



Shaqah

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

As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, we ended our last segment talking about the incident where Aaron and Miriam attempted to question Moses' leadership with the argument they too had heard the voice of God and prophesied. They also questioned Moses' purity in that he had a wife who was not of Israel, and made the case they should at least have some part, if not an equal footing with Moses, in what God was instructing the nation to do. God would be the one who would deal with their challenge and make it clear no one had a relationship with Him like Moses. No matter how much anyone thought they were a prophet, Moses was the leader God had chosen to work through! After waiting for Miriam to be clear of the leprosy she was plagued with for questioning Moses, and in doing so God Himself, the camp moved on through the wilderness of Paran, bringing them very close to the promised land. This brought us through Numbers chapter 12, and we will begin this segment with chapter 13 verse 1.

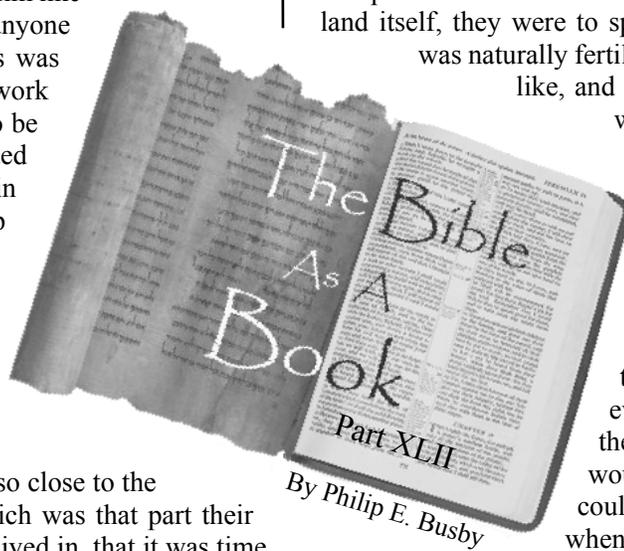
At this point, Israel had made it so close to the south end of the promised land, which was that part their forefathers had most predominantly lived in, that it was time to begin the process of scouting out the land for the sake of beginning to take it as God had promised to give it to them. As Moses was instructed by God to accomplish this scouting mission, God told him to send one man from each tribe, and each one needed to be a leader among their tribe. This would ensure every tribe had someone they respected who would be a firsthand witness to see the land and could convey to, as well as represent, that tribe's opinion concerning the land. The specific names of the twelve men are told to us along with the tribe they were from. In listing these names and tribes, one will note again that there is no representative from Levi, as they were God's tribe. Thus, the twelve men were from the other eleven sons of Jacob, with Joseph being two tribes in Ephraim and Manasseh. The two names which stand out from this group is Caleb, who was of the tribe of Judah,

and Oshea of the tribe of Ephraim, whom Moses called “Jehoshua.”

Moses instructs the men to specifically start by going up into the mountains of the south end, and as they covered the overall land they were to report on what kind of people lived in the land, whether they were weak or strong; if the land was heavily populated or sparse; whether they successfully worked the land or just lived off it; whether they lived in encampments of tents or had built walled cities. As to the land itself, they were to specifically report on whether it was naturally fertile and productive or more desert like, and if there were forests to provide

wood or not. Now, this scouting would be done in the seasonal time period right around the Feast of Weeks, meaning there would be plenty of fresh fruits and produce ripe for the picking, and these men were to be brave in their going through the land, even bringing back samples of the produce they found. All this would show what kind of life Israel could expect to build for themselves when the land became their home.

The men would set out and search the land from its south end and go all the way north, even above the area around what is best known to Bible students as the Sea of Galilee. This allowed them to see much of the same route Abraham had no doubt taken as he entered the land coming down from Haran, and the land extending about as far north as Israel would ever hold with any consistency once they conquered it. After seeing this path, the twelve would have a better sense of the land's configuration, and they would return south scouting more of the population centers, specifically Hebron, which was a very old city and predated a city they knew as the oldest in Egypt. Hebron was also one of the places Abraham had lived, and they would see how the descendants of the people Abraham had sojourned among had built and



populated this area since then. This would give them a true idea of the way this land had been settled, used, and maintained over a long period of time. One of the greatest evidence of the land's ability to produce, without being over worked by the people who had lived there for so long, was that the spies came to a brook where they found grapevines with large grapes that did not even compare to the small species they had known as grapes in Egypt. This place would be named for being a waterway, the valley of which contained such old growth vines as to produce such amazing size fruit! The specimen of the vine they cut from there to take with them, along with the other produce of the land they had gathered, had only one cluster of grapes on it which was so heavy, but at the same time the vine itself so substantial in size, they used the vine to carry the cluster between two of them as if the vine was a staff made for the purpose.

These men would spend forty days in their journey through the land and return to Moses and the rest of the nation with both the physical specimens that had been asked for as well as information about the land and people in it. Their report on the land itself was to emphasize it did not fail in any way to live up with what God had told them about the kind of land He was taking them to, for they described it as truly flowing with milk and honey. However, their report of the people living in the land showed they were no less impressed by them. In their opinion the people were very strong and they lived in fortified cities which were impressive. They had specifically seen the very first people Israel would have to contend with in order to take the land at the south end, including those living in the mountains, where it would seem Israel was to enter. They also reported that it would do no good to avoid this area, as there were others who lived along the coastal lands of the Mediterranean as well as the banks of the Jordan River valley. There was simply no point of entry where they would not be faced with strong people who already claimed the land!

As they gave their report, it became obvious the facts about the people in the land were being taken in the wrong way. Instead of being looked at as a good thing that proved the land could support Israel with no problem whatsoever, it was being seen as only a blockade the nation did not want to face. Caleb took the lead in attempting to settle them all down and turn the children of Israel back to the true meaning, with the encouragement it was something they should waste no time in going up to possess for themselves, along with the fact there should be no doubt they were able to take the land from the people already there! Unfortunately, most all the others who had gone up with Caleb were of the opinion there was no way the children of Israel stood a chance against the people of the land. They even used the good report about the land's ability to produce and sustain people as a reason for the people already living there being so large and strong, even if it were a fact Israel outnumbered the people, Israel was only like an army of insects against giants in comparison.

This essentially started an all-out panic among the people. It started as regret that they had come so far only to find

this out. It grew as they began to blame Moses and Aaron, even making the assertion they would rather have died in Egypt or the wilderness. All this eventually came to the accusation Moses and Aaron had no idea what they were talking about, because God would not have brought them all this way just so the men could be killed and the women and children taken as slaves. They decided it would be better to attempt a return to Egypt than go forward following Moses, and for this they even proposed the people choose a new leader who could help them do exactly that! In hearing all this, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in sorrow of their own and to express how much the people needed to repent of these thoughts. At that point Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes to express the same, and being two of the men who had seen the land, they stepped forward together to explain to the people what a good land God had brought them to. They explained the last thing Israel should do is rebel against God no matter what their feelings in the moment. They tried to be the voice of reason about how much The Great God Who had brought them this far was well able to fight for them, and in looking at it that way they need not fear the people of the land, but see all of it as just extra blessings The Lord intended to give Israel.

