

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip Busby

In our last segment, we did the math on the 150 days of the flood. Included in these days, was the forty days and nights of great rain and fountains of the deep breaking forth. There was a time period where the world simply suffered destruction by being covered with water, and then there was a time period where God set in motion those things which caused the water to “asswage.” However, it was not until chapter 8 verse 3 that we come to the end of these 150 days and see that the water had truly “abated.”

The Hebrew word, the word “abated” comes from here, is different from the one it comes from the next two times you see it in this chapter. The next two mean “to be” or “become light.” One might characterize this as meaning, the standing water which covered the dry land was no longer a problem, because only mud or something close to that remained. However, here in verse 3, the word is talking not so much about the amount of water left on what should be dry land, but the destructive force of the water. This word doesn’t mean “light,” it means “lack.” The force with which the water was able to destroy the land and be a threat to the survival of living things was, at this point, lacking. Remember earlier when we talked about the non-possibility for others to survive the flood by getting into boats because of the ferociousness of the water breaking forth? We also talked about the sea creatures having trouble living through the violence and change the water brought. Well, now that is all behind Noah and his family. At this point, one might be able, with some supplies, to survive being out on the face of the water in a boat; and certainly the threat to water dwelling animals had passed. All they had to worry about now was staying with water which would end up as part of a big enough permanent body of water that it would sustain them!

Verse 4 tells us, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month of the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, the ark came to rest, “...upon the mountains of Ararat.” Now, there have

been many, many people who have went in search of Noah’s ark. In fact, it may be the most looked for and sought after artifact known to man! It is Noah’s ark that many people point to as the Holy Grail - not the Holy Grail itself - of finds, which would prove the Bible is true. There can be a lot of answers to the question of why people feel this way, but I believe it has less to do with the fact so many people say they don’t believe it happened and more about a gnawing feeling that it did in fact happen! Out of all the miracles in the Bible and in spite of the fact only one man and his family survived the flood, the story is less personal than many others in the Bible. The fact the flood was such a gigantic world-wide event causes people to question if it ever happened; but at the same time, I think the thought is striking. Since it was world-wide, the flood touched all mankind in a way no other event ever has.

The story of the flood is not the healing or helping of one person or group like so many other miracles in the Bible which we may or may not find applicable to our personal circumstances. It’s not just a promise or a life altering action to or for one man, family or group. It’s not just something offered to all mankind which each individual must choose or reject. Even the confounding of the languages does not seem to compare. As much as that affected everyone alive at the time, we are so used to having language barriers today, we can hardly conceive of a time when it did not exist. The flood is a whole other story indeed! Literally, everyone alive at the time of the flood ceased to live, save eight. This means, when we talk about where we all come from, we are not simply all just from Adam and Eve, but from just one family out of all the families which came from Adam and Eve!

Another factor in all this is the understanding that an event as large and catastrophic as the flood has to have drastically altered our world. We, as people, are still what God created us to be, but our environment has been reconfig-

ured! We do not just lack historical places to visit where we can tell our children this building or on this spot, this or that happened prior to the flood. We don't even know if the mountains or valleys we see today would be recognizable to someone like Adam and Eve. "What was the world like before man fell into sin?" is a question we like to ask, but more profound than that is, what did our planet, as a whole, look like before the flood? In the end, we just don't know what to say about all this. Many are just not sure it has any truth to it at all, much less that it's completely true; but unlike other things people doubt about the Bible, there is a possibility that something remains which could tell us this really did happen. Maybe it doesn't prove every point of the story, but it would prove the story is at least based on significant facts! In the post-flood world, in a place pointed out by name, Noah left his ark!

Why has it never been found? This subject brings up many possible answers. Some would answer that it has been found! There are those who have made the claim that they have seen Noah's ark, and/or even brought back wood from the ark. However, these stories are a little like the monster in Loch Ness, and Bigfoot of North America. No really convincing evidence has been accumulated, and there is still not a clear route, no matter how hard it may be to travel, which adventurers or maybe even everyday tourists can follow to see the ark. The ark remains a mystery, and the simple truth of the matter is this: the fact we can't find it, doesn't mean it's not all true!

