

Free - Take One

Shaqah

שפאקאָה

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

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Step Into the Springs!

Here at Living Springs Institute, we have been working on a new project. This project has created a daily planning calendar which will teach you Biblical truths as you go about your everyday lives. How will it do this? Well, most of us are very familiar with all the holidays proclaimed by the church, but far too few have much awareness of the days God Himself gave to Israel in the law. So, here at Living Springs Institute, we have created a planning calendar which will teach people the Biblical calendar God gave to the children of Israel. Using a real life, day by day way, it will give you the Biblical calendar alongside the Gregorian calendar we are all familiar with. Our hope is that this planner will be a Biblical education as well as useful in organizing a person's daily life.

In the front of the planner, there is an introductory teaching which will help people understand some of the most basic elements about how God laid out Israel's calendar. It covers some of the differences between the Biblical calendar and the modern Jewish calendar of today. It also has a basic discussion on all seven of the Biblical feast days, as well as Hanukkah and Purim. If you would like to see this teaching and interior views of this calendar, you can visit our online "Calendar Project" page. Just go to www.livingspringsinstitute.org, click on "Learning Center" and then "Calendar Project."

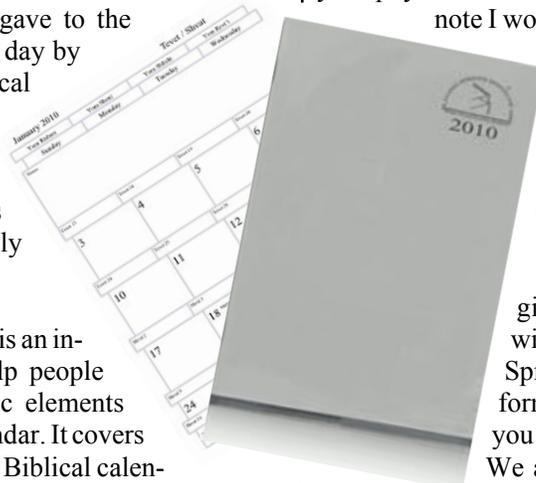
We think this is an exciting new teaching product, and we would like to send you one for FREE. Now, if you are a regular mail subscriber to this publication, you should already have received one of these calendars; but we understand you may want others, to share with family and friends. We would also like to send calendars to all of our e-mail subscribers. However, because you're e-mail subscribers, we don't necessarily have your current mailing address. Due to this, we did not automatically send calendars to our e-mail subscribers; but it's easy for anyone to get one!

To get your free 2010 planning calendar, you can simply write, e-mail, or visit us online. For online orders, just go to www.livingspringsinstitute.org and click on the "Resource Shop" button. The calendar is right at the top of the form, and you can type your mailing information into the lines provided. If you are using e-mail, send your request to: resources@shaqah.com. If you are using regular mail, write to us at: Living Springs Institute, P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539. Just tell us you would like a calendar; be sure to give us your physical mailing address, and it will be on its way! One

note I would like to make is, it does save us on postage to send more than one calendar in the same package. So, say you and your spouse and/or a friend would each like one, or you know of others you would like to give one to, please don't hesitate to order one for each person all at once.

As always, I want to make it clear that giving us your name and mailing address will not put you on any mailing list! Living Springs Inc. does not share your personal information with any other organization(s), and you will not receive constant mailings from us. We are happy to send you only what you request. Speaking of that, don't forget to request your free subscription to this publication (Shaqah), and if you would like extra copies of Shaqah, our free book, *A Sabbath By Design*, or anything we offer, please let us know. If you are using our online order form, and the form will not allow you to order the quantity you need, please make your request for extra copies in the comment box at the end of the order form.

We at Living Springs Institute are very excited to add this 2010 daily planning calendar to the teaching materials we offer; and Lord willing, we will be offering this calendar year by year. So, keep reading Shaqah, and you will be one of the first to know when next year's calendar is available. We greatly appreciate all your prayers and support of this ministry, and hope the work we are doing is a blessing to you. Please remember to share Living Springs Institute with others. We thank each of you so much for taking part in this ministry. God bless, and we hope you enjoy this issue of Shaqah!



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It's Not Extreme To Know What Is Right!