This was only taken as an insult, and the people were of the opinion the two men deserved to be stoned for saying such things. All this while Israel had been ignoring the pillar of God's presence that was constantly with them, and so at this point God would show forth His glory from out of the tabernacle in a way they could not ignore! God begins to speak with Moses from the perspective that Moses had actually taken responsibility for the people at Mt. Sinai. God asks Moses how long he thinks God should tolerate the people continually doubting Him, and how many miracles God had to do before the people would believe He was able to do all things! These are rhetorical questions, and God goes on to inform Moses He will grant the people's wish and kill them right there in the wilderness. In rejecting them, God tells Moses He would replace the nation in the same way He wanted to at Mt. Sinai by building a nation starting with Moses, and it would be even stronger than Israel was. Upon hearing this, Moses, once again, steps into the gap and pleads for God's mercy. The big difference this time around is that Moses had to do this in full view of the nation; and thus, they saw how much they actually should be thankful for Moses!

Israel heard Moses' words about how all the people in Canaan and the surrounding area had already heard of how great God was/is and the fact He was among Israel, leading them with His direct presence. At the same time, Moses makes it clear the foundation for his plea that God spare the people is so God is not blamed or accused of being unable to bring the people into the land, leaving the impression that any of the false gods of this world are greater than The One True God Who led Israel. Moses then pleads for God to use the opportunity to instead show what a God of mercy He is. Moses makes it clear he was not asking for God to be put at risk of being accused of pardoning the guilty, but to show Himself in forgiving Israel as He had all through the wilder-

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

We talked last time about how much the union between Abraham and Sarah was special, not just in that Sarah was Abraham's wife, but in that she, as much as Abraham, was chosen for the task of building the chosen nation. She, as much as Abraham, had been given that blessing. We also talked about the contrast between Abraham's reaction of laughing in his heart when God told him again that Sarah would bear a child, and the fact Sarah laughs at this same fact at a later time. In talking about all this, and more, we made it to verse 20 of chapter 17 of the book of Genesis. Now this is where I usually say something like, "Now we're ready for verse 21." However, we really aren't quite yet. This is because there are still a couple issues in the verses we covered last time that did not make it into our discussion, and we do not want to move on without covering them. The first one is in the verse where God reiterates Sarah would be the one who would bear Abraham the son of promise, and the other concerns facts God told Abraham about Ishmael.

In verse 19, God tells Abraham what to name the son he would have with Sarah, and that name was to be "Isaac!" Not only did we not talk about this specific fact, but we also did not talk about the meaning of this name, which is something we have done many times concerning others in this family. While it is true God had also given the name for the son Abraham had through Hagar, we should remember that this name was told to Hagar, and Ishmael's name was intended to let Hagar know God had heard her cry. Being a son of Abraham, Ishmael would not be without blessings of his own. Of course, we know God did not initially name Abraham and Sarah, but the fact they ended up with those specific names is due to the fact God changed their names. In our discussion of the meaning of what God changed them to, we talked about the contrast between Abraham being the father of many nations; but Sarah, while more than one nation would come from her son, was the princess of the chosen nation specifically. Thus, the meaning of Isaac's name is not just important to cover, but there's an interesting contrast to it and what God had named Hagar's son.

Because Isaac was to be that son of promise, it only stands to reason God would tell Abraham what the name would be for this son; and the meaning would go right along with the reactions we talked about both Abraham and Sarah having to being told they could and would still have a son together. "Isaac" means something pretty simple, for it means "he laughs" or "will laugh." Some will boil it down as far as to say it simply means "laughter," but the root of this name would not imply a noun, but a verb. Not just laughter as a thing, but at the very least, the act of laughing. This is important because it really points to everything involved with Isaac being born! Due to the way this name shows up in Hebrew, along with the fact Hebrew is much more expressive than a

modern language such as English, there can be some debate as to if the verb it really relates to is the one that expresses the idea of being the one who laughs, or the one being laughed at. This is why in English we say it means "he laughs," which would be reference to the one who is laughing, or "will laugh," which points more in the direction of being the one who gets laughed at.

It might seem like a very technical argument, and to scholars of ancient Hebrew it is! However, to a simple teacher of God's Word, you have to love the fact Isaac can point in both directions. Why? you may ask. Because laughter of all kinds for all reasons surrounded Isaac, but no matter in what form it comes, it all comes for the same basic reason! If you go back to just what we talked about last time in the contrast between Abraham and Sarah laughing at the thought they'd still have a son, there are those who see the humility part I pointed to as a non issue. They would do this with the insistence that Abraham laughed in total joy at the thought of having another son. For me, that's not how I see it; but at the same time, I do not see a total lack of this in his response. I believe Abraham was both apprehensive as well as joyful.

I stress the apprehension part due to human nature and the daunting thought it had to be to raise a son at the age they were. Abraham falls on his face and directly asks God if he, being 100 years old and Sarah being 90, could still hope to physically have a child? In this, I believe there can be no doubt Abraham is feeling a mixture of emotions that run from finding it hard to believe, all the way to what would they do if it were to happen. At the same time, Abraham was not stumbling at the promise of God, and he knew full well that what he and Sarah had done using Hagar had not worked out as they planned - to say the least. This is why I stress Abraham's statement in these verses we are looking directly at about Ishmael are concerning Ishmael not being left out. If God was going to do what He was going to do through a son whom Sarah would give birth to, what was to happen to Ishmael. Remember, Hagar and Ishmael did not return to Egypt where Hagar was from, but Hagar was told by God to stay with Abraham. Abraham had a father's heart toward Ishmael and certainly did not want the consequences of the mistake he and Sarah were responsible for to fall upon Ishmael.

However, God was not going to leave Hagar's son out in the cold or at the mercy of the larger world just because he would not be a part of the chosen nation. The fact this was a concern for both Abraham and Hagar is why God named Ishmael "God hears." In any case, it is apparent Abraham is concerned about a great deal many things as he has this conversation with God. In that clear context it is hard to believe Abraham's laughter was just that of joy, but, again, I will not argue there had to be, at the very least, joy in the idea

of having another son as well as the confirmation Abraham's life was to mean so much in God's work. To some this latter point would not be that big a deal, but to someone like Abraham, it no doubt was, and it brought him joy in spite of the astonishment!

