

Free - Take One



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*

Issue #92

www.livingspringsinstitute.org

September & October 2017

In our last segment, we ended our overview of the Book of Numbers, and that brings us to the last book in the Torah, which is Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is very appropriately placed at the end of the Torah in that it really is the chronological end of the five books which are the core of God's Word. It is also a book very much about review, and it's as if coming to the end of the journey we have been taking, by reading through the Torah from creation to the need for a chosen nation and its establishment, has brought us to a moment where we need to stop and review where we now stand. It was with the Law in place that the chosen nation was a nation with a purpose and from there would go forward watching their lives unfolding with this system at work. This is no trivial matter in the truth that God would not change this fact even once Jesus came. It would be inside this system that the coming of The Messiah could receive recognition by both the Jew and the non-Jew. It would also be from the perspective of this system that we can see all God has taught us about righteous living no matter what culture we may actually live in, and it is only with this system that there is a way to see The Messiah for Who He really is when He returns to do the work He shall do in the end of this world!

Because this system was not just important to Israel's journey to the promised land, nor just for the generation or two after they entered the promised land, Moses stops right before it is his time to go home to be with The Lord and repeats all these ordinances in their basic form. While many may see most of this as redundant, it is not! Not only does this solidify these Laws for us before we go on into reading what remains of all we call Scripture, it gives us an example of a truth so many want to deny, and that is - we serve an unchanging God! As we have gone through these first books of the Bible, we have talked about how much time they each span, along with how much time, if any, they have in between each of them. While it's true that most of what we read in Numbers does not really cover a great amount of time (especially in comparison to a

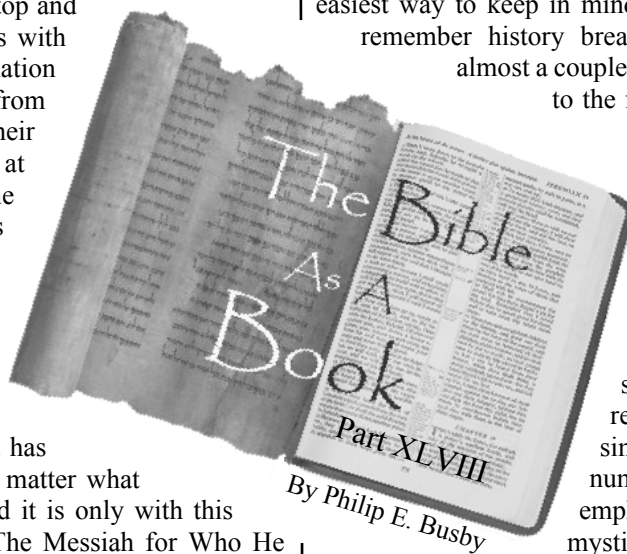
book such as Genesis), and Deuteronomy covers even less, when one considers the time period the Torah as a whole covers, we are talking about more than a third of the world's history!

Think about it. Over a third of human history passes before we get out of these first five books, and the rest of the Bible is talking about how the Jews, along with the rest of the world, responded to God putting this system in place. The easiest way to keep in mind a very rough look at time is to remember history breaks down into three sections of almost a couple thousand years. From the creation to the flood of Noah's day there is close

to two thousand years. From that time to when The Messiah first appeared, there is about two thousand years, and from the time Jesus left this world until now, there has been almost two thousand years. Now, I emphasize this is a very crude starting point for a way to remember it because it is not that simple when you really crunch the numbers. I suppose I should emphasize I'm also not teaching any mystical thought about how every two

thousand years an important event is going to take place. It's just that once sin became a part of man's character humanity became somewhat predictable in his thoughts, and this led to us having this simplistic way of keeping the basics in our head about where we are in time. As of this writing the Jewish calendar years, which are based on a calculation from creation according to what the Bible tells us, puts us in the year 5,777. This is just 223 years short of the 6,000 year mark.