It simply may be that Noah's ark has long ago deteriorated into dust, and it literally does not exist in a recognizable form in our day. Some believe it is under a great deal of ice, and until we can dig down to it or the ice melts, we will never see it. There is even the possibility that the place we think is Mount Ararat today is not actually the same mountains the Bible is talking about. Remember that verse 4 tells us, the ark landed, "...upon the mountains of Ararat." This would indicate that Ararat is not just one mountain top, but that Ararat refers to a region. At best, this means it may be talking about a mountain range. If that's the case, then we could still be talking about a lot of territory. However, Ararat could also be referring to an entire region of land, and to say it landed on the mountains of that region could indicate something as large as, say, North or South America. Just to be clear, I don't believe the ark is in the Americas. I'm only pointing out that when talking about regional names, you can be talking about a vast amount of land. It's possible that people searching for the ark haven't even come close!

Moving on to verse 5, we are told the waters of the flood decreased on a continual basis. Since the waters have already been "abated," this time period is like waiting for the water to drain out of a bathtub. The water had served its purpose and was now doing what water by nature does: flowing to the lowest point. The problem Noah faced was that he was not sure where the bottom of the tub was. As the water continued its journey back to the sea and evaporation took more into the

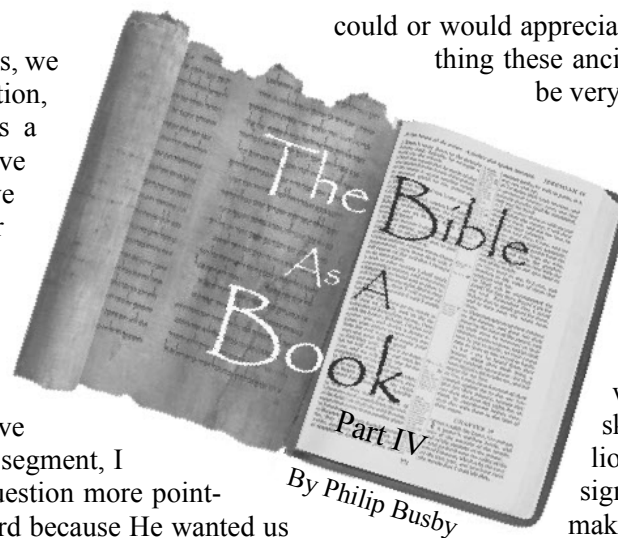
firmament, only God could know at what point the water would stabilize into a balanced system of bodies of water and dry land. However, all along the way there were points of hope. This verse tells us that seventeen days shy of three months since the ark came to rest, the tops of the mountains were seen. This is a physical occurrence for a physical situation. All along, Noah had, without fail, trusted God and His instructions. If God said it was going to happen it was going to happen! However, God is gracious towards us in that He always gives us physical signs to help relieve the stress the physical part of us is going through. In fact, this is one of the reasons Jesus was sent far before it was time for Him to establish the kingdom He is returning to establish for a time on this earth. God sent His Son as a baby born to humble parents so He could walk in meekness and allow Himself to be sacrificed on the cross. Passover, The Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits, had been foreshadowing these events for centuries. Right on schedule, Jesus died on the cross at the same time the Passover sacrifice was being slain at the temple. Then right on time, He rose from the dead on Firstfruits. This is the evidence that God has the power over death which we need. The sequence was physically enacted for our eyes and consideration. We have waited almost two thousand years now for Christ's return as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords upon this earth; but this whole time, we have had His first coming to rejoice in. For if He did not intend to return and gather His own unto Himself, why would He have allowed Himself to suffer as He did on that day?

Verse 5 is interesting in that the ark had already come to rest on the mountains of Ararat, but it was not until almost three months later that the tops of mountains were seen. Now, I realize you can just brush this aside with the thought that the ark simply landed on one of the highest peaks, and I would agree this is certainly likely. However, I think there is a perspective being talked about here. Unlike a lot of the children's illustrations we see, Noah was not standing on deck with the giraffes and hippos. Noah and his family were still inside the ark, and there was not a whole lot of openings for them to look out of. The only place they could have seen outside from were likely a line of vents which ran along the top of the ark, and the view would not have been great. Most importantly, the view would not have been at a downward angle. I believe God brought the ark down on a fairly level place so Noah's family and the animals they were caring for would have been comfortable. Thus, the view Noah would have had would not have been of the land they were sitting on, but far out across from them. The mountain they were sitting on was likely one of the tallest, but it took a couple of months before they could see the tops of mountains out from them beginning to appear above the water's surface. From this point on, they would have a bit of a gauge. Keep in mind they did not have the information we have about the highest peak being covered by several feet of water. It would mean something more for them to know they had not just happened to run aground on one of the highest hills of the planet, which

In part II and III of this series, we have been talking about the question, why did God choose to give us a written Word? With that, we have talked about why God did not give it to us right from the start of our creation. These discussions have taken us into some fairly deep water about the temple and the Garden of Eden. Mind you, we have not gone nearly as deep as we could have went, but we have covered a lot of theology. In this segment, I want to start by answering the question more point-blank. God gave us a written Word because He wanted us to see for ourselves the plan He put in place from the beginning!