By Philip Busby

In our world today, we see and hear a lot about extremism; and the definition has always been problematic for humans who believe in freedom. Where does the freedom to express one's thoughts crossover into extremism? The answer to this is really not as hard as some people think, but people and government entities seem to be getting it wrong more and more. In the fear of being labeled some kind of extremist, people are backing down on their convictions, with the hope we can all just get along. Today, there is a growing separation between those who are willing to stand up for what they believe in, and those who believe if we all just go along with ideas which, at the very least, seem to be for the common good, we will find a world of peace. However, peace is not the result!

In the end, the result is that those willing to be extreme win. This is not because extremists overcome those who will do nothing in battle; but over time, the extremists are the ones who hold all the places of authority and power. This is what happens when opposition to differing ideas gets villainized. Once this is the case, we find it's the extremist's ideas and thoughts which people are eventually taught and coerced into accepting. The irony is, because all extremists do not agree, you may find that not being willing to stand up for your own convictions will lead to you being forced to stand up and fight for convictions and ideas which you do not or did not hold. The most important aspect to all this is that even if cooperating for the sake of cooperation does seem to bring a certain amount of peace, common good is not necessarily righteousness.

The most basic differences between extremism and the freedom to express and even teach practices which differ from others or the political correct norm, is that of force and/or pressure. We must be clear on this simple point, or there begins to be a lot of feelings, even in free countries, that the teaching or holding of certain beliefs are wrong simply because they exist and are available. This steps on the very toes of freedom! People should be free to believe what they want and to share those ideas with others. Why, you may ask? Well, first of all, it should come as no surprise to any human that all humans don't hold the same values or beliefs they hold. This idea that people are always being "offended" by the fact someone else presents or even holds a differing view is preposterous. However, it seems more and more, people want to define wrong as simply being in opposition to the "norm," or what people in certain positions believe.

The simple question is, who gets to define what is right and what is wrong? The Bible tells us, in this world, human

governments exist which God allows to set laws over men; (Rom. 13:1-8) but that does not mean these authorities or powers are perfect. In the personal lives of each individual, every person must choose what he or she believes is right, and by what standards they are going to live their lives. (Rom. 14:1-8) Of course, the main reason government is not perfect is because individuals are imperfect. The point is, we will not stand before God as a nation or group, but we will stand before God as individuals! This is why government entities should believe in freedom, while still punishing true extremism. As an individual, it's not enough to simply follow any man or man-made institution; and no one should be forcing others into doing so. We should not be so easily offended by the fact others hold different ideas, and we should stand against the ideology that everyone must believe the same. This does not mean we believe freedom is righteousness; it's that freedom which allows individuals to seek righteousness, and righteous individuals to share what they have learned.

I believe choosing when to obey and when to stand up will be some of the most important decisions believers of this generation will make. God is ultimately the One Who decides what is right and what is wrong, and He is perfect; which of course means, He will judge us in perfection. However, while here on this earth, man, not being perfect, will not always make right judgments. So what is an individual to do? It may seem like a paradox to some people that the Bible tells us to obey them that have the rule over us, but that it's equally true we will be held accountable for all our personal choices which may cause us to stand in defiance when they tell us to do something wrong. However, what the Bible is telling us is not that we should simply do everything a government authority tells us to, but that we should not resist their authority simply because they exist. Being in opposition to the "norm" is not always right, any more than always being in compliance with the "norm" is. The answer to our question is that we must look at the true golden rule, which is to love the Lord our God with everything we are; and the second which is like unto the first, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matt. 22:36-40) We offer the righteousness of God's Word to this world, through our actions and our voices. We are not here to force or attempt to trick others into making a confession of faith - that would be extremism - but we are also not here to simply sit in silence. When the authority tells us we must do or not do something we know is against God's direction, we must put God's law above man's! This has the chance to affect the governing authority to do the right thing, just as it did in Daniel's day. Daniel prayed to God three times

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Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip Busby

Last time, we spent almost the entire segment talking about the fact man and his “creation” stories actually do not go back to creation but chapter 8 verse 1 of the book of Genesis. This is because this verse is the breaking point between the old world and the new. This verse is where we truly transition from the world Adam and Eve knew, where sin did not originally exist, and only through the natural progression of man’s actions combined with the curse of the ground was there any physical destruction; To a world where, because of the greatness of man’s sin on this planet, God was forced to send ultimate destruction which destroyed every living thing outside that small ark of salvation, and man was forced to begin anew.

