those who represented their desire to always see the Jews freed from a secular government, as a religions thing. However, saying they drove this revolt is a bit much because, of course, people such as these would be all in from the start. The fact there was anyone outside those considered Zealots to drive – that is the point in the matter!

History also tells us the uprising started as a few minor skirmishes. However, again, this is just a way of looking at it from the day and age. From what we know about resistance fighting today, it would seem clear this was not some fights of resistance here and there but a calculated string of attacks meant to feel out weakness, cause problems, and bring more attention to the fact something was on the rise. This is why it is true this was looked at as a small revolt, but at the same time it lasted a couple of years. We are told the uprising lasted until 48 A.D. when it is said to have reached its climax. At that point the Romans stepped in with force and crushed it! Both Jacob and Simon were executed for their roles in the matter, and so it would seem it ended with not much damage done. The problem for Rome is that because this was not the typical flash of anger driven thing other revolts had been, the damage was far greater than they likely believed!

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

*Questions submitted to the Institute, answered by
Philip E. Busby.*

FBS continued from pg. 4

see that yes, we too have flaws, and we need to constantly guard against falling into sin due to them. However, the other side is not just about understanding others are not perfect either, but the point that in those imperfections God must still use those He chooses to use. If God only used those who were perfect, Jesus would have been the only one to ever walk this earth and be used of God. I will also add - look how the world judged Him?

Thus, we will see many flaws in those who serve God, but that does not mean God is wrong to use them. It means, just like you and I, God is not through with them yet. Now, this does not speak to the idea of allowing a person to get away with everything and still support them in the ministry or sit under their teaching. That is a more complex and long discussion, but we should simply realize that if a minister of God makes a mistake, we can not use that as an excuse to stop obeying God in all things. This is the humility that for one reason or another existed in Abimelech when it came to Abraham. He simply understood God was with Abraham in all things. Abraham might make some mistakes, but that was something to take to God not try to act directly toward Abraham in any way to try to get revenge for. Thus, as we head into verse 23 we continue the entire point Abimelech was making in that he says due to this he does not want Abraham to deal falsely with him as a king or future kings of his family. Instead, the king wants Abraham to treat him with the kindness he has treated Abraham with. The kindness part can be taken as an arrogant thing on the part of the king in that he is saying I have been kind and I expect kindness in return. However, we so often miss what is really going on due to cultural changes and differing forms of expression.

In many ways, the king is simply asking Abraham to do unto him as he has done unto Abraham. Abimelech also does not ask just for Abraham's kindness to his throne, but he specifically says, "...and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned." You see, Canaan did not really have a ruler over it like Egypt and many other lands did. Sure there were kings of sorts here and there that ruled over cities, and who knows how far out they felt their influence reached, but no king in the real sense of the word who had a people loyal to them and which they truly ruled. That is unless you look at Abimelech. In many ways he was about the only real king ruling over a specific group of people and for specific reasons that the land of Canaan knew. It is in that sense Abimelech asks Abraham to be kind to not just his house but the entire land Abraham had entered and lived. It was as if in some way Abimelech had come to understand that God had brought Abraham to this land for the specific purpose of giving it to him and his descendants. In some way there is that idea here. What the king says is not so much about right now and how Abimelech was treated by Abraham, though that was part of it, this was about knowing Abraham and his future family was not going anywhere. What this man brought to the land of Canaan meant something special and very long term!

Of course, the other part of Abimelech's statement is that he asks Abraham not to deal with him falsely. This in no way is a throw back to the idea of telling him Sarah was his sister other than in a very general way, which was that Abraham

obviously did not have to tell Abimelech anything he did not wish to. The king could be kept in the dark as to the reasons Abraham sojourned on this land, and there was nothing Abimelech could do about it. As he learned before, God was with Abraham. Thus, what Abimelech wanted was for Abraham to promise not to just deceive him by acting like they had good relations and then suddenly turn out to be an enemy who would devastate him. So Abimelech wanted Abraham to simply promise he would remember in whatever happened in the near or far future, that this king and his people had been a friend and not an enemy. This is what he really meant by returning the kindness. Whether kindness or defining it in another way, the point is the king did not attempt to overcome Abraham in order to absorb his assets as many kings would have, or at least try to. The king did not try to agitate Abraham in an attempt to get him to move on to another land. No, especially after the Sarah incident Abimelech had allowed Abraham and his flocks/herds to roam freely and do as they pleased for the most part. Abraham totally gets that this is what the king is saying, and so verse 24 is simple, Abraham agrees this is what he will do.