It's often hard when you are too close to something to see it very clearly. A forest looks much different when you are walking in amongst its trees and the undergrowth, than it does when you are on a hill far away looking at the whole. In the southwest of North America there were native tribes which carved lines and made other markings on the ground which modern men had trouble figuring out. The first assumption was that most of these lines were roads. However, some of these roads seem to just go in a loop of sorts and come back to an adjoining road without taking you anywhere specific. Others of these roads simply went a distance and ended. People wondered where these roads were meant to take you and why they had such strange configurations. In the end, one of the problems was the misinterpretation that these lines on the ground were roads at all. The road assumption came mostly because the lines looked like roads, and some of them went on for very long distances. Investigators could not imagine what else they would be, but they couldn't figure out why people would take the time to build roads which go nowhere.

The answer to the quandary did not come until someone got in a plane and flew high above these lines on the ground; and from a bird's-eye view, it became obvious that the lines were not roads at all. Instead, these lines were giant pictures, but that fact could only be seen and fully appreciated by being high above them. When one was simply walking along the ground, especially with no clue as to what you were looking at, the lines seemed like simple pathways, unorganized and senseless. It's still not understood how people of pre-aircraft days figured out how to draw such gigantic pictures, literally using the earth as their canvas; but they obviously found a way. As to the question of why they did such a thing, we may never know. Of course, people have speculated that these ancient artists believed there was someone or something in the sky which



could or would appreciate these drawings. Likely, something these ancient people worshiped. This may be very true, and it's certainly not out of the context of what we know even from the Bible about what many people believe. However, they may have been more "scientific" about this (if science is truly separate from religion) and were trying to be prepared to make contact with possible visitors beyond the sky. Even today, we spend millions of dollars sending electronic signals out into space hoping to make contact with something or one out there! It's also possible that these ancient people just made these drawings because they could and wanted to. It's not like that has never happened before!

Getting back to my original point: it can be hard to see the forest for the trees. As we live and walk in this world and through this life, it can be hard to face what we face everyday and still know that God is out there working a plan which is far greater than the struggles we are going through each day. It can be hard to believe this all has a greater purpose, when at times, it seems it's all we can do to survive; or at other times, we have it all but it means nothing. God's Word is that bird's-eye view of time itself which enables us to see the bigger picture. It tells us the past and gives us a snapshot of the future. It lays out the fact this existence, and even our personal life, is all going somewhere; and not just someone, but The One Who created us, cares about us. At the end of the day, no matter how small or large a piece we feel we may play or not play in the grand scheme of it all, at least we know there is a grand scheme!

As we talked about before, this is also why God did not give us His Word in the beginning. In the beginning, and even for a time after the flood, it should have been obvious that God was there. In the time before the flood, man was not that far removed from the Garden of Eden. Many may have even known where its entrance was. They wouldn't have been able to get past the flaming sword and the Cherubims charged with guarding the Tree of Life, (Gen. 3:24) but knowing it was there was enough to remind them of where they came from. After the flood, there was no doubt God was enacting a plan. The only people who made it through to the other side of that flood were those who had been listening to it. However, it was not long after that, man began to build false religion and society ideas which would take from, and in many cases overshadow, the basic institutions God had created man to observe. At the Tower of

Babel, man cared more about accomplishing something great as a whole; and the individual began to diminish in importance. Even the family structure became less important. The leadership of a father was dwarfed by the leadership of a ruler of the land. The truth of God, and what He created us to be, was being replaced by the worship of heavenly bodies which were said to tell us our future. (Gen. 11:4)

However, it doesn't matter how many theories man comes up with, the truth remains, to this day, important! We were and are meant to live as God created us to live, not just by our own thoughts and fleshly compulsions. Each individual and the outcome of their life is important to God. Now, God did create a male human and a female human which together had the ability to bring a countless number of other humans onto this planet; but this means, man has never been alone even if he totally rejects the presence of God in his life. In fact, there are so many people living on this planet at this point and time, there are those who worry that the world is over populated with humans. There are even those who call themselves environmentalists who will specifically help fund abortions, because they believe the planet needs to have far fewer humans on it than it does! This, of course, is one of the insane heights those who engage in earth worship will go to in order to "protect the planet," instead of valuing individual human life - and why not? What good is it to worship something physical if you are going to simply let it be "destroyed"?