In someways Abraham encompasses almost all the laughter Isaac's name was meant to denote, but there is more. When we look at Sarah's laughter at hearing the words that day as she stood inside the tent, we see greater evidence of an almost uncontrollable burst of human nature in finding it unfathomable it could happen at her age. (Gen. 18:9-15) She, knowing there were negative aspects to her laughing, is also overcome by the human nature, and she attempts to deny she had laughed. However, she is told God knew she had laughed; at the same time this laughter, no matter the reason for it at that moment, would be turned to laughter of joy when it came to pass, and that was important. The point is Sarah shows us the disbelief in us all, and I'm not talking about just those who would see it physically happen and be amazed it was possible. I'm talking about the fact there are those who look back on these very ancient words in the Bible and believe this is nothing but a story made up to make the forefathers of the Jews seem to be miraculous!

This brings us to even more aspects of laughter, and those are the ones with real negativity associated with them. We say Sarah's laughter comes with a negative aspect but really only in that it would be doubting God. Outside that, her reaction is nothing but normal in the human mind; and while some might be offended when they tell someone something and get laughs for saying something so unbelievable, who of us would believe a ninety year old woman could have a child? Especially in a day where no "scientific" trickery could be at work. No, there is a laughter that is far more negative than that and in all aspects of it's meaning. Those who have been laughed at by others who just wish to make fun of them, no matter what the reason may be, know the pain and negativity of such laughter. Many a person's life has been shaped by negative laughter they suffered, some long term and others just at very specific times. The point is, laughter is not always a positive or semi-positive thing. There is a big difference between being the one who is laughed at and the one doing the laughing, but with God nothing in this life has to mean so much to us as individuals, for He will always have (to use an expression some might find a bit distasteful when talking about God but applicable for our conversation here) - the last laugh! (Rom. 12:19-21)

One great Biblical example is that of Samson, who made the mistake which allowed the Philistines to capture him. On what would be the last day of his life he was brought out and bound between two support pillars of the great hall where the Philistines were celebrating. They brought him out to that spot so they could laugh at him. They felt they had brought down Israel's greatest hero, and they laughed at the fact that for all he had done to defeat them in the past, they felt they were getting the last laugh. However, those who know the story know it was actually Samson who got the last laugh as

he prayed to God and received the strength to destabilize the support columns of that great hall. This literally, brought the roof crashing down on the heads of the dignitaries and others celebrating that night, as well as killed many more who were celebrating on the roof of the structure. In that one night, Samson killed more Philistines than he had in the combined total of all the other encounters with them during his life! (Judg. 16:23-31)

This story actually shows us the exact kind of negative, as well as positive laughter we want to look at. As we have covered many times, Isaac was the son of promise, he would be the father of the chosen nation; specifically, he is a typology of The Messiah, which is God's ultimate salvation for all those who desire God's ways. All these things get laughed at in this world. The main reason Hagar and Ishmael were finally separated from Abraham's house was because Sarah witnessed Ishmael mocking Isaac one day and demanded Isaac not have to grow up alongside Ishmael (Gen. 21:9-11) Lord willing, we will cover this more when we get to those verses, but whether this was Ishmael just doing what kids so often do, or him specifically wishing to down Isaac because Ishmael was in truth the oldest son of Abraham, doesn't really matter. There have been, and will be those who do not believe the miracle of Isaac's birth nor the will of God that Isaac be the heir of Abraham's house. There were those who laughed at Isaac for believing his life would really mean something in the work of God here on this earth, as no doubt there were those who laughed at Abraham for believing it, and certainly those who laughed at Jacob for the same.

There have been and will continue to be those who laugh at the idea God set up a chosen nation, but no matter how hard they have tried to destroy it, the nation remains. There are those who laugh at the idea the Jews today are the true chosen nation, but as we see prophecy being fulfilled through them day by day, those who study God's Word know it's true no matter how hard others might find it to believe. Certainly there are those who laugh at Jesus. They laugh at the truth Jesus was born of a virgin, and there are polls that have been taken in recent times that say even many "Christian" ministers don't really believe it's true. It is even in the doctrine of certain organizations that while Joseph may have had nothing to do with it, Jesus was still formed using a piece of Mary's DNA and not of a pure newly created human form.

There were those in Jesus' life on this earth who laughed at Him showing Himself to be The Messiah. Jesus was killed for the fact He showed Himself to be, and there are those who still laugh today at people who believe Jesus was/is The Messiah. Unlike Samson, Jesus did not take others with Him in His death, but died as a criminal being mocked as not being the Son of God or even powerful enough to come down off that cross. (Matt. 27:35-44) There are those who laugh at the fact we believe Jesus, as the Bible tells us, even existed in history, much less that He rose from the dead and still lives today. They laugh at those of us who await His return and who believe if we do not live to see that return we will be

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XVI

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

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

We ended our last segment by talking mostly about the Septuagint and the why and how it came to exist. However, the main point of that overall discussion was about the fact the Jews had grown to have a better personal knowledge of the Word of God than maybe any time before. This is not just important to the conversation about the Jews living in a time when some were on the land in great numbers while many still were not; it's important to the later times when the Jews would be mostly off the land and hold no governing power over it. The personal knowledge of the Torah and other books of the Hebrew Bible were/are specifically important for the individual Jew, as well as non-Jew, being able to recognize Jesus as The Messiah. This is true no matter how many in the past or present may or may not do just that!

Of more immediate consequence to the time period of the Greek rule, which we are discussing here, are the events that led up to and created the the feast of Hanukkah. Far too many people are not really aware of the real reasons for its observance, and to them Hanukkah seems to be the Jewish version of the many celebrations based on the winter solstice. Of course, the most widely known, and celebrated, of those events is Christmas, which is the Christian version of such "holidays," and for Christians it is suppose to be the celebration of the birth of Christ. Now, there is a lot we could talk about when it comes to the good, the bad, and even the ugly in Christmas, as well as many other holidays, but I really only bring the issue up as an example of a holiday coming to be recognized/celebrated at the time of year Christmas is.

While religions the world over commonly celebrate the two solstices and equinoxes, the winter one has always held high meaning for many cultures. This is because people are marking the shortest day of the year (speaking in terms of daylight hours), and there's a feeling that if we've survived to that day there is real hope we will make it through till spring. Statistically, this is a very incorrect thought, but emotionally it has always struck a tone of hope. In any case, this thought is emphasized by the fact that after the winter solstice the days are getting longer and we are headed for warmer times in the year. The problem is that because celebrations of this sort were already so important to so many cultures, which the establishment of the Christian religion wished to assimilate, this time of year was chosen to establish the celebration of Christmas.

One note on this is that the seasons are reversed in the Southern Hemisphere from what they are in the North. However, the Christian religion held its seat of power in the North and

the northern winter solstice won out. The other odd fact in man's worship of the creation is that many of these solstice and equinox celebrations got moved due to various factors; and thus, most cultures do not observe their celebrations directly on the astronomical event(s) they were originally meant to celebrate. What this means is that in spite of the Christian religion's success in making Christmas the main event at this time of year, many non-Christian aspects of the older celebrations easily, and some intentionally, got mingled into Christmas in spite of the fact Christmas does not take place directly on the winter solstice. All this has a lot to do with man's rising use of set calendars, but what is more important to our discussion here is the fact some of the non-Christian celebrations of the winter solstice did and have remained completely intact!

