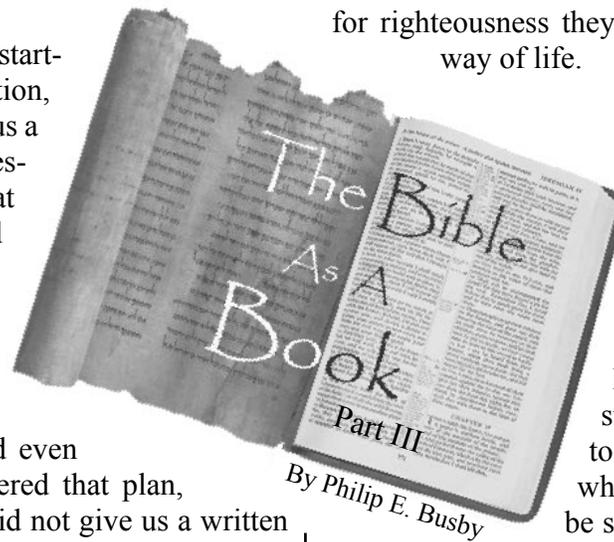


In our last segment, we started talking about the question, why did God choose to give us a written Word? With that question, we also wanted to look at the question of, why did God wait so long to give it? The answer to our secondary question really comes down to the simple facts of creation. God intended to walk with us directly and even though sin has greatly hindered that plan, it's still God's desire! God did not give us a written Word from the beginning because we did not need it in order to learn of Him; but as sin took away the Garden of Eden and chipped away at our ability to stand before God's presence with any kind of closeness, God gave us something tangible we could hold in our hands under any circumstances.

This brings us to a discussion about the history of the Children of Israel and the temple itself. You see, God did not give us a written Word because He had given up on the idea anyone would ever be able to draw close to Him again. God gave the Word so no matter how far from or close to God we became in our lives, we would have something to look to which would lead us ever forward and closer in our walk with Him if we would only desire it. This is why the basis of the written Word is not what Christians call the New Testament and the story of the first coming of the Messiah, nor is it the whole of what most Christians call the Old Testament. The true core of the Word is the first five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy! What the Jews call the "Torah." (Law)

These books not only tell us the story of how this universe and our own existence came to be, but they show us the establishment of a nation to whom God would commit His written Word. (Rom. 3:1-2) This nation would preserve the written Word, which they have done very well; and they would - for lack of a better term - enact it! What do I mean by this? Well, those first five Books to the Jews are simply, "The Law." Everything else derives from that. Even for the Children of Israel today, who through a lot of history are identified by just one of the twelve tribes names (Jews), these laws are more than just a guide

for righteousness they are intended to be a literal way of life.



To understand this, there is no better example than to look at the history of the temple. Today, in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount is occupied by a structure known as, "The Dome of the Rock." This structure is believed by many to be setting on the very spot where the temple of God should be setting. However, even if you

could build the temple alongside this structure, there is great political pressure which prevents the Israeli government from giving the go-ahead to build. However, this does not stop those Jews who are sincere about living the life God instructed them. Even now, all the preparation for the temple and its service are being prepared and studied. All the elements which can be put into place are being created in anticipation of a new temple being built. Why is it so important to them? Because it's what God instructed them to do over three thousand years ago, and it's just as relevant today as it was then! Why? Well that question takes us back to the Garden of Eden!

The garden was the place where God's physical presence would be on a regular basis. One of the first things Adam and Eve understood, after eating the fruit they were told not to eat, was the fact God could be coming along any time. (Gen. 3:6-10) As we talked about last time, sin made it dangerous for this situation to exist. Thus, God cast man out of the garden and put an angel and a flaming sword to block the way to The Tree of Life. God, however, never stopped desiring to be close to man. Thus, He came and walked with those who sanctified their lives unto Him; but God wanted more than just the hope that a few men would walk with Him. (II Pet. 3:9) God desired a place where His presence would unmistakably be, and all men would know! Thus, God established a nation in order to create such a place among them; and the promise was always that when this nation made it to the land God had given to their fathers, God would eventually pick a place for the purpose of His presence! (Deut. 12:1-14) That place, which God chose to set His name

throughout human existence on this planet was and is Jerusalem! (I Kings 9:1-3)