That is what each individual has to choose in this life. What is of the utmost importance to you? Now, the fact there are those who worship this earth and will go to any extreme to "protect" it, does not mean we should not be, and are not supposed to be, good stewards of what God has given us. Loving God first and loving our neighbor as ourselves is what all the law and prophets hang on. (Lev. 19:17-18, Deut. 6:4-5, Matt. 22:36-40) If we love God, we will take care of what He has created. If we love our neighbors, we will respect their right and the right of future generations to a planet not stripped of its resources and polluted with our toxic trash. However, the point many people miss, whether they believe we should be environmental or not, is the simple point that individual human existence is what is important, not the "saving of the planet!" Every human counts and will give account to God for what they have chosen to do here, but how do we know what we should choose if we never understand why we were created?

The fact there are a lot of people on this planet means, as alone as some of us feel at times, it may not truly be possible to ever be alone! That is a fact of physical existence, but even Adam before Eve was not truly alone. We have The Creator of all things to have a relationship with. It was for this purpose that we were created, and it is to this purpose that we must strive. I like to say we were created

to commune, and I believe the basis of God not wanting man to be alone (Gen. 2:18) points to this fact. God created us to commune with Him, but not because we are forced to. God did not want even Adam to commune with Him just because God was the only thing which kept Adam from feeling like he had nothing to satisfy that communing urge he was created to have! So, God gave Adam not just another human, but created the institution of marriage. Why? Because marriage is not just about giving us someone to be with, but about a committed relationship which can produce even more humans. This is why we should strive to work out marriages for better or for worse.

In this day and age, and really in many days and ages gone by, humans have had trouble with the concept of marriage; and it's one of the reasons we have trouble with the concept of what God wants from us. We try to sidestep solid commitment in marriage through our laws or in the actions which some societies allow in marriage; but regardless of what you personally may have experienced in marriage, stop and think about the concept. "For better or for worse..." is a statement we put in our marriage vows - or at least we used to - because it really is the concept in a nutshell. We shore up the idea by saying things like, "...for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health..." but the, "For better or worse..." part really says it all! We should have an understanding that what we are saying is not just, "I love this person!" Because love, in a lot of people's minds translates into "like," or some strong combination of like and want. "I like this person, and I want to be with this person." The problem is that "like" and "want" can be very fragile and/or fleeting! What you like today may not be what you want tomorrow.

Remember when you were a child? There were things you wanted, and you wanted them so badly, you almost couldn't stand it. Some of us got the thing(s) we really felt this way about and some of us didn't. In any case, there is a very high percentage chance that whether you ever got that thing or not, as an adult that thing doesn't even begin to mean what it did back then! Sure, you may be bitter to this day that you never got it; and if you obtained it, you may still think fondly of whatever it was. However, the memory of how good or bad it made you feel back then is what really lingers. Having that item for what you wanted it for back when you were a child, likely has no relevance to you now. For those of you who got the item, it's likely you no longer even have it. For most, who do still have it, it's likely in some forgotten corner of a storage area; and no matter how much you treasure the item, it's probably not something you touch often or at all. Instead, it quietly sits on a shelf or in a display case. My point is simply this, time has a way of changing things!

People will often say that you should not marry until you are this age or that age because studies have shown that you will marry a completely different person if you marry

before that age than if you marry after. I happen to believe this is a very true statement, but it can be thwarted. Some people aren't the age their last birthday says they are; or maybe a better way to put it is to say, they simply have not come to the same place others have come to by that point in their lives. This is not to say one is more mature than another. Maturity comes in many different facets and on many different levels. It's kind of related to the saying, "The man whose goal is nothing will have no trouble accomplishing it." Whether you have reached a place where you are ready to make a good choice in marriage or not can have a lot to do with a lot of things outside of just what age you currently are.