However, Abraham immediately turns to point out the king and his people had not dealt correctly in just everything. The implication in verse 25 is that if he and Abimelech now had a pact between them in which they promised they would do right by each other, there was already a matter Abimelech needed to deal with. That was the matter of a well of water which the king's servants had taken away and done it with violence. To us today it might seem a small thing to lose one well of water, but in the climate they were in and the work with animals they did, water might as well have been gold, and wells like gold mines. So this was no small matter, and since the king had made this agreement with Abraham, not on the basis Abraham would simply be kind to him and his people, this was a right-off blow to the king about what a mouthful he had agreed to on his side. You can interpret as much or as little fear into verse 26 as you want, but I believe these words show Abimelech reeling to find an answer. There is little doubt in my mind that the king had sat down to go over all the affairs with Abraham he had and think if there was anything about this that might come back to bite him. He had come to this meeting thinking himself justifiably a good king who had been nothing but good to Abraham, or at least tried to make it right the one time he had made a mistake. Now Abraham mentions to him that there is a matter pending that with most could have caused a war, and that is exactly what Abimelech did not want with Abraham. He feared Abraham enough to want to make this agreement, thus, this had to be a shock, and he tries to convince Abraham that he knew nothing about it. He even stammers over the excuse about how Abraham had not brought the matter to his attention, but he knows the real point is that his servants were not necessarily accustomed to taking orders from others or having to respect the property of others. After all, Abimelech was a king, right? This was going to be an issue for the king and one he needed to deal with. A later story shows us he did not do a very good job of dealing with it, but there would be an ultimate price to pay for all these actions just as God had said. (Gen. 12:2-3)

Now, verse 28, if not understood in the context of the day, might seem confusing to some, but basically Abraham

ignores Abimelech's excuses as to why he let the well thing happen and goes right to sealing the agreement by giving the king gifts of animals. It might seem to some that this should have been the other way around. If the king wanted some agreement from Abraham, then shouldn't he be giving Abraham gifts? The answer to that is no, because of two reasons. First, Abimelech was a king, and in spite of the fact Abraham was a great man, Abraham would respect the fact Abimelech was a leader of a nation. Second, this has to do with the fact Abraham was the one making the promise. Yes, Abimelech wanted something, but Abraham had to agree to do it. If he did, it was custom to give something to seal the agreement and say I am willing to give more to this than just the words of my mouth. This Abraham would do with a large enough gift as to not be overlooked. It would be obvious to all who saw Abimelech coming home that he had been given gifts, which meant he had sealed a deal with Abraham. However, there is a third point that is likely most important of all, and that is the fact Abraham himself wanted it to be clear to Abimelech he took this agreement seriously! In spite of how much Abimelech may have wished to only get something out of Abraham, that was not going to happen. Abraham was going to hold the king to his word!

Verse 28 tells us, out of the animals it was obvious Abraham was giving Abimelech, he had put seven female lambs off to themselves. Showing this had significance the king understood, he asks Abraham what he means by these. Abraham tells him these are so the king does not forget the important point Abraham had brought to his attention concerning the well. People have a bad habit of saying yes I'll get right on that and then, whether due to forgetfulness or the fact they never meant to do anything in the first place, they do nothing. However, we need to truly understand Abraham's words here. He does not say anything about the king forgetting to do something about the well, he says these lambs were to be taken as a witness to the king that Abraham dug the well in the first place. This was not just something Abraham or his servants claimed one day as their own and now they and the king's servants fought over it. Abimelech was not to come back with the excuse as to why he did nothing, that after talking with his men this really was not Abraham's well. Abimelech was the one who brought up the point Abraham had not brought this to his attention. Thus, Abraham was saying, if you and I are going to deal with such things face to face, you will believe me now that this well is mine and always has been.