The flood may not have killed every animal and plant as we think of the word kill to mean; but it’s important to understand that without God’s intervention in reversing the flood, every animal, even in the water, would have eventually died. Every seed of life or plant particle capable of re-growing vegetation would have broken down. There would have been only a planet of deep water just as is described in Genesis 1:2. We live on a planet where all parts are interdependent on each other. We are only just now realizing this, and certainly man’s belief in evolution has slowed the acceptance of this fact. However, without life on the land, even sea life is not going to continue. Evolutionists want us to believe that life began in the water and crawled out onto land, but the system is not designed to sustain one without the other. The world would never create and evolve life just in the water so that it could come to the land. The water ecosystems are part of a chain which is connected to land life just as much as they are connected together. This is why God created everything physical in just six days, and in the order He did. This physical world can only sustain physical life when things are in a proper order; and at the time of the flood, that order was greatly messed up. Only God could put it back.

Thus, chapter 8 verse 1 of Genesis tells us, “...God remembered Noah, and every living thing,...” Noah, just like us, had a physical form which was dependant on this planet and its processes. God knew Noah could not live in that ark for an immense amount of time without miraculous intervention on God’s part. God also remembered the way He created the physical world to be: the fact all living things need to be working in their proper order; and He began to put what was left of creation back into order. To do this, God starts with air - and that is fascinating! Of course, when God created the world, He started with light; but the flood did not destroy light; thus, light did not have

to be put back in place. However, if you go back to chapter 1 verse 2 of Genesis where darkness was on the face of the deep, you find, “...the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Spirit is often related to wind or air in someway, (Gen 2:7, Eze. 37:9, John 3:7-8, 20:21-22, Acts 2:2-4) and the “deep” was water in some form which God only later organized into atmosphere and specific bodies of water so dry land could appear. Here in verse 1 of chapter 8, God made a wind to pass over the earth which was once again covered by very deep water, some of which had been part of the atmosphere prior to the flood. So, you could say, “Light was upon the face of the deep and God made a wind move upon the face of the waters!”

The result of this is that the waters “asswaged.” Now, this word only appears in the King James Bible three times, but the word it is translated from here in Genesis 8:1 is a different word than it’s translated from the other two times. The other two appearances are found in chapter 16 of Job. There, the word comes from a root word which means “to restrain.” This has the implication of force. Job tells his miserable comforters (Job 16:2) that if it was one of them which was suffering, he would speak to them words which could effectively force grief from them. He would design his speech in a way that would bring strength, and carry them to the other side of the tragedy. They, on the other hand, had done nothing to help move the grief from his situation; and even though the weight of his calamity had not as yet been able to crush him, no one was putting forth effort to do anything which would begin to help or remove the load! Job wanted action and power. That is the difference between the words. The one used in Genesis is very similar, but it’s not about force or power, it’s about planning and cunning preparation. The word in Genesis is a root word which means “to weave.” Both have the idea of two forces acting upon each other, but one is doing it through strength and the other by skill or cooperation!

The word here in Genesis is like laying a bread crumb trail for something to follow. The way to lead an animal back into its cage is by giving it something such as food. This works because the animal’s natural instinct is to survive, and there is no greater part of that than to obtain food. Most animals spend most of their lives searching for and attempting to obtain food. Thus, when it’s presented in such an easy way or obtained through the repetition of certain actions, it can become so great a focus for the animal that they do not even pay attention to the fact they

are stepping into something they normally would flee away from.