This makes it very easy for people to assume Hanukkah is simply the Jewish version of this same category of celebrations. What makes it even easier for people to think this way is that just as with Christmas (which never really was uncorrupted by the non-Christian celebrations), Hanukkah has been affected by some of the other events. Jews have had difficulty keeping the separation and clarity Hanukkah once had. While many holidays incorporate various traditions that are, in truth, the same things, such as gift giving, etc., there were not nearly as many commonalities to Hanukkah's original observance to something such as Christmas until our more recent times.

Having covered all that, my point is, Hanukkah is not one of the various celebrations and/or observances based on the winter solstice! In truth, it is merely a fact (what some might call a coincidence) that Hanukkah comes around the same time of year, because its reason for existing has absolutely nothing to do with a desire or Biblical commandment to even observe a major, or minor, winter celebration. To be clear on this point, Hanukkah is not one of the feast days laid out by God in the Law, nor was the time of year specifically chosen by religious leaders as was the case with Christmas. Hanukkah is the remembrance of a purely historical event, and it has some major implications to the question this series is attempting to answer. Why? Because to believe the Jews are not the chosen nation God established through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is to believe the nation had disappeared by the time of the Greeks. If that is not your assertion, Hanukkah makes for a very difficult argument. If those of the chosen nation were the ones who established Hanukkah, it becomes an observance that a people not truly of the chosen nation picked up and started celebrating just because it was one that belonged to the nation originally!

Stop and think about that for a minute. The Christian religion could not resist picking the winter solstice time of year in which to set one of its most treasured celebrations, no matter

how much non-Christian influence had to be fought and/or intermingled in order to do so. This because celebrations of this type and at this time of year are so popular! If you were a people attempting to hijack the identity of being God's chosen nation, you would have been maintaining Hanukkah in the face of there being many other cultures celebrating a major winter holiday in order to take up an observance that traditionally rejected being anything like those. This is why I brought up the fact it has only been in more recent times things such as Christmas have really begun to intermix or be "borrowed" from by those observing Hanukkah. Through the centuries, Jews, and this is a point affecting their children in particular, have not celebrated Christmas or the like. They did not celebrate it in their homes, nor take part in the festivities carried out around them in the cultures they lived among. Unless you've tried to do such a thing, you just can't understand how difficult this is to do, especially if your intent is not just that you don't bother celebrating but you want to avoid it!

Understand that the Jewish religion rejects Jesus as The Messiah, and Christmas is suppose to be the celebration of Jesus' birth and important because He is The Messiah. This fact is why Christianity even exists! On a religious level there can be almost nothing more incorrect than taking part in a celebration so central to the belief which separates you from another religion. Jews also have a deep desire to stay at distance from any of the other winter celebrations in the fear the knowledge of Hanukkah will be lost! This shows a deep passion for preserving and remembering, generation upon generation, an important event that is directly tied to your people's continued existence! If the Jews we know today were not the the chosen nation at the time Hanukkah's events took place, why did it happen? If the Jews we know today are not the chosen nation because they displaced the true nation in some way after these events, especially in light of how few outside those who are Jewish even know what Hanukkah is, why keep such an event on your calendar? What is the point?

With that in mind, let's go into the historical reason Jews have and do celebrate Hanukkah. It's important to remember all the turmoil the nation had been through up to this point. It's important to understand the Scriptures had become more personal than ever to the Jews, and maybe most importantly, the fact the Hellenization of the world was in full swing! It's important to understand the turmoil the nation had been through because these events were a very do or die, as the saying goes, time for the nation. If there was ever a time to give up their identity as the chosen nation, it was at this point. While some could argue the time of Esther fits that better, one needs to remember the edict of death put forth against the Jews was a sudden occurrence in that time, and the Jews had every reason to fight because it was a literal fight for their lives! In contrast, when it comes to the time of Hanukkah, the threat fought against was one that could simply have been gone along with and life might truly have become more prosperous and peaceful for Jews everywhere.

Lest we forget, this was a time when there were even many Jews who viewed letting go of the Biblical ways in favor of the new Greek way, which we call Hellenization, as the thing to

do. This means for the events of Hanukkah to take place, there had to be Jews of the mindset that if Jews were going to disappear as a people, it was going to have to be because everyone who cared about being the chosen nation died in the trying to preserve their ways. This is why it's important to understand personal knowledge of God's Word had really risen! The Torah makes it clear that the nation exists for a purpose, and teaches how God brought it into existence. People don't give their lives for history that is already lost or they feel has no personal meaning to them! With this, one should consider that while the temple is central to the story of Hanukkah, not all Jews cared so much about the temple. I can just hear the collective gasp as some react to that statement, but the reality is twofold.

There were those who simply were satisfied, or became too comfortable with the synagogue system. Christians would understand this best by relating it to a desire to have a church "home." To Jews who had already stopped worrying about stipulations of the Law that required them to go to the temple in Jerusalem, the temple being inaccessible would not have mattered so much. This is not even to mention those who felt they lived too far away to come on a regular basis, or those who had simply become complacent about going, feeling there would always be tomorrow. The second main factor is that there were those who felt the temple had been corrupted to such a degree they saw no reason to go or felt it was wrong. In these types of arguments there are always those who come to these conclusions for both right and wrong reasons. That's why we should all be very thankful God can see each heart, and only He will be our judge in the end!

The point is, if the temple had been all that really mattered to Jews, there may never have been a large scale uprising against what the Greeks did. So what did the Greeks do? The answer to that takes us back to the fact the Greek rulers had begun to see the world's acceptance of the Greek ways as a source and/or opportunity to gain power. There is no simple way to rundown the history from Alexander the Great to the time of the event Hanukkah celebrates without leaving out many elements different people find crucial, but trying to give a thorough history is outside the scope of our study here. Thus, I will attempt to give a shorthand version of what takes us to the important points of our discussion. To start with, I'll be a little more specific about what I've continued to repeat concerning the fact four of Alexander the Great's generals took over after his death. The reality is that this was actually a very messy affair involving many different military leaders and pieces of Alexander's family. However, while the history is not as clear-cut as any shorthand will make it appear, the empire did split into four main sectors with the main generals being: Antipater, who took over Macedon and Greece; Antigonus I Monophthalmus (maybe better known as Cyclops), who took western Asia Minor; Seleucus I Nicator, who took Mesopotamia east and into the top of India; and Ptolemy I Soter, who took Egypt and land holdings west along the Mediterranean coast.