If we think about it in more detail, we find that just the first part of Genesis covers the first third of our universe's existence all by itself. What is important about this fact is it only took until that first third for man to take all the steps needed to cause God to settle on what system was needed in order to deal with man's choices. This, because it only took that amount of time for man to insist on a way to go about living this human existence. It is true Jesus is The Lamb slain from



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the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8) However, what this really tells us is Jesus was always prepared to give His life for us, and it was with the understanding this might be necessary that God created a freewilled being. Man not only gave up the innocence and paradise that came with the way God created us to be, very early on, man continued to reject the ways of God so badly that it only took until about 1,656 years before God had to send a flood to destroy everything and everyone not on the ark He had told Noah to build. It only took about another 175 years before God had to confound man's language at the Tower of Babel, because even after the flood man headed down a path that would corrupt all men even faster than before.

After that, the Book of Genesis shows us how God began building and establishing a chosen nation. This, because God knew that nations, which are a smaller version of what man did at the tower, would be the way man would choose to divide up and even attempt to overcome the barriers God put in place to man again achieving the tower's original idea as a whole. Thus, as we have discussed, there needed to be one nation who's culture represented the struggle to maintain the ways of God on this earth, along with being the keepers of God's oracles for how to find righteousness. This would ensure individuals all throughout the world could still learn the ways of God in spite of the cultural influence they lived in, and that's what makes those written oracles so important, because we all need to study the Word of God for ourselves. As I just keep saying, the core of all those words are these first five books, and Deuteronomy is given at the end of the five because we are at that point where the reason to establish a chosen nation has been clearly defined; the work to build a specific family into that nation has been accomplished; the laws that would make those people a true nation had been given; and the nation had some time to live those laws in a real world setting, even for a long enough period to understand who they now were! It is in this light that we need to see the reason for this rundown of all that came before being placed at the end of the Torah.

It should also not be forgotten that the generation which now stood to hear Moses rehearse these words was not the generation that knew Egypt's bondage and had seen firsthand how God's might had brought the nation out of that bondage. Mostly what this generation had seen was a lot of wandering round in the wilderness until the generation before them had all died off. This was not God's intent. It was His intent to bring the same generation He freed from Egypt's bondage to the promised land where they would see God use them as the tool to destroy the wicked inhabitants of that land. This would have added a greater impact to the world's understanding that a nation, once slaves in Egypt, not only were freed from the mighty Pharaoh, but destroyed an entire region's people in order to possess their land all because they served The One True God of the universe. That exact story did not happen, because that first generation did not believe God could bring them into the promised land. However, the story would still be much the same in that the nation did not simply disappear into the wilderness after leaving Egypt. It continued to survive and thrive in a place where only handfuls of nomadic people lived here and there, but in which there was no natural resources for any nation to exist.

Then one day that miracle of a nation turned east and then north to easily destroy Canaanite people on the east side of the Jordan River. What this gives us is a story where there is a whole lot more years and events between Egypt and the entering of the promised land than there was originally suppose to be, but it did not change the fact this nation, by the hand of God, would rise up to be a great nation in this world! At the time of Deuteronomy that rising up was about to happen, but before those events this new generation which had seen God give them the land on this east side of Jordan needed to be reminded of their real reason for existing. God was not giving them this land because as God's people they were entitled to greater blessings at the expense of other people in the world. God knew at the time of Abraham He would one day give them this land because the wickedness of the people living on it would need to be wiped out. However, Israel's real point for existing was to carry on generation after generation studying, preserving, and exemplifying these Laws God had given them! Thus, it would be at this point Moses would stop to go over those Laws in their most complete form.

This is a point so crucial to every believer, because it is more often than not a mistake in the mindset of those who claim to have received salvation that they now hold some special ticket that entitles them to blessings of God and an ultimate home in heaven. While it should be our great desire to make it to heaven, even that should not be based on the thought of just getting to live for eternity. It should be based on how much it will mean to get a second chance to return to what God created man to be, instead of just living this sin-filled existence man has chosen to build in the here and now. If that desire is what truly motivates us, then attempting to take the steps we can to have as much of that life as we can in the here and now is what our lives should be about right here and right now. Living the ways of God, or, at the very least, a desire to strive for those ways no matter the cost to our comfort in this life is no more than our reasonable service to God. (Rom. 12:1) In so many ways, shapes, and forms, this is what the Book of Deuteronomy is emphasizing to the nation of Israel as well as to us. We can be distracted by many events and historical happenings, but living for God is about obeying His Words - pure and simple.