By taking the lambs, which I can only imagine Abimelech must have been afraid not to, the king was doing more than just agreeing the well was Abraham's. He was admitting his men were wrong to take it, and he was taking Abraham at his word on the matter. Abraham had taken the king's word on the matter he had been kind to him in spite of this well, now the favor would be returned. Also, Abraham was saying, if you fail to do anything about this, I will. That might be the more forceful point in doing this. You see if the king admitted here and now the well was rightfully Abraham's, then there was nothing he could say later if Abraham and his servants did something more, shall we say, drastic to take it

back. Abimelech had asked to be dealt with in the same way he had dealt with Abraham, and Abraham had pointed out very specifically that the well had been taken away with violence. Up until now, Abraham had been very giving, but what this agreement opened the door for Abraham to do was be less. Abraham was the righteous man in this situation, and that point might have slipped Abimelech's mind a bit in coming to do this. There was going to be little Abraham would ever do which could even be misconstrued as incorrect by Abimelech's people. (1 Thes. 5:22) Let's just say this well of water was only the tip of the iceberg for what would need to be dealt with on the king's side of things to keep things right!

Abraham would name this place Beersheba, which means, "Well of the oath." Thus, the name needs no explanation. However, this place and this agreement these two men made would have very long-term meaning. As for the agreement, if it had of been kept by the side Abimelech represented, it could have been a great thing for both the chosen nation, the Philistines, as well as the world. The Philistines were the one people who not only got to stay on their land as Israel came to possess it, but unlike others the nation simply failed to destroy, it would seem the Philistines continued to thrive. When Israel comes out of Egypt and to the promised land, one of the main points as to why they did not want to enter the land at first was fear of giants that lived in the hills of the south. Those giants were eventually dealt with, but later as David goes to meet his brothers, who were out in the battlefield, it would be a Philistine giant he ended up facing. The Philistines continue to be a thorn in the side of the chosen nation because they still did so well on this land, but they were not suppose to be Israel's enemy, they were suppose to be the closest of friends, helping one another.

Such a partnership could have been of great value to the people of Israel, and the blessing to the Philistines would have been so great one can not imagine how much they might have prospered. They were a seafaring people, and not only would they have prospered as Israel did so by trade of goods across the Great Sea, the world would have prospered at the way the spread of God's word would have been expanded. This agreement was no small thing between Abraham and Abimelech, but it was squandered by men not keeping their word. The One we know to this day did keep His word in this situation was God! As the Philistines were allowed to continue their existence in ancient times until finally even they would pass with the dust of changing times, in much later centuries, that they should have survived to see, their name has been taken on by those falsely attempting to use it as their own as a political weapon against the Jews today. Yet even to these people God has been gracious beyond compare as, in spite of all their grumbling, those who call themselves Palestinians are blessed everyday by the existence of the modern state of Israel through food, supplies of clean water, electric power, and the list goes on!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

Abraham would have more than one son, but he would only have one son born of Sarah and who God said would be the one through whom the chosen nation would come. Isaac would also live on this land in much the same way his father had, only having two sons. Of these two, only one would be worthy to go on to build the chosen nation. So, again, we see after two generations of God working to build this nation, Jacob stands alone and would leave for his grandfather's homeland, not coming back until he had two wives, the two handmaids of theirs (through whom he had also had sons), and almost all the sons he would ever have. Interestingly enough as much as this would finally seem to be the foundation of a nation, one would think was to be developed two generations prior to this, Jacob's family would not stay on the promised land. Even before Jacob's life would end they would go to Egypt! There they would grow into a nation of people, but be oppressed by those in Egypt until decades later when God would finally lead them out to go back to the promised land. This journey would likely have taken about the space of two to three years, and in it the bulk of the Law was given. However, in spite of the Law being given the nation would not trust God to bring them into the land, and would wander for another forty years before they even started the process of taking the land. The point in all this is that no real world event took place during all this time. God simply worked step by step with His nation as only those in the world who had any interest looked on!