When I was a boy, we used to have a couple of small dogs which we taught to do a few simple tricks such as rolling over and sitting up. To do this, we would guide them or physically put them through the motion we wanted and then give them a piece of popcorn until they caught on to the fact that when they did it on their own they would get the treat! The problem was, it became automatic and we never furthered their training to teach them restraint. From then on, when someone had popcorn, the dogs would literally stumble over each other rolling over and sitting up then staring us down until we gave them a piece. Even if we had visitors, they would do this to them. Most people caught on all on their own; and for those who did not understand, we would explain what it was the dogs wanted. This, almost without exception, led to the visitor having a certain amount of amusement watching the dogs and throwing popcorn at them. This was furthered by the fact, one of the dogs had learned to catch the popcorn in his mouth. This would compel the person to keep throwing popcorn until they learned just how to throw it so he could catch it each time. In the end, I'm not sure who was controlling who and who was training who in these situations. The point is, this is what the word in Genesis is talking about. We wanted the reward of watching the dogs do tricks, so we taught them; but to do this, we had to give them a reward. Because we taught them this, they would do tricks and we were left with the feeling they deserved a great deal of our popcorn. From their perspective, we were not giving them popcorn to get them to do tricks, they were doing tricks to get us to give them popcorn. Often their perspective was the more truthful one. When they did tricks, the only thing which "asswaged" our feelings was to feed them. It was an interaction at best!

It has been my observation that most of the more modern English "translations" like to use the word "subside" here. However, this serves as an example of how it does not really help us for the Bible to simply be "translated" into the most simple words we can think of. Most people may not really have a perspective on what the word "asswaged" means, but this is a simple lack of knowledge which can be corrected with some research. If in doing such research, we are compelled to look at the original language and understand it better in at least some small way, we may uncover a deeper truth we might never have found. When we take the easy route and study with what we think is simply an easier to read "translation," we read a word like "subside." Believing we know exactly what that word means, we move on and are never the wiser!

The water did not simply "subside." The air began to move across the surface of the earth which at that time was water. As the wind interacted with the water, there began

a new pattern of atmospheric operation. Before the flood, there was no rain as we know water falling from the sky today. Instead, the earth misted itself. (Gen. 2:5-6) Water would come not from above but from below. The whole face of the planet - for lack of a better term - would sweat a mist of water. There was no need for irrigation, and there would never have been a buildup of water which would cause a flood. There would only have been a seeping of water from the ground itself which would have kept all different kinds of plant life thriving. I still believe the world would not have been a tropical rain forest all over, but this process kept all different varieties of plant life thriving in their various climates, and there would have been little to no deserts consisting of nothing but sand, as we know them today. When considering this, one can certainly see why there was a need for much larger animals than we know today roaming the earth and keeping the plant life in balance, especially in areas where there was no man making changes to the natural configuration. The idea that all these large animals were lizards is preposterous. However, the word "dinosaur" means "terrible lizard," and once evolutionists are stuck on a course, they don't turn back no matter how wrong their first "hypothesis" is proven to be. Instead, they just keep bending the information until it fits in their narrow box; and if they can't get it to fit, they simply throw it out! Yet, after years of research and the understanding that years ago very large animals of one sort or another along with many smaller species lived all around the globe, instead of coming to the obvious conclusion that these animals are not all lizards, men came up with fanciful tales about a world before ours where lizards were the greatly predominant species in all shapes and sizes. Further, they conclude that this lizard world only ended after a great catastrophe changed everything. That great catastrophe? Well, when one studies the tales of ancient people, the obvious conclusion would be a great flood of some sort; but what does our so called scientific community say? An earth shattering meteor strike - and we were so close! (Rom. 1:20-23)

Truth is, there was a world before the one we know today, but it did not happen in a completely different dispensation of time, nor did mostly lizards or the devil rule it; and no, there was not a meteor strike which changed it all. The time was our time - this creation cycle. The animals we know as only dry bones were not all lizards. Whether great or small, they were just as diverse as what we see in the living examples today; and yes, it was a world flood which changed so many things. A flood so large it covered even the highest mountains by several feet; and which only began to recede because God began an interaction between the vapor water (air) and the liquid water on earth. This interaction did not immediately nor forcibly take the water from off the ground. It simply began a process which would, once again, put large vol-

umes of water back into the firmament above. As this happened, the balance between the amount of water on the earth and the solid surface of the planet would begin to level. Accumulation of water (clouds) formed in the sky, and dry ground began to appear once again!

To further help the dry land to appear, verse 2 of chapter 8 tells us God shut the fountains of the deep so that water under the surface of the planet would stay there. It's likely that it is at this moment when the dynamics of water coming up from the ground to water the whole face of the earth, changed. The world was being repaired not restored. On the other side of the flood there would be differences in the way things worked. Not so different that Noah and his family would not know how to live, but enough different that they could not simply step off the ark and completely go back to life as they knew it. Remember, God was wiping away the sin-filled past of human existence and destroying the footprint man had created. However, there was still a lot of information contained in the minds of those eight people who were left in the ark, and as we say, "Old habits die hard!" God did not just want them to have a world where they could start anew; He wanted them to see how it made no sense to attempt to simply carry on with or attempt to restore life as they had known it before the flood.