So, what I'm further driving at is that time has a way of constantly changing things, and one of those things is simply, "perspective." That's why having a certain shiny bicycle or doll can mean everything to you at one point in your life; and at another, it may not even enter your mind. So, I say again, like and want are fragile things! This is why we say for better or for worse in our vows. We can marry the person of our dreams, but sometimes dreams change. What is even worse is that more often than not, things are not all we think they are at the time. When we marry, we are not getting a guarantee that the person is everything we think they are. People lie, people misinterpret, people misunderstand each other, and yes, people even change! The bottom line is, we don't know if a marriage will make us happy or not, and we won't know until each day passes. Some people build a good marriage out of something which started out badly. Some people have great marriages which after a time just fall apart. For better or worse is not an all encompassing idea. Often our feeling about our marriage wavers back and forth. We never truly know if what makes us happy today will remain or make us happy tomorrow. Thus, for better or worse means we are taking on a relationship for the sake of a relationship. It's no doubt foolish to take on one which you can almost certainly say will never make you happy or be peaceful; but it's even more foolish to take on a marriage if the challenge, marriage can be, is not something you want in your life!

The problem is, we just aren't taught that marriage is a challenge in the same way climbing a mountain is a challenge. It's not that marriage is without reward; but at the same time, it can be a lot of hard work. Instead, most are taught marriage is a fairy tale; and when it doesn't turn out to be a fairy tale, people often give up on marriages which could have been some of the best there has ever been. If they had just gone into it accepting it as a challenge, they could have been prepared to fight for the relationship, not just about the relationship. We would learn to strive not against each other, but for each other. If we would go into marriage with the right perspective, the everyday would make more sense. The fatigue would often seem more like that which comes from accomplishment, not just the draining of our lives. Of course, there would also be far less people who

would choose marriage; and contrary to popular belief, that would be just fine! In fact, it's certainly better than all the marrying, divorcing and abusive marriages we have today; and it certainly would leave far fewer children left without parents to guide them. We need to start making sense of things, and information is the key. Because people are not looking at things from the bigger picture, they often kill their chance at better rather than worse.

One of the greatest things we glean from God's Word is the prophecies which show us God was and is way out in front of all that happens in the here and now. This is one of the reasons God gave us more than just those first five books of the law! No matter what it seems like in the here and now, we should understand by reading God's Word that He knows what is going to happen. Now, far too many "teachers" and "preachers" lead people to think prophesy is in the Word so we can know specifically what is out in front of us. Certainly from the days of the Tower of Babel, man has wanted this kind of guidance; but the Bible gives very little of it in reality. Mostly, what prophesy gives us is the opportunity to see that as time unfolds, God knew all along how it was going to unfold. Nothing man does surprises God; and therefore, nothing man does can overwhelm God or catch Him off guard! Sure, prophesy shows us the future from the standpoint that it tells us God ultimately wins; but what is a promise if we have no idea that it's true? The fact we can look at such ancient words in the Bible and see the world has unfolded just the way God said it would, gives us the backup we need to know we are not just believing in a fairy tale. No matter how bad we think this life is or can be, God is not just allowing us to suffer in vain. We may not understand it all, but God knows what He is doing in allowing us to go through it. If we call upon Him continually and seek to hear His voice, we can rest assured we are gaining ground in some form or another. (I Pet. 1:1-9, Rom. 8:25-28)

It is man, not God, who has complicated our lives so badly, that especially the individual can be simply lost in the crowd. God gave us a written Word which would take us above the crowd in a way which shows us the true, bigger picture, not just the one man attempts to draw. The point in doing this was not so God can point out to us our individual destiny, like some kind of fortune teller, but the fact man and all his grand plans can't stop us from being what God created us to be. (Rom. 8:35-39, Matt. 24:15-24) This gives us the freedom to pursue an individual relationship with our Creator and make Him Lord of our personal lives in spite of the opinions and actions of others. This we must never forget!

For even the Jewish nation was not looking for a humble child to be born who, in meekness, would simply offer Himself as The King of Kings. They were looking for a mighty conquering hero who would free them from the oppression of the current governing system. Jesus was not, at that time, the picture the religious leaders of the day had in their minds of who The Messiah should be, even though

the prophesy does, all line up. There was to be a great prophet who would come as a leadoff to the coming of The Messiah. (Mal. 4:4-6, Matt. 17:10-13) This was John the Baptist! "He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light." John 1:8 After John the Baptist had been thrown in prison, he sent his disciples to follow Jesus by telling them to go ask Him if He was The One or if they should look for another? When they did this, Jesus told them to go tell John: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. (Matt. 11:2-6) The political circumstances of the day may have made it hard for people to see Jesus was The Messiah, but His works told them otherwise. It was at this time, and based on these observations, that people needed to go back and read the Word for themselves once again. They may not have understood that The Messiah would come in this way, but after considering the Word again, they should have said, as the Samaritan woman at the well said to her fellow towns people, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" John 4:29 Even Jesus' disciples did not understand He would be crucified; but after He was, they needed to think upon the prophecies they already knew about the Passover Lamb being slain, and the symbolism of the sacrifices they had done at the temple all their lives!