Mankind did nothing special which did or would have had major consequences to our existence at this time. Man himself was not said to have come to any state so degraded that God needed to make some drastic adjustment such as the theology says He had in Noah's day. The most drastic thing God did at the time is give the Law, but stop and think about it! It is not like even that was something which was done with a big announcement to the world. It is not even like the coming of Jesus where a specific group of men were developed whose job it would be to learn the Law and go out to take it into all the world! In truth, the practice of the Law was isolated to just one nation which God had developed for that specific purpose. This was not as true when it came to the words of the Law so much, but even that was something there was no real plan we are told of as to how it would be taken to the world, other than the fact the nation would eventually begin to practice it as a nation who would be known and seen as a culture in this world. Thus, what we see in all this is that the giving of the Law, in spite of what a transition it seems to be as one reads through the Bible, was not an instant or big world event in the history of men. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying the Law did not have a major impact. To say that would be one of the most ignorant Biblical things to think, so that point goes without saying. However, we need to stop and think about how in contrast with the transition that was close to instantaneous when Adam and Eve took of the tree.

Yes, there were only two humans at the time, which makes it seem easy, but still it included and affected the entire world's population. Then when God sent the flood in Noah's day there were far more than two people, and yet this affected the entire world's population. The preparation leading up to it might not have seemed to have, depending on what amount of work

and success one believes Noah had in reaching the world with the message the flood was coming. However, one thing is for sure, the population of the earth was more connected than we can really imagine today, and the news of the man building a gigantic watertight box on dry land too far inland to ever be moved to a large enough body of water to float it in had to be the wonder of the world! One way or the other, once the flood came it affected the entire population. All but eight people died, and those eight lived in that gigantic floating box for a full year of their lives due to the flood. On top of that, the world was affected physically in a way it never had been and never will be again.

Then there came the Tower of Babel, and unless one wants to deny what the Bible says in black and white, this affected the entire population of the world. In fact, this event was specifically about the entire population of the world refusing to live in a way that would disconnect them to a great enough degree that the major theologies of men would not be the only theology of men! Now, I am not trying to claim that it was God's intent to drive men to specific lands across the world or that it was God's desire for man to become disconnected from each other, but like the eating of meat, no matter if it was the greatest thing for man or not, it came to a point where separation was necessary for survival. This is why God confounded man's language. This way only those who worked to bring men together or teach a certain philosophy would be able to affect any great number of people. Meaning the chances of being able to affect the entire world would be next to impossible. We see this most clearly in the Greek Empire as they had a culture considered by many to be superior to any other. Greek culture is still revered this way by many today, and this was so true at a point in history that some people willingly gave up their own culture to become Greek in their thinking. Yet, neither the Greek Empire or the Greek culture succeeded on bringing all men back to one way of thinking or under one centralized rulership.

No doubt the confounding of the languages was a major event, but its main reason had nothing to do with changing dispensations. Like so many other theologies out there, if one simply reads the Bible with no motive other than to learn the truth, what we find is the giving of the Law was certainly no major change in how one can be or should go about being saved! It was gradually implemented into the life of one specific nation thing, which God placed into the world at large to affect the world, and to which we can all look for the assurance we know what we are talking about when we believe in the plan of God. When Jesus came, not only had the Law been around for centuries, but between It and the prophecies given to the nation, we are told Who He would be, to where He would come (right down to the point of the city in which He would be born), and to what family line He would belong. There was also a star that appeared which wise men from far away recognized as something that would lead them to the King of the Jews! This was the point of the Law. Not to change some dispensation but to make clear the plan of God. God announced Jesus' birth and John was sent to be the forerunner of Jesus' ministry. All this was prophesied about long before it happened, because both the people long prior to His coming as well as those long after needed/need to know Who He is!

This is why there is the fact we touched on which is that disciples were taught and actually commissioned to go out into all the world and make sure everyone everywhere knew of Jesus' life and work. (Mark 16:15) Why was this needed? So all would know Jesus had changed the mode by which we must be saved? No, because everyone needed/needs to know The Messiah the Law tells us would come has come. That is why this was not just a commission for the twelve but for all who believed, and it was not just for the time period, it was to continue until Jesus one day returns. Then the return of The Messiah will be another worldwide event known to everyone everywhere! The fact Jesus will come down and put His feet on the Mount of Olives, making a triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, one of the greatest hot points of war and unrest in the most tumultuous region of the world, will not go unnoticed no matter what may follow. However, through it all, just as Paul tells us, grace was and will still be the only reason we can be saved, and faith will always be the substance of what we hope for.