An important fact is that after Alexander's death there was great disagreement among the generals who met in Babylon to

determine how to handle the empire. Much of this was based on the fact that among Alexander's remaining family there was no obvious successor. Thus, Antipater was confirmed as "General of Greece," which in many ways made him the true power. However, a man named Perdiccas was named "Regent of the Empire," and a man named Craterus was given the title "Guardian of the Royal Family." Together these three were the obvious political group to take over the empire, but it would not be that simple. Ptolemy I was given responsibility over Egypt; he established his capital as Alexandria, and began to make trouble with those in Greece. Perdiccas was never popular, and after bloody battles over power and various family issues, he was finally assassinated by the soldiers of his own army while on a campaign against Ptolemy I in Egypt. This resulted in Antipater becoming the "Regent of the Empire" in 320 B.C., but oddly the significance of Greece itself would not be long lasting in the fight over the empire.

Antigonus I being in control of a large amount of territory in Asia Minor had ambitions to rule even more. Ptolemy I had his sights on gaining control of the promised land, even attempting to use the Sabbath as a way to attack while the Jews were observing the day of rest in 320 B.C. His attempt was not successful, and Antigonus I generally ended up holding power over the promised land. In Babylon, Seleucus Nicator was considered a good ruler over his territory, but was not without his own ambitions; and by 312 B.C. he had established what would be known as the Seleucid Dynasty. However, Antigonus I's ambition would come to be the one considered such a threat to the others that they would work together to keep Antigonus I in check. In this conflict, Antigonus I was killed in battle about 301 B.C., and his territory was then divided up between the others. Seleucus Nicator would obtain most of it; he would found the city of Antioch and begin using it as his capital. Antioch being very much at the crossroads of Asia Minor and Greece to the west, Mesopotamia (which Seleucus already held) to the east, and the promised land to the south put him in a powerful position.

On the other hand, Ptolemy I gained the control over the promised land that he had initially desired, and would be the father of the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Alexandria Egypt. Unfortunately, none of this would end the fighting among them, specifically back and forth across the promised land. Ptolemy II Philadelphus would eventually take his father's throne in Alexandria, and it would be in his reign the Septuagint was produced. It would be very popular with the Jews, many of whom had fled to Egypt during the turbulent times the promised land was suffering. By about 222 B.C. Antiochus III was the Seleucid king. He would eventually push south in an attempt to overrun the northern territory of the promised land, and to take the promised land as a whole. By this time, Ptolemy IV Philopator was on the throne in Alexandria. Philopator drove Antiochus III back to the north and defeated him in 217 B.C. Fresh off his victory, Philopator returned to Egypt and stopped in Jerusalem on his way. There he wished to celebrate his victory by sacrificing on the altar at the temple, but the Jews rightfully kept him from doing so. Angered by what he saw as a great insult, Philopator began a program aimed at killing every Jew in Alexandria.

Philopator would die about thirteen years later, and about six years after that, Antiochus III, in another southern push, would add the entire promised land to his territory. Antiochus III was greatly encouraged by his success at bringing the empire back together and wanted to solidify Asia Minor and Greece, which, in many ways, had become disconnected from the rest of the pieces of Alexander's original territory. This was a critical mistake because it brought the king face to face with the rising power of Rome. After bloody conflict with the Romans, Antiochus III turned back to Asia Minor; but in the area of Ephesus he was met by a Roman army under the command of a general named Scipio. This would be in the year 190 B.C. and mark the true beginning of Rome's involvement in the affairs of what we call the Middle East.

After these defeats, Rome would dictate a devastating peace agreement to Antiochus III. It would include loss of territory, restrictions on military power, and Rome would demand twenty hostages be sent to Rome in order to ensure his loyalty. One of the hostages would be Antiochus' own son named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Epiphanes' brother would inherit their father's throne; and Epiphanes, after spending many years in Rome, would be allowed to return from Rome in exchange for his brother's heir. In 175 B.C. Epiphanes' brother was assassinated, but Epiphanes overcame the assassin and took the throne. Epiphanes saw the best way to exert his own power, and shape the world into his view of what it should be, as a push to completely Hellenize the territory under his rule, which included the promised land. This is where the story of what led to Hanukkah really begins, because of all the people who had or had not already tossed aside their culture for the Greek ways, there would be none so unyielding as that of the Jews!

With relationship to where we started this segment, it's very easy for different cultures of the world to find themselves on the same side of things no matter how different they may seem to be one from another, and this is for very simple reasons, which James defines for us in the New Testament. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4 Those cultures who had not for the most part already converted to the Greek ways were not considered a threat to this Hellenization attempt. The only way any of them would become a threat is if they decided to become disruptive in defense of their own culture. However, as we have covered, the people at large were very impressed with the Greek ways, and there is no evidence this was going to be a problem for most all the cultures under Epiphanes' control. Epiphanes likely even hoped to impress the Romans themselves by doing this. However, the devil, and thus, men who seek power in this world, know the Jewish culture is a direct threat to globalization just by its very existence!

This fact is why we see the Jews being considered a threat even when they have done nothing in particular to be noticed, and/or in many times and ways when they have caused no disruption remotely comparable to what others have and/or are doing! The two great historical examples again are the story of

Esther, where a man close to the king singled out the Jews as being a people with strange laws and not worth the risk of allowing them to live. This came in spite of the fact the Jews had done nothing to bring themselves to the king's notice before that. The other is the modern event of the Holocaust, where a man in Germany leading a political group which was determined to take over Germany, along with other countries, and, at the very least, eventually transform the world, also took note of the Jews. Thus, the Nazis saw the extermination of the Jews as a top priority in spite of the cost and resources it would take from their efforts to conquer the world, not to mention the fact Jews were some of the most productive members of German society as well as in those countries they began to conquer.

Many other examples both great and small exist that show the world's resistance to the Jews along with an insistence of minimizing, if not annihilating, Jews from particular areas and/or in particular ways. Jews are traditionally seen as a threat, and the Greeks felt this too. While some would argue the same things were true at the time of the Greeks that were pointed out to the Medes and Persian rulers (as the Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem upon their return from the Babylonian captivity), it makes no difference if Jews are pushing back or simply trying to live their lives in peace, they are almost always seen as a rebellious people the world would be better off without. What is interesting at the time of the Greeks is that, while Epiphanes killed many Jews, he did not go after the Jews as a people as much as he went after the real reason they are seen as a threat, and that was/is the Laws God gave them to live by.

At the time of Esther the Laws the Jews followed were pointed to as the problem, but extinguishing the Jewish people was seen as the answer. Hitler had - for lack of a better way of saying it - the "advantage" of hindsight. Hitler had the opportunity to study what the Greeks had attempted. However, by his time the temple was gone and the Jews still remained. That being true, he also saw this other religion called Christianity, which claimed to hold much of the same basic writings the Jews held as core to its beliefs, yet the establishment of the Christian religion did not seem a threat and the Jews still did. Why? Because the Christian religious establishment was/is not truly Biblical and also has seen the Jews as a threat to their power. This should cause all true believers to live with the realization, and never forget, that attempting to live by the Laws of God will make you an enemy of the world. This is not untrue for non-Jews just because the Jews are the world's lightning rod on the issue! The Jews being the lightning rod is simply the reason that in man's attempt at globalization, men such as Hitler tend to go more directly after the physical existence of the Jews as a people!