In truth, the written Word tells us a lot in order to emphasize just a few simple dynamics! It tells us, in the beginning of man's existence, even before there was male and female, God took the time to plant a garden: meaning it was not just a place where nature had taken its course, but a place where the elements were specifically placed by God's direction for the purpose of providing a specific "home!" When we read the Bible, it is easy to miss this point; but it's crucial to our understanding of why we are here and what we were created for. Humans are special, and God wanted a place where they knew they could always come and commune in a very physical way with His presence. We can't go to that place today. Why? Because sin brings destruction and separation from God!

God told a man, well into his old age, that he would have a son. He and His wife laughed within themselves, but it happened nonetheless! Not because they were able to come up with a plan of their own, but because it was God's will! (Gen. 16:1-18:15) This son would be the father of a nation God would call His own. This nation would be given instructions for building a physical place among them where God's presence would once again reside in a very physical way, but it would not last forever. The tabernacle they originally built would be neglected. The first more permanent temple they built would eventually be destroyed by the Babylonians. The second temple they built would be desecrated by the Greeks, and eventually built over the top of by an ungodly king, for political reasons. Even that temple

would eventually be destroyed by the Romans, and centuries of fighting and bloodshed would not see a new temple built, even to this day. Why? Because sin brings destruction and separation from God!

Almost two thousand years prior to where we are now, The Messiah was born in the flesh and dwelt among us. We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of The Father, (John 1:1-14) but He does not still walk the earth with those physical feet. He was mocked, beaten, and nailed to a cross. Then His body was laid in a tomb. However, The Messiah, being without sin, would not stay in that tomb. He would leave to present Himself to The Father as The Pure Passover sacrifice we all needed. Then He showed Himself to us once again, but only for a time. He did not stay here. Instead, He left this world to go and prepare a new place for us where sin cannot abide, so that where He is there we might be also. (Luke 13:23-29, John 14:2-6) Why? Because where sin abounded, grace did much more abound! (Rom. 5:20)

This is why God gave us a tangible written Word. There is a plan which God has had since the foundation of the world. He did not just put us in a garden which contained the choice of taking on the responsibility of the knowledge of good and evil, with the idea that if we faltered, He would simply throw us away. It's not God's will that any perish, but that all come to repentance! (II Pet. 3:9) Thus, Jesus is not just a coincidence or an afterthought, but part of the plan which would continually make a way for us to know and commune with God! (Heb. 9:24-28, I Pet. 1:18-20, Rev. 13:1-9) The Word of God was not given as an afterthought, but as a blueprint to future generations which, because of time and space, were too far removed from the Garden of Eden to even know with certainty that it ever existed! The Word may not create the Garden of Eden on this planet, but it prepares us to live in the new one! (Rev. 22:1-7, Ps. 119:9-16)

The written Word may not maintain a physical temple on this planet, but it can be our temple! By opening it, we can enter into the presence of God. By reading it, we are hearing His voice. By living it, we are walking with God. When we study God's Word, we are receiving nourishment from the Tree of Life, and learning what to do about the fact we have already taken of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It's our pillar of cloud by day and our pillar of fire by night. (Ex. 13:21-22, Ps. 119:105) It's our inner chamber of solitude and rest from a world filled with sin. Best of all, we can follow it into eternity; because when it tells us it will never pass away, it is not just telling us it will always exist, (I Pet. 1:24-25) but that the Word is, what it is to truly exist!

Let's stay in God's Word!

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to their knowledge may not have been covered by much. By seeing other peaks appearing above the water's surface, they now knew that the water was truly going down. As they looked at the terrain visible from their vantage point, they could now gauge about how fast the water was going down; and they could see the simple fact it was a continual process.