Demonstration of this truth on a physical level is why the nation of Israel was told if they would follow the Law the nation would be blessed. This included physical truths of prosperity, but that is the point for the nation. It was to show that a people living as God asks us to live can still accomplish in this world a place where the blessings of God can flow and how that can bring even physical prosperity. However, this takes the cooperation of more than just a handful of people, and as was the case with the chosen nation, only under the constraint of following God in all things. This is not oppression, unless you believe serving God is oppressive, which many do, and there is another key thought! One of the greatest things Christian teachers rejoice over and get very defensive about anyone suggesting they are wrong about is the fact, "We are free from the Law!" True, Paul does use these words in his writings, but not in the context we so often want to think of it as. It's easy to chop up what someone says and claim it means one thing or the other, but even after the coming of The Messiah, Paul was speaking to the Jewish mind and those who studied the Law who came to the same kind of conclusion Dispensationalism teaching thinks, which is that the Law was and maybe still is necessary for salvation. This debate was big as the Gospel went out. We see not too far into the Book of Acts those who went out from the Jews teaching that even non-Jews needed to come under the Law in order to be saved. (Acts 15:1-21)

This was incorrect, and so what Paul was trying to speak to was not just that harsh teaching being driven by people who very well may have had the best of intentions, but also those inside the churches who might develop or wonder about it in their own minds. He was trying to get at the point from that view of people thinking it was necessary for salvation, and say, Jesus proved we are free from Law. In truth, he was not pointing to the Laws of God, but the legalistic thought patterns of man's religion! These thought patterns do not teach us there are those who desire righteousness, and when they live in those ways they experience a closeness to their Creator and the finding of truth that brings a peace which passes understanding. Religious

thought tells us we are doomed and we must find a way to appease an angry God in order to obtain some eternal reward. Jesus showed us that while we were still here in this very sinful state, God loved us so much that He came down and gave His life for us! (Rom. 6:7-8) Does this sound like a God Who has ever wanted to do anything but make sure we could find and follow Him if that would only be our desire? It's never been about crawling on one's hands and knees trying to be worthy. Nor is it about some simple religious ceremony observed once in a while or maybe only once. Paul was trying to get us all to see how Jesus made it clear, if we could just step out of our religious thought patterns no matter Jew or non-Jew, we'd see that true salvation comes from the grace of God. God wants to save us, and He is not interested in making it hard for us to find and/or obtain! However, He also will not force us into a life we do not want, and that is why even Adam and Eve were not left without a choice.

One of the whole reasons people think of the Law as so powerful so as to save us, and now so weak that it can be cast aside and, in fact, must be, is our unwavering belief that religious ceremony and/or formulas of some sort can, in fact, hold the power of salvation. What we believe and now argue over is which one is the correct one to follow. This is simply wrong at its core! Salvation is only a term we use because of the fact we are not able to be perfect, and thus, we have something to be saved from. For Adam and Eve prior to the taking of the tree, this was not a fact they even had to worry about as long as they did not take of the tree God said not to. In this, we see they were not completely innocent. They knew they should not take of the tree because God told them not to. Why had He told them this? Because taking would make it harder for them to walk with Him! Why did God send a flood? Because man was making it impossible for anyone to walk with Him here on this earth. Why did God confound the languages at the tower? Because man's religious thoughts were threatening to keep men from ever thinking about walking with God again. Why did God give the Law? Because the nature of man had been truly revealed! It was time to make it easier for those who desired Him to see the right path and that they were not alone. Why did God come down and give His life for us? To show us even death, caused directly by our wrong actions, could not hold back His love and ability to save us! All this was done not to change how we might be saved but to make sure we never lose sight that it will always be available to every generation that ever lives, and that is why Jesus will one day return!

As we go into what we call the history books of the Bible, we do not just enter a new section of books but the overall story of man's journey under the circumstances man had created and the ways God had responded to deal with them. We should be careful to never forget that at any moment, and if we lose our way in the events of these books, we need only to look at them from the perspective the Torah gives. That will show us the way to bring it all into focus!

Let's stay in God's Word!