It's hard to know if Epiphanes had any grasp on the fact destroying the individual's ability to find and obtain the true Word of God, which is the disruptive force in man's attempt at making the world one, was what he needed to do or not. However, one way or another, it seemed logical to him to go after God's Law directly, and the story shows us there is simply

nothing in our time that true believers will face that the Jewish people have not already faced. Long before Hitler found allies among the Christian religion, Epiphanes found, with so many Jews turning to the Greek's way of thinking, there were Jewish allies in his attempt to snuff out God's Law. They had served as "the voices of reason" to other Jews about why it was not necessary to care and even archaic to hold on to God's ways. While there was some success in this, this is why I point out over and over that Jews had an internal struggle. For as much as those, such as the Sadducees, may have desired to turn to the Greek way of thinking, the roots of this had more to do with a way to interpret the Laws of God than it did about abandoning their Jewish identity. Epiphanes doing what he did solidified in the minds of many Jews, consisting of both the common man as well as the religious leadership, how unprepared they were to completely give up being Jewish!

Now, just how much effort Epiphanes may have put into any attempt to initially convince all the Jews to give up the Laws of God voluntarily before he went headlong into an aggressive policy of attempting to make God's Law totally illegal is unclear. However, what we know it came to was an edict that outlawed the Torah in its entirety! When the Jews refused to simply obey, emissaries and soldiers were sent to the Jews and specifically Jerusalem. Copies of the Torah were burned, circumcision was banned, and heavy taxes were imposed on the Jews with the intent of destroying the land. Further, the temple itself would be desecrated. A statue of the Greeks most revered god Zeus was set up in the temple. Swine, which was and still is a very popular sacrifice for pagans but totally forbidden for the Jews, were sacrificed on the temple's altar in order to make it unusable for the offerings commanded in the Law. This was the desecration that made the temple desolate which Daniel was told about! (Dan. 11:29-31)

However, God also told Daniel that these things, and more, would be allowed to happen in order to purge the nation and show that with all those who could simply claim to be the chosen nation by right of birth, the true chosen people are those to whom God's ways are not just another religion. (Dan. 12:9-13) Many Jews would not simply give up God's ways, but struggle to maintain them under the most difficult of circumstances. How did they know what to do? Many of them had hid the Word of God in their hearts, not just as a matter of practice, but for the very reason all true believers should desire to be Biblical instead of religious, and that is so that no matter in what circumstances we might find ourselves, we might not sin against God! (Ps. 119:9-16)

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

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

FBS continued from pg. 4

collected to Him in much the same way as those who are alive and remain. (I Thes. 4:15-18)

All this is true, but with God it does not matter what those who do not believe think. This is why there is a simple fact that is pointed out in I Corinthians 1:25-29, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence." This is what Isaac's name means!

If you do not believe in the things of God, even just in part, go ahead and laugh all you want to because it doesn't change the truth. The truth is in Paul's words I just quoted, which is that God has intentionally offered His plan the way He has so that in the eyes of the prideful it seems to be foolish. (Matt. 11:25) If you can't get over your own arrogance and believe God is able to provide salvation because of the ways He chose to physically reveal the plan, then you were never going to make it no matter how God had revealed it. God will not accept those who are only convinced because things are done according to their own selfish thoughts. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and many, many others lived before there was a chosen nation, the Law, the prophets, Jesus, the cross, and the promise of His return one day, and they staked their lives on the fact God has always offered, and been able to deliver in any way He chooses, a crown of life unto any individual who sincerely seeks after Him. Thus, if you have joy because Christ is your Redeemer, then be one who laughs no matter how much you may get laughed at, because in the end it will be God who has the last laugh!

With that, I'll turn our attention to the second point we did not cover last time which I wanted to get to in this segment, and that is what God tells Abraham about Ishmael in verse 20 of Genesis chapter 17. The first thing God tells Abraham is exactly what Ishmael's name means, and that is the fact God had heard Abraham. We have talked about this earlier and covered what this means in this conversation, in that God fully respects Abraham has a father's responsibility to Ishmael. God respects the family structure He established humans to live in, and it does not matter how much one might think the birth of a child is a "mistake" on their part, there's a new life birthed into this world at the moment of conception!

Some people like to say, "There is no such thing as a child who is a mistake!" I believe this, but not necessarily in the way many people mean it. There are too many people running around, even claiming to be teachers of God's Word, who do not seem to grasp the fact man has a free will, but that does not mean everything we use it to do is correct. Human's make mistakes, and even if those mistakes produce one of the

best things the world has ever witnessed; in many cases, it does not change the fact the choice one made in the beginning was a mistake. In spite of our weak language, we need to think on a high enough level to understand we can look at our mistakes as mistakes, but in the end result, learning from a mistake can mean a variety of things. I suppose to most people it makes no sense to call something a mistake if the end result taught us we actually made the right choice regardless of how long it took us to see it. However, this is one of those examples of when we need a more defining word to express the idea instead of having to constantly talk about how at first we thought it was a mistake but it turned out we were wrong about that.

That being said, maybe we should have another word for things that are no doubt mistakes, but only in the sense we made a wrong decision, there may even be very negative consequences to bear on the basis of that mistake, but what resulted was not a mistake. This is kind of what Paul is talking about in Romans 3:1-8 when he tells us if unrighteousness, or specifically a lie, ends up leading someone to the truth of God, we need to understand that does not corrupt in any way the person the lie assisted in seeking God. At the same time, it should go without saying that lying is wrong. The same thing applies to a pregnancy. The choices that led to the pregnancy can be wrong, but it's a downward thinking if we allow ourselves to pretend, ignore, or make excuses about the fact we make mistakes, even if we are doing it on the basis people can't be wise enough to know it should go without saying that no child is a mistake!

This goes hand in hand with the fact many people love to say, "Everything happens for a purpose," and that's wrong. The right way of thinking is, "There's a reason everything happens." Oftentimes the reason is that someone or multiple people have taken certain actions. Saying, everything happens for a purpose, is a bit like cursing, in that it implies God had it in His plan, and this could not be more wrong! Samson used the last super strength God granted him to weaken Israel's enemy in one action, more than he had in his entire lifetime prior to that; but Samson's mistake is what led him to that place and time, not God's will or purpose that he be there to accomplish it, especially in that way!