Now, just because God chose the place where His physical presence could reside, does not mean it automatically and forever was so. The same factors which existed in the Garden of Eden still exist today. God having a place where His unmistakable presence could reside, even in Jerusalem, was still going to have to be prepared; and this would have to be done out of the freewilled choices of the human race. God can beat an elephant with a worm if He can get a wiggle out of the worm. God can do anything, but He has set up this planet to run on our free will. God needs willing vessels in order to accomplish His will on this planet. This is yet another part of why Jesus came to this earth as a man, making it clear He was to be about His Father's business. (Luke 2:49) It would be up to Israel first and foremost to be used as an instrument of God's will to see the temple built and maintained. This is why it's, of course, true that God could, at any time, clear away all obstacles to the temple being built today; but He is letting us unfold the story as we the people will.

Now, if it was up to just me, I would simple step in and give the order to build - but who am I? The reason not even the Israeli government will give the order to build, is because, it would seem that order would be the start of world war III! Which if you read what the Bible tells us, something of this nature is exactly what will eventually happen. (Matt. 24:25-31, Rev. 19:11-21) When it does, Jesus will return to take His rightful place as King of Kings and Lord of all! Against Him, no man, no army, no government will stand or have the power to stop His will. Thus, we pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Whether Jew or non-Jew, we can all be a part of bringing about God's will on this planet. This is why Jesus instructed us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:9-10 The reason we say Jesus is The Word is because God has placed all things in The Messiah's hands; (John 13:1-5) and when He returns, the physical presence of God will once more be walking this earth! (Zech. 14:1-4)

How do we put all this together? By reading the tangible Word God has given us. By looking at the history of the Children of Israel, and more specifically the temple, we can understand the nature of what is going on. In the Torah, when God first gave the commandments for the temple to be built, it was a "tabernacle." (Ex. 25:8-9) The true difference between a temple and a tabernacle is that a tabernacle is a moveable structure, and the temple is a "stay where it's placed" kind of building. Moses and the Children of Israel coming out of Egypt did not know God would eventually choose Jerusalem as the place to set His name. In fact, they were not anywhere close to Jerusalem. They had a journey of many miles and many trials before their first opportunity to even enter the land of promise would come; but even so, they were instructed to build a tabernacle which could be carried with them as they traveled. God wasted no time in utilizing the nation of Israel for the purpose of His presence. He not only gave instruction about how to build the tabernacle, but He gave them instruction as to how to set up their camp around the tabernacle. He also told them just how they were to take it down for the purpose of moving it. (Num. 4:5-33)

It's at this time of the tabernacle that we really get the picture about God wanting to maintain an unmistakable physical presence on the earth. God does not lead the Children of Israel by a still, small voice. He does not sneak them through the back way and slowly build them into a nation which would quietly crowd out the other people of Canaan. No, God leads Israel with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night! (Ex. 13:21-22) God audibly spoke to them at Mt. Sinai. God had them build a tabernacle which would be in the middle of their camp and where that pillar of cloud and fire would rest until God was ready for them to move on. I don't know about you, but if I had heard of such a thing, I would have been saddling my camel to go and see that!

The Children of Israel were experiencing the presence of God in a very physical way. They were receiving God's instructions as to how to maintain that presence; and those instructions are, to this very day, the core of God's written Word. God gave words on a page - as we would say today - and those

words, when enacted, brought about something those who desired God, from Enos forward, could only hope to see! (Gen. 4:26) God's Word, when enacted by those to whom they were committed, again, created a place where God's physical presence would be; but it had to be maintained! After the journey through the wilderness, the tabernacle was not always maintained in a way for God's presence to reside. However, as bad as that was, the fact there was a written Word of God meant there was never any reason to doubt just how to go about getting it back. At the time of the prophet Samuel's birth, the Bible records there was no open vision. (I Sam. 3:1) Even in God's chosen nation, God's presence was not openly felt, seen, or heard from. Samuel would begin to change that. They were not maintaining the instructions God had given them. Samuel was the prophet who was sent to anoint David, king of Israel when David was just a boy. (I Sam. 16:11-13) David would grow up to be the king who desired to see not just the ark of the covenant brought to the capital city he had established, but a temple built which would re-establish God's presence among Israel. God had made David a mighty conqueror, which made him the wrong man for this task; but God promised him that his son would get to build the temple! (II Sam. 7:1-17) When David's son Solomon became king, the temple in Jerusalem was built; but how did they know how to build such a structure? Simple, the pattern given for the tabernacle was used to build the temple in Jerusalem. There was no longer a need to fold up a tent and carry it along, but the concept of how to use the structure had not changed!