Verse 6 bring us to the story of two birds and more numbers. Noah waited another forty days from the day they finally saw the mountain tops before he did anything different than what they had been doing all along. Why did he do this? Mostly because of what we just talked about. Noah could gauge the rate the water was going down. He knew that just because they could see mountain tops on the first day of the tenth month, it didn't mean they could blow the doors off and go out into the world. Noah had a lot of animals with him, and the system was stable. They had kept these animals alive for over two hundred days by this point. Noah was smart enough to know he was going to have to care for them awhile longer, and you've got to stick with what works! So, Noah waited another forty days before he even opened the window. Now, we are talking about a time period which, to our knowledge, was before the technology of glass. However, there is no way the ark was without ventilation! There were most likely openings in the ark they could see out of to some degree, but none of those openings were meant to get you outside in any way. Thus, Noah opened the one opening - other than the door itself - from which he could gain access to the outside. This was likely a hatch of some kind, but it may still not have been a full-fledged opening which a person could completely get out. It may have been that Noah still could not get out on top of the ark and survey the situation for himself, or the good likelihood is that Noah simply was not going to go outside the ark until God told him he could. So, he sent out a raven.

Now, some believe this was a bit of a mistake on Noah's part, and after learning his lesson, he sent out a dove; but I don't believe that's true. I think Noah knew the facts. There is no wonder at the fact Noah sent a bird, but ravens are not one of the more delicate birds. They are not finicky about what they will eat, nor where or on what they will set foot. A raven could survive outside the ark when other animals he could have sent would not. Ravens also do not forget the source of a good meal. If the raven could not find things to eat, it was going to come back to scavenge from the ark. Noah knew if the raven came back for food, it meant bad things. It would mean the ark was the only source of food for miles and miles, even for a raven! If this were true, there was no sense in sending out anything more delicate. However, the raven did not come back looking for food, and this does not mean it did not come back at all. Verse 7 says the raven did exactly what I believe Noah was hoping for. The raven went to and fro until the waters dried up. This is not just telling us it went all over the place; it would do that even after the waters dried up. I believe this is telling us the raven

came back to the ark at times, and continued to visit the ark until the ground had returned to a more normal state. It would go out and at times come back, to at least perch on the ark. Ravens can also be noisy birds, so Noah would have opportunity to know when the raven was just outside. It may or may not have ever come back into the interior of the ark; but ravens are a bit cantankerous: if it were hungry, Noah would not have had to reach out and pull it back in. This raven probably saw the ark as a home base until it was able to establish a more natural one. It's also likely the raven brought some things back. Now, there is no telling what it brought back and where it had gotten it; but the raven would have been a continual gauge. He would have shown, not just that things were returning to normal, but that they were not going to walk out into a world filled with all kinds of death and decay which would make it hard for the other animals to survive outside the ark.

After a satisfactory run of the raven being able to go to and fro outside the ark, Noah determined it was safe to risk sending out a much more finicky and delicate bird. A dove would not scavenge for whatever it could find. A dove was going to look for thriving plant life and viable seeds before it was going to be satisfied outside the ark. It was also going to look for a secure place to land and build a home before it was willing to do much more than a scouting run. Verse 8 uses that word "abated," again; but in this reference we are talking, not about the water's lack of destructive force, but about the true level of the water being lessened. Was the world still one big pond or swamp, or was there true dry land to live on? was the question Noah wanted the dove to answer. So, the dove was sent out, and verse 9 simply says that the far more finicky than a raven, dove, "...found no rest for the sole of her foot,..." Thus, the female dove returned to Noah for food, shelter, and a dry place to perch herself! Noah knew this meant they would have to wait awhile longer before they opened the door of the ark; so he specifically retrieves the dove from the outside, to keep her from going out again until he was good and ready to send her. Remember, at this point and time the animals did not fear man, so the dove would have been easy to retrieve.

Verse 10 tells us Noah waited for a week before he would test the world again. This is where we stop and consider how much Noah was paying attention to what God had created and done. You will note that from the time the tops of the mountains began to appear, until Noah sent out the raven, he waited forty days. Where else in the story have we heard this number? Of course, it was at the beginning of the flood. It rained for forty days and forty nights. Noah was following the pattern he had observed God using. If it took forty days of rain to flood the earth, then it stood to reason from the day you could finally see the tops of the mountains again, that forty days might be a good time period to wait for the waters to recede. Just like a child emulates his or her parents, Noah was following in the example of God. Now, forty is a number we will also see in other parts of the Bible. When Moses went into the mount to speak with God, he

spent forty days and nights. (Ex. 24:18) The Israelite spies which went into Canaan to view the land, spent forty days in the task. (Num. 13:21-25) Because the children of Israel doubted God's ability to give them the promised land, they would spend that same number in years, wandering and dying in the wilderness before going on into the promised land. (Num. 14:30-34) Elijah was fed by God as he fled from the wicked Jezebel, and that food sustained him for forty days and nights as he journeyed to Mt. Horeb. (I Kin. 19:1-8) Of course, one of the most prominent forties, is when The Messiah goes into the wilderness to fast and pray. Jesus fasts for forty days and forty nights. (Matt. 4:1-2)