The flood, in many ways, was like a trip through time. The curse of the ground, combined with man's determination not to follow God's will, was going to do a lot of damage to the planet eventually; but the flood did a lot of that damage virtually overnight. The curse had been furthered in that the dynamics of the earth's ability to take care of itself was drastically decreased. This is why it's important for us to understand what truly happened in our world! The lesson God wanted to give man by cursing the ground had a lot to do with showing man the temporal nature of this universe. The world would not simply provide food for man year after year without effort on his part. Man would have to work the ground to get it to give what he wanted. Plus, man would be in a continual fight with thorns and weeds which he did not want. This would keep him from simply creating whatever he wanted now that his thoughts were corrupted by sin. Most of what man did would have to be redone day after day and year after year. Now, the flood had taken away everything man had created, and even changed certain dynamics which would show us that not just what we plant is temporal, but the world itself is. This world cannot be our eternal home. Even with our own eyes, we can see the world is waxing old, wearing out, and will someday be gone or, at the very least, uninhabitable! Man may believe going into the stars is man's hope; and there have certainly been a lot of stories told, based on this idea. However, even what is out beyond this planet is only temporal, and it will take us a long time to get there, which individuals do not have much of. We should be able to amply grasp the temporal concept just in the fact our grand-

fathers and fathers pass away; but because we attempt to continually ignore it, or believe we can someday overcome it, God continues to show us this truth in multiple ways!

When we look at the story of the flood, we also see how God is showing us in multiple ways that He is the answer we seek, and it's foolish to turn away from Him. Just as He had destroyed the planet with a flood, He could put it back together again. He would also do this in ways we could continue to observe, even today. People often are taught the story of the rainbow and the fact it came into existence as a symbol God would never again destroy the world as He had done. (Gen. 9:9-17) However, it's seriously jumping to the end of the story not to see all the signs God left to remind us it happened in the first place. As we have talked about, there were much larger animals on this earth which are no longer needed now that the ground no longer grows lush vegetation as it once did. Beyond that, we see things are not on the upswing even now. Today, we see many species of animals going extinct or having to be specifically cared for to keep alive because they are too large for what the planet is willing to sustain, or their habitat is becoming extinct for one reason or another. We even find that some species we cannot keep alive no matter how much we try. The video footage and photographic evidence of their once existence will likely survive to show future generations the continuing pattern.

In today's world, we see clouds in the sky. When we need water, we hope they will bring the rain; and when they bring too much, we have floods which show us just how devastating such an event can be. This, however, even in its most violent appearance, is only a minuscule fraction of the danger the entire planet was in during the Genesis' flood. Genesis tells us the windows of heaven were opened as one of the elements for water to overtake the planet. (Gen. 7:11) Verse 2 of chapter 8 not only tells us the fountains of the deep were stopped, but also the windows of heaven. This is not talking about the simple idea of rain. The very next words of verse 2 tell us the rain was "restrained." Restrained does not mean stopped. It means the rain would not continually come down. God was placing boundaries on the way water can evaporate and re-accumulate in the sky in order to transport water and redistribute it around the planet. This is different than stopping the windows of heaven. Opening the windows of heaven was the process by which the water which made up the firmament above came down to rejoin the water on the surface of the planet. If God had not stopped this process from happening, our atmosphere would have disappeared. "Science" spends a lot of time today talking and debating things such as holes in the ozone layer and the build up of certain gasses in the atmosphere; but none of these things hold a candle to what took place during the flood. After the flood, it would rain water from the sky, but the water which still remained to make-up our atmosphere was stopped from ever coming down again.