When Solomon finished the building, he prayed a prayer of dedication; and when he finished that prayer, the presence of God descended on the new temple in such a powerful physical way that the priests could not enter the house, and fire came down on the alter in much the same way God's presence had done when the tabernacle was dedicated in the wilderness centuries before! (II Chron. 7:1-4, Lev. 9:23-24) This temple would stand for many, many years, but even during its existence there would be times when it would fall into disuse and need of repair because the people and/or the king did not care enough to maintain it. In many cases, it came to this state because the people and/or the king had chosen to follow other gods instead of The One True God;

but the story, I believe, that has significant relevance to our study is the one found in II Chronicles 34. In about 623 B.C., a priest named Hilkiah "...found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses." II Chronicles 34:14 Hilkiah then gave the Book to Shaphan (who was a scribe) and Shaphan brought the Book to King Josiah and read it to him. By the time the king had finished hearing "...the words of the law,.." he was so moved by how far Israel had strayed from what God had commanded, "...that he rent his clothes." II Chronicles 34:19 Then the king ordered that the priests enquire of the Lord concerning the words, "...for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book." II Chronicles 34:21

King Josiah was already in the process of cleansing the land of false religion and repairing the Temple of God. In fact, it's when the money the king had collected to repair the temple was delivered to the priest that the "Book" which was found was delivered back to the king. However good Josiah's intentions and actions had been up to that point, the Words in that Book still caused him to be very concerned about the condition the nation was in. It was by the hearing of the Law that the king realized just what they needed to do and just how far short their efforts at that time had fallen. God was not attempting to discourage the king; God used His written Word to direct the king further down a path of righteousness, he, up to that point, had only been guessing at. God was not going to leave Josiah's desire to serve God and bring God's presence back to Jerusalem setting in the dark. God used His Word no matter how long forgotten and lost, to show Josiah just what he needed to do!

This story is a great example of why God gave us a written Word! Josiah was the king of the chosen people of God, yet he had grown up in a society where the things of God had been forgotten. Even The Word of God, written down in ink, had been lost. It's really hard to say just what Josiah did and did not understand about God; but one thing is for sure, no matter how great his desire, Josiah was a long way from returning the presence of God to Jerusalem. Then a scroll was found! No doubt, covered with enough dust to plant barley in, and sudden-

ly everything changed! There is no telling just how long it would have taken Josiah to understand what, in a very short time, he was able to understand just by hearing the Law read to him.

Now, one of the things, which has been a stumbling block for Israel for a very long time, is the fact they have had trouble with the concept that God, in the Law, never intended them to have a king. God knew there would be a day when they would desire such a thing because all the other nations had one; (Deut. 17:6-20) but it was not until the people became insistent about it that God allowed and established a kingship in Israel. (I Sam. 8:4-22) The shorthand point of all this is that God was to be their King; and every person in Israel, whether rich or poor, was to serve God directly with the Law as their guide. This is another reason the Word was given. As we talked about earlier, just because there are those who desire to rebuild the temple doesn't mean it's going to happen. In Israel, at those times when the temple was in disrepair, there were those who desired to repair it, but it took a national effort lead by, or at the very least not hindered by, the current king in order to accomplish it. Bottom line is, a king who serves God, such as Josiah, can be a good thing; but a king who doesn't desire God's ways, can be a bad thing. However, no matter who the king was, there was and is no reason for each individual not to find and study the written Word for themselves. In fact, through the centuries since the last temple stood, leading right up to today, almost because they lacked a temple, Jews have done exactly what Christians have continually failed to maintain, and that is focus on the Word! Even without a temple, the Jewish people are showing us what is important in this world, and setting the righteous example of making God's Word the center of their lives.