What it does show us is that God can give us purpose no matter what kind of mess we've gotten ourselves into if we will turn to Him and allow Him to take control. Abraham taking Sarah's handmaid Hagar as a wife in order to produce the son they believed he needed was a mistake, but God had a purpose for Ishmael's life as He does for every human life that has ever been conceived in this universe. This is why the sixth commandment tells us murder is just not an option, and this is true even if we think it may in some way correct a mistake, much less when we choose it to avoid the consequences of our mistake(s)!

Now, I find the specific point we did not cover in our last segment a most intriguing fact, and that is the fact Ishmael would beget twelve princes. Not only does this emphasize

how much Ishmael was not going to just end up being someone's slave, a beggar on the streets, or even just a man working his fingers to the bone in an attempt to survive this life, dying without being able to leave anything to his children and/or have no heir to leave anything to, Ishmael was going to be a great people of great numbers! In other words, there was no cause for concern on Abraham's part as to what would become of Ishmael. However, I think the more interesting part of this fact is that twelve is the exact same number of tribes Israel would end up with!

To be clear, this twelve number is not just metaphorical, because Genesis chapter 25 verses 12 through 16 gives us the names of Ishmael's twelve sons and repeats the fact they were princes of nations. Now, when you start talking about numbers there is always going to be people who get all mystical on you, but we should keep in mind how God works, and for that I'll repeat another point I often make. Prophecy is not so we can have a clear view of what is going to happen in the future. It is mostly about being able to see when God's hand is at work, both as and after events have taken place. Those who believed they had a clear view of what The Messiah was suppose to look and be like, missed Jesus entirely and/or refused to accept Him as The Messiah. However, the reason almost two thousand years later we can feel comfortable in the fact Jesus was The Messiah and The One we wait for again is that His life, words, and actions line up with what we were told about The Messiah. This is why true Christian understanding does not start by knowing the New Testament, it starts by knowing the Hebrew Bible!

In talking about the number twelve, understand that the fact there are numbers we can see over and over in the Bible is not some numerology thing. They often are there to show us God's hand is in something. The numbers three, seven, and twelve are good examples of numbers we see often in God's Word, but that does not mean we go out looking for and/or thinking everything that comes out as a three, seven, or twelve has something to do with God's plan. God taught us about Himself, and in turn ourselves, by showing us He consists of three parts, and we are made in His image so we are as well. Knowing God is Triune helps us look back and see the beauty in the representation of how the chosen nation sprang from a founding family story of three men: Abraham, his promised son, and the servant who would have been Abraham's most likely heir if Abraham had not had a son, and whom Abraham sends to get a bride for Isaac from Mesopotamia. (Gen. 24:1-9) We see the feasts God laid out in the Law for Israel to observe consisting of sevens in that there are seven feasts, they take place in the span of seven months, two of them span seven days. Inside this structure of the feasts is the fact three feasts take place in the first month and three of them take place in the seventh. Because the day of Passover directly joins to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits is the same day as the second day of Unleavened Bread, these three cover an eight day span in the first month.

Some do not understand this, but the last feast, which is the Feast of Tabernacles, is specifically commanded to be a seven day feast. However, because this feast represents no ending but the idea the cycle now continues under the circumstances all seven feasts ultimately are to represent being accomplished, this feast, in the seventh month, also spans eight days. Seven is God's number of completion for this creation we live in. We see this right in the first words of Genesis. However, eight is a number of continuance, in that cycles continue as God set them up and for the purpose He completed them for. So why the number twelve? Well, just as eight crosses from one cycle into the next, six shows a cycle one segment short of completion.

It took God just six days to make everything He made for/in this universe, but He waited a seventh day to call creation complete. It was also a specification of God's design that He waited until the sixth day to make man. Six is man's number. God tells us in the fourth commandment man gets the first six days in the week to do his work, but the seventh belongs to God! (Ex. 20:8-11) The 666 everyone freaks out over is nothing more than a representation of how man attempts to ignore God's day, and in doing so God Himself, thus repeating his life without God in a hopeless struggle of relying on only himself. (Rev. 13:18) This is what leads us to destruction. Twelve, on the other hand, is a simple doubling of man's number! Why is that important? Because to hopelessly cycle your life without God is a waste, but to allow God in your life brings increase! Most want this increase to be physical, but God brings blessings that are not really of this life. Those that are, are again, only confirmations He is at work both great and small.

What's important about six being doubled is that it represents molding or shaping, more specifically folding. If I fold a sheet of paper in half I can get two pieces of the same size. If I need to give an equal share to someone else I can. They in turn can do the same with their piece if they choose. One can note the pieces just keep getting smaller, which is true, but that's man's hopelessness, not God's ability. "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." I Corinthians 3:3-7 Both Ishmael and Isaac were clearly given God's blessing on what they would become. Whether they, and those who followed them, would choose to involve God or try to reject Him would determine not just the increase, but the value of the blessings God had granted them both!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

ness, as well as be The God Who gives people many chances to repent (as God had said in giving the Ten Commandments), even across more than one generation who continues to make the same mistake. (Ex. 20:1-6, 34:4-7)

God would respond by granting Moses' request in the same way he had requested it, for it was God's intent to fill not just Israel but the entire earth with His glory! To show He was/is a God of mercy but not a God of pardoning the guilty, the fact Israel had been given the opportunity to see God's power and were the ones who doubted Him would now be their downfall. God made it clear none of the people who had doubted Him were going to go into the land. God specifies the group who would survive would include Caleb, because while he may not have had the opportunity Joshua had to show himself during earlier events, Caleb showed himself in this situation to be a man the nation knew stood on God's side! Thus, God also specifies Caleb and his family would go forward to be a great people in the land. This was very prophetic in that Caleb was the man of leadership skills who had been chosen from the tribe of Judah to be one of the twelve spies.

Because Israel was currently so close to the people in the land and God had no intent of allowing those of Israel who had doubted Him to enter it, and thus, not willing to give Israel victory in war over those from it who might come against Israel, God instructs the nation turn around and head back south in much the direction they had come. God would also speak to Moses and Aaron about the details of the punishment Israel would face. God told them that everyone of the nation who had reached the age of twenty and up would be held accountable and not be allowed to see the promised land. These would die wandering in the wilderness. The two exceptions would be Caleb and Joshua who had believed, and the other ten men who had scouted the promised land would die by a plague God sent upon them. The spies' forty days of being in the promised land would turn into forty years of the nation waiting to take the land. God would not specifically kill them, He would not allow enemies to slaughter them, but the wilderness itself would consume them year after year. Thus, it would primarily be the children (who the congregation felt were going to be taken as slaves by those living in the land if they had tried to fight them) who would one day take the promised land. However, they too would have to endure these forty years of wandering in the wilderness, but in doing so they would learn how to trust God.