The rainbow is not just a symbol God will never send a flood, but that the world will not be completely devastated until such time as God totally takes it out of existence. (Gen. 8:20-22) Man's existence will not come to an end by some odd meteor strike, or the complete collapse of our atmosphere. This is true even in spite of man's stupidity in harming the earth! Revelation shows us God's wrath will allow us to devastate the planet to a great degree, which we already have done much of; but He will put an end to our destruction before we are allowed to devastate ourselves completely. (Rev. 15:1-16:19, 19:1-21:8)

Verse 3 tells us the waters continued to be removed from off the face of the earth. As we talked about before, this was a process not a sudden rush. The last verse of chapter 7 speaks of a 150 days. Verse 3 of chapter 8 tells us the waters were "abated" after 150 days, so these two verses agree, but look at it from two different sides. Verse 24 of chapter 7 is looking at it from the ending perspective. The verses before this talked about the destruction, and verse 24 caps it off by saying the waters "...prevailed." for this time period. Verse 3 of chapter 8 looks at it from the new beginning standpoint. Telling us the water, by the end of this time period, had come to a state which could be described as, "...abated." Thus, we know the waters were only allowed to prevail for 150 days because after 150 days, "...the waters were abated." This is the true time period of, "The Flood." Everything in the story before this was preparing for it, and everything after this was recovery from it.

Now, one might be tempted to ask a couple of questions if this was the only information we were given. First, are we talking about the same 150 days? Second, does this include the 40 days of the flood itself? This brings us to some math. If the answer to the first question is no, then we have 300 days. If the answer is also no to the second question, then we have 340 days. That would be our max scenario. If the answer to the first question is yes, but the answer to the second is still no, then we have 190 days. At the minimalist end, the answer is yes to both questions. Yes, this is the same 150 days; and yes, that includes the 40 days and 40 nights of rain. That gives us simply 150 days of destruction by the waters!

Thankfully, God gives us the answer to our question in verse 4 of chapter 8. The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. If we go all the way back to chapter 7 verse 11, it tells us the flood began on the seventeenth day of the second month of Noah's six hundredth year. To be Biblically accurate about this, we must not go by the ever popular Gregorian calendar. Instead, we must look at the calendar God gave Israel at the same time period God was giving the Torah (first five books of the Bible) in which this story is contained. That

calendar is lunar and starts the months with the new moon. Technically, a moon cycle takes 29.5305882 days, but in ancient times the new moon - or should I say the disappearance of the last crescent before, and the appearance of the first crescent following the new moon - was looked for in order to set the months. This was the more naturalistic way of doing things, but today it comes out much the same. The modern Jewish calendar simply follows an alternating pattern of 29 and 30 days. This modern calendar does not care so much about the exact day of the new moon; but it stays pretty close, and certainly brings about the same kind of pattern as the ancient way of doing things.

Now the Gregorian calendar does the whole, "Thirty days has September, April, June and November, all the rest have thirty-one save February...." on and on because it's solar, and doesn't care much about the moon. The calendar God originally gave Israel also only cared about the start of the year, not the end. It had an eternal feel to it, which I don't have the time to explain here, but it's neat! Because of this, the ancient calendar only had to know what moon cycle to call the beginning of the year. The method it used to do this meant that even though the months did not care about keeping pace with where a solar calendar would be, it still stayed right with the seasons. The modern Jewish calendar is more rigid and has a set number of months, which means it falls short of the solar cycle each year, and has to have a month added every so often to stay in step. This is all calculated and works just fine; but getting back to Noah, it all started in the second month and ended in the seventh month of his life's six hundredth year. These would have been lunar months, and this gives us four full ones. If we alternate between 29 and 30 days, saying the second month had 30 days, we need to subtract 17 from 30 which gives us 13. This would mean the seventh month would have 29 days, but that is not relevant since only 17 count. This gives us 13 days in the second month, plus 29 in the third, then 30, 29, and 30 again. Adding this together, we come to 131 days, and to this, we will add the last 17 days in the seventh month, and get a grand total of, 148!

Just as is the case with the modern Jewish calendar compared to the ancient one as a whole, we are pretty close; and if you consider that watching the moon cycle for what it is can actually give you months of 29 or 30 days in a row, you could throw out the two full months of 29 in our calculation and say they were 30 days. When you do this, what do you get? 150! It rained for 40 days and 40 nights; and after that, the ark bobbed on the surface of the water for another 110 days before it finally came back to sitting on solid ground. What a day that must have been to feel and hear that big wooden ark come to a grinding halt, and know God had kept His promise. You had been saved!