When we look at the word "Torah," we see a word that at its root means simply "The Law," and we know this is a specific reference to the Laws of God. In our covering of each of these books, we have talked about which ones are more history and which ones are more purely law, along with what that means. However, it could be said that Deuteronomy in and of itself is the Torah in a nutshell! If we look at what the name Deuteronomy means, or, in other words, why this book is named Deuteronomy, we find it's because it simply means "Second Law." This is not to say in any way God had revised the Law. Far too many people want to believe God has done such a thing and is continuing to, because it is their hope it opens the door to claiming so many things are true which are not if one is attempting to live righteously before God. Such people want to throw out those things that are not convenient under our "modern" or current circumstances. If God really does change things as we go, then we can interpret what we

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

We ended our last segment talking about how the angels had taken Lot and his family out of Sodom and Gomorrah to the extent that no one else could stop them from fleeing the area, but it was still up to them to take the journey into the mountains in order to escape. The angels' instructions in this matter also included the stipulation they not even turn back, which is a point that becomes very relevant later in the story. We talked about how this was not about performing a ritual, but how just about anything can be looked at as a ritual if one wants to see it that way. However, the real point in doing anything we do should be to obey God's voice instead of following our own desires. This brought us through Genesis chapter 19 verse 17, and we are now ready to start verse 18.

In spite of what we talked about last time, concerning Lot and his family needing to obey the voice of God in order to escape without hesitating, Lot's words in verse 18 sadly illustrates how resistant we can be to following God without question. Lot takes on the all too familiar attitude that God's grace in saving us from one thing somehow opens the door for us to ask for more. The truth here is that for all he and his family had just experienced, Lot simply does not want to go into the mountains where the angels had told them to flee to. In verse 19 he begins his dissertation about how he understood what mercy he had already been given, but if he had found grace in their eyes, he desired not to go into the mountains. If that in and of itself was not enough of a request to make, he really shows a disrespect for God in that he brings up the excuse about how he's afraid there are physical dangers there. Then he shows us why he is really saying all this, by asking he instead be allowed to go on down the valley to the city of Zoar.

In verse 20 Lot brings up his other excuse in this matter, which is that the city is just a small one. In doing this he would seem to be indicating it would not have the same kind of entrapment as the cities they just came from. However, it seems pretty clear the real reason he wanted to go there was because it had at least some of the same "comforts" they were walking away from. Verse 21 begins God's response to this request, and it shows again the longsuffering God shows us which we do not deserve. Lot's attitude is very much the same as what the children of Israel showed on more than one occasion when coming out of Egypt, for they said it would be better to have died in Egypt than to have come into the wilderness to die. At times they even went so far as to claim Moses brought them out of Egypt just to kill them in the wilderness. Lot does not say this precisely, but it's indicated in his request. This is quite insulting because why would God save them from Sodom and Gomorrah only to send them into harm's way in the mountains? Even if it was dangerous, why would God spare you and then fail to protect you from whatever dangers might be there?

We refuse to believe God knows what He is doing and

that what He asks of us is best no matter what we might think or want. Even if we believe and know in our heart we should just trust God or that it makes no sense to request such a thing, we many times make the request to go a different direction or just end up going in the direction we want anyway. This brings us back to the point of what the flesh wants is almost never what our spirit knows we need! Surely after seeing what they had just seen in Sodom, the thought the city of Zoar was going to be better, at the very least in the long term, had to be something Lot knew very good and well wasn't going to be the case. He simply could not let go of his desire to live the life a city provides. In this, God, once again, illustrates how much He saves us when we do not deserve saving. It is only by His grace that we are saved, and even the relationship we have with God is not something we deserve credit for, because it is God Who has offered it in the first place and continues to expand as we show willingness to allow it. (Eph. 2:8-10)