Knowing the Word for yourself as an individual is still the first and foremost thing anyone can do, and it makes no difference whether you are Jew or non-Jew because the world just keeps shifting. No individual can control what the rest of the world does around them. Different times bring different seasons. You can make the argument that things like the temple and its sacrifices are not for you to enact if you are non-Jewish, but how does that currently make you any different from a Jew if you desire the

things of God? The Jew does not currently have a temple to sacrifice at! The Jew cannot enact certain things in the Law; therefore, the non-Jew cannot observe all the Law being enacted. However, the same Words which enable the Jew to understand what it is he would be doing if there were a temple, are the same Words available to show us what the Jews would be doing. What is clear is that we all can and should be reading the Words Josiah heard, and through them, gaining an understanding of what it is God wants out of each of us as individuals!

We also find, by reading our Bibles, that non-Jews can and do play a part in supporting or hindering what Israel does. This can be complicated; but if we want to be on the right side of this dynamic, we must all seek to follow the Words of God. If we move from the story of Josiah and go down the line of kings, we come to the second son of Josiah who reigned over Judah. His name was Jehoiakim; and because Israel did not keep the ordinances of God, this king of Judah was put on the throne by the Pharaoh of Egypt after Pharaoh had dethroned his brother. (II Kings 23:31-34) Not long after he was placed on the throne, God would allow Judah to become subject to the Babylonian Empire. The prophet Jeremiah was sent to King Jehoiakim to tell him that this was in God's plan and the king should not fight against it. The words prophesied to the king were that God created the world and He can give it to whomever He pleases. God was giving it into the hand of the king of Babylon, and even the king of Judah should serve him. (Jer. 27:1-11) It was not important that Israel have a king which ruled in sovereignty over the land. What was important is that Israel have the freedom to serve God and show forth His Law to the rest of the world! Jehoiakim did not listen to God, neither did those short-lived kings God gave a chance to after him. Because of this, eventually Jerusalem, along with the temple, was completely destroyed and almost all of Judah was carried away captive. (II Chron. 36:11-21)

Even after this, God sent word again to the remnant, which was left in the land, and instructed them to serve the king of Babylon and enjoy the freedom to do God's will. (II Kings 25:24) The people did not listen and eventually went down into Egypt and served false gods there. The temple would not stand

again for over seventy years; and instead of being built by those Jews who had been blessed enough to remain in the promised land, it would be built by returning Jewish captives which had been taken to Babylon by the king who originally destroyed Jerusalem. Also, we see that the order to build Jerusalem and the second temple came from the king of the next empire to rule the land. However, this second temple would still be built under duress. It would be hindered by those who had come to live in the land of Israel during the Jew's absence. (Ezra, Nehemiah) The second temple would eventually be completed, but political circumstances would continue to affect the temple and its existence as time moved forward. Many years later, this second temple would be built over the top of, and dismantled inside of, a much bigger temple. This bigger temple is known to most of us as, "Herod's Temple." This bigger temple which was standing at the time of the Messiah's first coming was not really built by those following the Word of God at all. Instead, it was built by a ruler put into place by yet another empire who ruled the land. Essentially, Herod rebuilt the second temple in an attempt to gain style points with his Roman overlords as well as the Jews. This temple would stand a few decades past the first coming of The Messiah; but in spite of its Romanesque style and grandeur, it was destroyed during a battle between the Jewish resistance and the Romans!

Time and time again the tabernacle or the temple was destroyed or neglected, but as sad as that is, it really only stands as an example of human will at work. Sometimes, people were passionate about creating a place for God's presence and sometimes they were/are not. Sometimes passionate people were in a position to make it happen and often they have not been. Sometimes the temple stood as the jewel of Jerusalem and sometimes it was a simple structure. Sometimes the temple was built strictly by Jews under the purest of circumstances, and sometimes it was built under the auspices of a non-Jewish ruler. What we can physically have or not have on this planet is often dictated by the circumstances we find ourselves in; but what never ceases to be important and can never be taken from us, is our personal desire to have a relationship with God! Temple or no temple, faith is always going to be "...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Hebrews 11:1 All those who desire the things of God know, or will eventually learn, that this world offers very little, and seeking to build something here has no point if it does not direct others to the saving knowledge of The Lamb only God could provide! (Gen. 22:8) The ultimate lesson the Word was written to confirm to us is that we must not seek this world and all it has to offer. (I John 2:15) All through the ages, those who truly desire God's presence in their lives, in reality, "...desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." Hebrews 11:16

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