Until next time, Shalom!

It's Not Extreme To Know What Is Right!
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a day in spite of the fact the law said he couldn't. For this, he was thrown in a den of lions. God chose to save Daniel; and the king not only turned the law completely around to say everyone should pray to The One True God; but he threw those men who had the idea of outlawing prayer, into the lions den. (Dan. 6)

This is why we must be persuaded in our own mind that what we are standing for is right. We cannot afford to take our knowledge of righteousness lightly. We may have to make an individual decision to stand up for righteousness, and we can't make our choices with the idea God will always save us as He did Daniel in the lions' den. If we choose to do something the ordained authority says is worthy of punishment, we need to have the knowledge of righteousness for ourselves. Many an individual has shed blood for the sake of righteousness, and we must make our choices with the knowledge that our reward is not on this earth, even if God does choose to deliver us. (Rev. 6:9-11) This is not a crazy or extreme ideology; it's exactly what Jesus did.

Man has often had trouble dealing with the fact we can only follow God by having a personal relationship with Him, but it's the foundation of what we are talking about! We can't claim to follow God and be in the right simply because we do or don't do what someone else tells us. We can't just blindly follow another man or group, even if that man or group claims to be of God. The definition of a theocracy is a government which is said to be led directly by a deity. This is mostly done by having a leader who is believed to be getting their direction straight from a higher authority, such as a god or even be a god incarnate themselves. This automatically puts what the leader or government in general chooses to dictate, outside the arena of individual debate. When one tries to challenge even a singular idea or edict the leader has laid out, it immediately becomes not about the issue, but about questioning the legitimacy of the leader's link to the higher source. This is not really different from the way many cults are ran. Often, there is a leader who has some supposed link to God or a god of some sort, which makes what they say special and unchallengeable. Some of these cults only survive for a limited time and then fall apart; but at other times, they last for years, if not centuries, even after the death of that special someone. In either case, what the leader says goes, or you are defying the direct order of god. That's pretty heavy stuff, and in almost all places where this has been or is practiced, there is a significant abuse of power, and the creation of extremism.

Unfortunately, many churches are vulnerable to the same troubles which a cult or theocracy are, and commonly

turn into, because the very same ideas created their premise! Often there is a man who has ideas or preaches a certain "way," and those ideas are considered direct revelations from God. People often follow them, not because they have learned something for themselves, but because they believe there is merit in simply following that man and his teachings. In many cases, the only difference between what people consider a cult and what they consider a legitimate church or denomination, has to do with how much the original person(s) who laid out the teaching considered themselves to be an undeniable authority, and/or how "extreme" they feel the group is in its teaching. However, whether the person who originally taught, demanded anything or taught something extreme in any form, the result is the same. People are often following the original ideas and teachings without question, instead of gaining a deep personal understanding for themselves. Thus, people are also easily taught to follow the teachings of later leaders of the group, just because they are who they are and/or hold the position they hold. In the end, this can bode very badly for everyone.

Many would even make the argument that this is Biblical and point to the way Israel was formed as an example. However, this argument is, in actuality, an example of how much damage, people blindly following people, has done. The only reason to think Israel was formed by people blindly following a man and his teachings, is that many do not look at the details of the story for themselves. Instead, they are only looking at the overview or impression they have about what happened. Moses was no doubt a leader who was being directed straight from God Himself. However, it was not Moses who forced the people to follow, or who desired to even stand in the place of mediator between God and the people. When God called Moses, He was calling a man of great humility. Many people interpret Moses' talk with God at the burning bush as being one of distrust; and while this may seem to be the case in the eyes of man, it could not be the case of Moses' heart, which God could see. (I Sam. 16:7) Moses was standing on holy ground upon which he could not even wear his shoes. Before him was a bush which burned with the presence of God. (Ex. 3:1-4:17) There is no way Moses could have been of a defiant mind, an argumentative nature, or even a doubting spirit in regard to the power of God. If he had been, he would never have been seen again. (Lev. 10:1-2) What Moses was seriously questioning was himself and his individual ability. We should never question God, but we should always question ourselves. This is what working out our salvation with fear and trembling is all about. (Phil. 2:12-15) Realizing we have serious shortcomings, which God desires to develop into solid abilities, is a first step in allowing God to grow that part of our lives. (Gal. 6:3) God wanted to assure Moses that the seeds of ability were already in him, even if he could not see them. God even sent Moses' brother (Aaron) to go with him as an arm to

lean on - so to speak - but if you read the story, you find Moses needed him very little for the task which Moses thought he couldn't do!