The allowing part is what's important in that God will not force us to do something, and that's shown many times in this story, but let's remember something we covered in our last segment. When we look at other people and see their life seeming to be going so smoothly, this truth is why that doesn't necessarily mean those people are on the right track. If people resist God's will enough, God will simply allow them their way, and certain people will end up with a significant amount of comfort in this life. The question is, what are you living for? This life and just what you can get here, or the next life where God has promised those who listen to His voice will be freed from all the sorrows and pains even the people with the best life here still experience on many occasions? At this point Lot was in that category of being grateful to God for sparing his life, but still wished to live for this life and what it could offer. This is why he chose to come into this valley in the first place, and this is why he still wanted to stay in a city after having to flee the wickedness of the one he was living in.

All this brings us to some very interesting words in verse 21. First, the angel telling Lot God's decision in this situation, says Lot's request has been "accepted"; and second, it is pointed out God would not overthrow that city as part of the destruction He was bringing on Sodom and Gomorrah. Not to put the cart before the horse, but focusing on the second point to start with, I find these words interesting in that they indicate Zoar was likely slated to be destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah. I say likely because one could interpret the words here as meaning God would refrain from destroying it in the near future as it became corrupted to its height. That being said, I don't think that's what we're talking about here. What we are told in Scripture is that Abraham was the real reason Lot was spared, and what the angel said is because God allowed Lot to go there He would not overthrow Zoar. This is related to the point Abraham was making in his conversation with God about whether Sodom and Gomorrah could be spared

or not. Remember, Abraham's request had to do with if a certain amount of individuals for whom there was still hope could be found in the cities - would God spare them? To this God answers yes each time. Here Lot points out Zoar is a small city. Thus, if God was willing to spare the entire region for the sake of only ten people, how small a number would that have to be for the same kind of percentage to be true of Zoar alone?

One might still argue that even one person in the city couldn't be found, but that would change if Lot went there. This shows us how much God acts on the basis of our choices! Lot, as wrong as he was in his mind, was a man for whom there was still hope of salvation or God would not have spared him even for Abraham's sake. Thus, if he entered Zoar, he alone would be that one person who could fulfill Abraham's point, at least for that city. God wanted Lot and his family to flee to the mountains, and as we talked about last time, even the smallest stumble might have meant not making it out of harm's way in time because God intended to utterly destroy the entire valley and its inhabitants. Lot alone would not be worth saving the entire valley's inhabitants for, but he would be enough to save Zoar. This shows us incredible grace and mercy on God's part, but also another one of those extremely complex choices only God could make!

God's intent in destroying these people was similar to why He sent the flood in Noah's day, but more so related to why He confounded the language at the Tower of Babel. As we have talked about earlier in this study, the sinfulness of these places was outpacing the rest of the region. Like a sinful cancer, these people, if allowed to continue, would corrupt the land of Canaan in a way that would spread even outside the land quickly. Another factor was that of timing in God's chosen nation being given this land. God was going to give Abraham's descendants this land because the time to destroy the people in it would come at the same time God said the timing for bringing forth a chosen nation was right. If the sin of these cities had spread, that would all be thrown off. In asking to go to Zoar, Lot was standing in the way of God completely wiping this blight from the land, meaning the corruption would potentially be worse than God initially wanted it to be before He was ready to bring the chosen nation as the tool to destroy it. This brings us to the first point the angel made to Lot, which was that his proposal had been "accepted."

The Hebrew word "accepted" is translated from in this verse is a prime root word. This means it can have variations in its meaning. Saying that might not be looked at in the right way for those of us who speak a weak language of today, so hopefully I can clarify it a bit. It is not to say the word is in any way ambiguous! What it means is that the root word was intentionally used without any of the variants that could have been used to change it to a more specific aspect. God could have used a word that emphasized He was accepting Lot's request but with a lot of reservations. He could have indicated it was a very displeasing thing but would go ahead and do it. God also could have went the other way and indicated that it was perfectly fine if that's what Lot wanted; but He didn't. Why? Well, when it comes to giving Lot an indication God thought it was perfectly fine is answered in the fact the angel

went on to say God would refrain from overthrowing that city. If God wanted to overthrow it, doing this for Lot was obviously not a good thing.