In the Word, forty is a number which denotes a journey through time, which completes a transition. Taking an analogy from nature, it's not unlike the caterpillar to butterfly process. First, there is a ground dwelling insect. One day that insect builds a cocoon and enters a state of seclusion. At the end of the isolation period, the ground dwelling insect emerges with a new capability - it can fly! It's not a, snap of your fingers kind of, instantaneous transformation. The caterpillar has to take the time! Now, when it comes to man, forty seems to be our cocoon time period. Of course, we like the idea of living happily ever after as a beautiful butterfly; but while here on this earth that is not what it's all about. If we serve God, we will live happily ever after in beauty and security after this life passes; but that is a glorious day we will have to be patient for. (Lam. 3:25-26, Rom. 8:24-28) While we wait, there is work to be done in the here and now! (James 1:21-25) Just like Noah, we are to serve God in whatever purpose He needs our lives to serve! Thus, forty can be a spiritual journey and/or a physical one; but forty brings with it change. Moses was in the mount receiving the law and learning how to take the children of Israel from being a group of slaves to God's chosen nation. The Israelite spies were transitioning the children of Israel from a wandering group of people in the wilderness to a people who knew where home was. When the people did not believe God, they spent forty years transitioning from one generation to the next before they would go into the promised land. Elijah had come to the end of his strength and was on a journey to the same mountain where Moses had heard from God centuries earlier. There, Elijah would be renewed and strengthened for the next segment of ministry which still lay ahead of him. Jesus had lived as a child and grew into a man who was ready to show Himself to Israel as The Messiah. Before He did, He spent forty days and nights fasting and communing with The Father!

From the time Noah would see the confirmation that the water was truly going down, to the day he would open the window and begin working on their post-flood lives, he would wait forty days. The danger had passed; the waters were going down. They would take time to reflect on what God had brought them through. I'm sure they also began to think about where to go from here and what to do next. They

would prepare for the day they would open the door and step out into a world made new!

Here in verse 10, as Noah goes through the process of sending out natural probes in the form of birds, Noah is simply following the pattern God put us in from the days of creation. This kind of thinking is exactly why Noah and his family was saved from the flood. Noah patterned his life and everyday choices on Godly examples! The dove he sent out did not find a place good enough to stay or even land, so she returned to Noah. As I have said before, I say again here, seven is not God's number of perfection, it is the number of a cycle of completion in this creation. Noah would wait seven days before he would open the window again. He would lead his family's life just the way God intended. He would wait for another cycle of completion before he would test the waters again!

Seven days pasted and he opened that window and sent the dove out again. Verse 11 tells us, this time the dove did not come straight back. This time the dove must have found a place or two to land, because she spent the day roaming the great outdoors! Then the dove did what birds by nature do. She brought home some nesting material, which yet again was the mercy of God being confirmed in their lives. The dove brought something man would continue to see as a symbol of peace to this very day. We like to use an olive branch; but here, the dove brought a single olive leaf. Now it was not just any old, floating around on the water, olive leaf. The leaf she brought was a freshly plucked olive leaf. This meant the waters were not just going down, but that the waters were no longer at a state where they were hindering plant life from returning to the dry land. This was crucial to the survival of the animals on the ark. When the day came for Noah to let them out into the wide open spaces, they would have to find food for themselves once again. It was absolutely essential that the earth be to a point where it could sustain them.

Verse 12 tells us Noah did the right thing again and waited another complete cycle before sending out the dove once more. When he did, the dove found the world such an inhabitable place that it finally preferred it to the ark. This time, the dove did not return to Noah. Before the flood, the world was so corrupt that God said the end of "all flesh" had come before Him. (Gen. 6:12-13) The post-flood world was so clean and fresh, the environment was approved by a female dove!

Until next time, Shalom!

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