Moses tells the people all these words that God had spoken about what would happen to them, and again, they mourn greatly. However, in adding rebellion upon rebellion the people would get up in the morning with a totally new attitude. Instead of fearing the people of the land, they determined they had finally made it to the promised land and they would not turn back just because they had sinned. Instead, they would go forward to fight. Moses warns them God had already made His will clear and would not give them victory, but they just did not get the message it was only by the power

of God, which they should have trusted in the first place, that they would be able to fight the people. They ignored Moses' warning, and while Moses and the Ark of the Covenant did not move, the people went up into the hills to fight. They were not successful and ended up fleeing to the west. The enemy pursued and continued to kill them all the way to a place about half way between the hills where they had started and the seacoast.

After this, Israel traveled back into the wilderness, and God wasted no time continuing to give Moses specifics about how to conduct themselves in following the Law of God. Here God lays out the specific measurements of plant-based offerings to be brought and offered with an animal burnt offering, whether to perform a vow, offer a freewill offering, or on a feast day. While much of this information is given in other places in instructions about how to perform different ceremonies and offerings brought for various reasons, God does not want sacrifices at the tabernacle to become just the slaughter of animals like the pagans did. He did not want them to lose or forget the plant-based parts that made up the whole of every animal sacrifice. If they felt no specific had been given for a particular animal sacrifice, God gives this list which makes it clear what the measurements of the flour, the oil to be mingled with the flour, and the wine to be offered with each animal was to be. The measurements went up as the value of the animal increased. Meaning a bullock would require the most, it would be less for a ram, and least for a lamb. Each individual animal required these specific amounts to be offered. Meaning if you brought more than one lamb, each had to have these same measured portions of plant-based offering brought with them. It also did not matter if the one bringing the offering was a person born into the nation or a person who had come to live as part of the nation, the amounts were to be the same.

Keeping a focus on personal knowledge of God's Law, God gives further instructions on offerings that do not include animal sacrifice. On the feast of Firstfruits Israel was to bring the very first sheaves of the very first grain harvest of the year to offer before The Lord at the temple. Here God also specifies that as they prepare the grain for storage in separating it from the stock, they should take the first of it to the priest to be a heave offering before The Lord. At whatever point they got around to making the first flour and using it to make bread, there was/is also to be a cake made from that first batch of dough, and it was to be heave offered to The Lord as well. In each generation, this was to be done in order to not just thank The Lord for providing the harvest, but also in giving strength to come to the day when the processed portions of the harvest could be used to sustain the nation!

These kinds of details are followed by the specification the congregation might not sin just willfully or ignorantly in a specific way at a specific time which required certain offerings, but the congregation as a whole might simply come to understand there is some detail of the Law they had failed or been failing to recognize, or had been doing wrong. In such a case, the way to get back on track was not to just begin

to do things right, but to acknowledge they had failed. To do this, they were to bring one young bullock for a burnt offering and a young goat for a sin offering, each one having the appropriate plant-based offerings along with them. The priests would offer these offerings as the Law prescribed for such sacrifices, and God would forgive the entire congregation, both those blood born and those who sojourned among the nation.

The same thing that happened to the congregation might happen to an individual, in that they come to realize there was some detail of the Law they did not fully understand or they had been failing to follow. In such a case, the individual's sin would not fall on the entire congregation, but the individual was also not to simply begin to do right, they were to first acknowledge they had failed. For this they were to bring a female goat of the first year for a sin offering, along with all its plant-based elements. The priest would offer it according to the Law, and God would forgive the individual for their failing. However, if any individual was found to be making the choice to ignore or refuse to follow any particular part of the Law, no matter what their reason for doing so, that person would not be excused by offering an offering at some point. Such a one was to be separated out from the nation as one who was no longer part of it. All this, again, was to be true for both the blood born in the nation as well as for one who came to be a part of it from the outside.

These instructions are directly followed by an example of an individual doing exactly what was just covered. A man was found, out gathering wood on the Sabbath. This being work that should only be done on other days of the week, those who saw him doing it brought him to Moses and Aaron. Not knowing what such an offense was worthy of, they detained the man so Moses could take time to ask God. Because this offense was obviously a willful act of disobedience to God's Law on the man's part, God tells Moses the man's offense was worthy of death. In order to show how serious God was about the people not taking God's Laws lightly, this was to be done by the congregation, who was to stone the man to death. Thus, the man was taken out of the camp and stoned by the congregation just as Moses had been told they should.

Now, after all the rebellion that had taken place and this latest incident of seeing how seriously God wants Israel to take every commandment He had given them to follow, God tells Moses to give the people an instruction that is a little softer than what we might call a commandment. Moses was basically to challenge the people that if they really desired to be God's people, they should show it outwardly on their clothing. To do this, they were to build into, or at the very least attach to, some edge piece of their clothing something extra that did not need to be there. This would not be like a piece of jewelry, but something most today would understand better by relating it to more in the line of putting a flower in

one's chest pocket or pinning a corsage on a girl. The difference would be these pieces for Israel were to be at an edge of the clothing, such as at the hem of a sleeve or bottom edge of the garment. It could also be at a corner such as a shoulder. In any case, the meaning was clearly so one could show others they were in a relationship with God, are dedicated to His service, and belong to Him.

This extra piece would likely be a tassel of some kind, or in the case of a shoulder piece, a ribbon or rope like attachment that hung off or went around the shoulder. However this extra piece was created, it was to be made of or, at least, have the royal color blue (or what some might call a purple) running through it in a way that made it distinctively visible. The fact it was to be an extra piece was first to make it clear this had been added on purpose, which is something people did not waste material to do for just everyday clothing, with the exception of possibly the rich. Second, being an extra piece also meant it might swing or move in some way, especially being at an edge. This would draw attention to it for both the one seeing it on a person as well as for the person wearing it. All this was important because this was not just a message to those seeing it, but also to the one wearing it. Every time you saw someone wearing clothing that included this element (which if all in the nation did it that would be a lot of times through each day), or anytime it caught the attention of one wearing it, it would remind people of the Laws God gave to them and how important they were/are to the way they live and had lived every moment of their lives!

The reminder was to help Israel not make the mistake of forgetting God's Law in general, by thinking about them always. It was to help in those times they thought about making decisions after their own thoughts instead of according to God's Law or by seeking His guidance. Looking pretty much only to one's own judgment and desires is how one lives their life normally, but it is not how we are to live after we give our lives to God! Thus, it reminded Israel they were to be separate from the rest of the world for the purposes of God, in other words, "holy." They were not seeking to fit in. Even if wearing such an item was in and of itself something one found hard to add to the personal style they liked to wear, which would come into play in our day as God had said to do this throughout their generations, one was to ignore this in order to wear what God had asked. Another specific point God wanted to use this symbol to remind Israel of was/is the fact that even after everything they had gone through, and the punishment they would now endure as they traveled forty years in the wilderness, God was still their God. He had brought them out of the land of Egypt so they could be a specific people known to be God's people. He wanted to use their lives for a purpose, as He does all who serve Him, and that would never change!

Let's stay in God's Word!