When Moses came to the children of Israel, he did not take over by force, or even attempt to win them over by political maneuvers. Moses, much like a prophet, simply delivered God's message to the people. It would be up to the individual families and each person to listen and even take part. This is why God delivered the people in the way He did. God was not just humbling Egypt with the plagues; He was proving to Israel that He could do anything and He was truly in control, not Pharaoh or Moses. In the last plague, God would give the instructions for Moses to give to the people, about how to survive the passing over of the death angel. (Ex. 12:1-13) Moses did not ask for a vote, but he also did not go forth with a sword or army by his side. Moses gave the instructions; and again, it was up to the people as individuals to believe or not believe what Moses said. It was up to the people to follow the instructions or choose not to bother, in spite of whatever they believed. Had they been paying attention? Had they been reaching out and attempting to have a relationship with God for themselves? It was very important they be convinced that what Moses was telling them was not something Moses came up with, but it was the truth. Why? Because in the end, the reality in the home of each person was, where the blood was not found on the door posts and header, death was found the next morning!

After the children of Israel had been freed from Egypt, they came to mount Sinai where God was going to give them the instructions for how to form their nation. God did not ask Moses to go and tell the people all the law. God told Moses to instruct the people to come to the mount and hear God for themselves. Once they did, they were very afraid. God had gone through the Ten Commandments, and that was all the people wanted. They clearly understood God was speaking to them, but what they requested was that Moses go to speak with God instead, and everything God told Moses they would follow. This was not God's first intent, nor was it Moses' choice. This was the choice of the people, based on the fact they were afraid they could not continue standing before such a direct presence of God and live. (Ex. 19:1-20:26)

Another important point to keep in mind when considering the way God established Israel, is the fact it was not until the people insisted on it, many years after the death of leaders such as Moses and Joshua, that God allowed Israel to have a king. (I Sam. 8) Most men in authority desire their power, and they often get away with it, not because there is no one big enough to stop them, but because, in many ways, it's the majority's desire to take the easy route of just being

led. This is the very reason why when God's own Son came to this earth as a humble baby born into a humble family, He was eventually crucified on a tree. Pilot did not just crucify Jesus because the religious leaders brought Him. Pilot asked who the people would rather have released to them: A man in prison for sedition and murder, or the humble Jesus who had healed their bodies, even on the Sabbath day. (Matt. 27:15-26) Many of the people who called out that day and flooded that courtyard with calls to release Barabbas, did so simply because they were told by the religious authority of the day, that is what they were supposed to do. In an example of how power is often shared more than people realize, Pilot had only asked because he did not have the guts to use his authority and release Jesus as the innocent man He was. We can't be like this if we want to be saved from this world and all its sorrow. We must seek to be righteous and to know the truth for ourselves. Then we must stand up for righteousness, even if that puts our voice in opposition to the government, religious authorities and/or only in sync with a very small minority - maybe no one else at all!

Now, more than ever before, we live in a world where not just one country, one area, nor one region is suffering from the abuse of power by those in authority. The time has come for people to know what they believe, and be ready every day to live their lives according to what is right before God. As Jesus walked this earth, He chose twelve men to specifically disciple. These men were ultimately given authority to teach the Word, but that Word was/is just what Moses was given: and that is to follow God in a personal way. (Ex. 29:45-46, Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16) This is why the Bible tells us God gave "gifts" unto men in the form of apostles, prophets, evangelists, preachers, and teachers. (Eph. 4:8-16) Just as Jesus worked in humility, so too, these men are to work in humility. They carry the authority to teach God's Word if they are truly called of Him, but they are not your mediator. The fact man desires a mediator is why God sent His Son Jesus Christ to this earth and allowed Him to die by the sword which the government bears. Just think about it, through His shed blood, God Himself became the Mediator between man and God! If that doesn't tell us something about how much God desires not some religious experience for those who believe in Him, but a true in-depth personal relationship, I don't know what does!

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