However, the question remains as to why God didn't indicate His displeasure, and that again has to do with God allowing us to make our choices even when God has made His will clear in a matter. God was telling Lot it was his life to ruin. Lot did not have to take it that way due to the word that is used here, so, again, why did God not make it clearer? The answer to that is, using the root word in combination with the following statement about not overthrowing the city, Lot was given that clarity to the extent God intended to give it. At the same time, the root word can also be interpreted as "forgiven." This is an interesting aspect to the matter! God was saying it was Lot's life to ruin if that's what he chose, because he shouldn't have doubted he was going right from one bad place into another. Thus, in even asking instead of simply following the angel's initial instructions, Lot had revealed his fleshly desires overriding his will to follow God in the matter. However, in granting the request God was also saying, "I forgive you!"

I don't know about you, but as much as this speaks to God's grace, this conversation should chill one to the bone! Another issue we touched on last time is the fact we far too often lean on the fact God is always there to help us when we fall. We do this in that we don't care to pay attention to if we are going to fall, but instead stumble along knowing God is there to help. This attitude is far too widespread in the church and its teachings today. The Bible explaining to us, just as it has here in these verses, how much we serve a God of grace, has to do with helping those who feel convicted of the wrong they have done in life and doubting God could or would ever save them. Rest assured this is an unmovable fact! No matter what you have done, no matter how much others are unwilling to forgive you for it, God's grace is sufficient if we are truly sorry in our hearts and fall upon His grace! (II Cor. 12:9) People have asked me about the point of knowing when God turns you over to a reprobate mind, and the short answer is that if you are still worried it might have happened to you, it hasn't happened or you wouldn't be asking.

All that being true, there is a difference between coming to God as the unrighteous individual you are and asking His forgiveness believing He rewards those who diligently seek Him, and believing that not continuing to diligently seek Him is alright! (Heb. 11:6) God may still forgive you when you choose not to follow His instructions, but you're walking out into the cold once again. You are walking away from, not toward the reward God has planned for you. It's not about how far or how fast you further your righteousness, but whether you are walking with God or walking away, which is shown continually by your willingness to seek Him! Not understanding what God is asking can be a problem, and God will work with you on that, but only if you continue to seek. If you are going your own way without regard to if you are doing the right thing or not, you give God no chance to correct your mindset, which needs to be done even for things that have already done damage that cannot be

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXII

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 talking about the religious political group called the Sanhedrin and the Hasmonean Dynasty ruler of Judea, Salome. Salome was by this point the widowed wife of the cruel king Alexander Jannaeus. In talking about Salome's rule, we discussed how she was able to bring a certain amount of peace and quiet to the land through the policies she favored. One such policy was that of causing the Sanhedrin to be more of the ruling council over the people of Judea, but specifically the Jewish people. This was important because the land Salome's husband had left her included more than just those areas by then considered Jewish. This leaves us with many tasks in our historical look of this time, and two of them are - one, to discuss more about exactly what the Sanhedrin was in order to understand the power they had and would obtain by later events; and two, to talk about the demise of what was left of what had once been the Maccabees. The first is some simple facts, but the second discussion is very hard to follow because it takes us into talking about the various people involved in the region. Thus, we will attempt to make it as streamlined as possible.

That being said, one of the main facts I hope to convey in covering this time is to bring an understanding of just what a cruel and dangerous time period this was leading up to Jesus' birth and through His early life! The transfer of power is very often not a smooth affair, and while it seemed to work out better than one might have expected for Salome to simply become the ruler of Judea after her husband's death, for all intents and purposes she would be the last in the line to rule over a true independent state for any real time. Salome and Alexander had two sons together, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. As I've mentioned before, it can be hard to keep up with the names due to the fact so many share names with past individuals important to our study. However, this has some direct connection to the question this series is based on, because while we see Jews in leadership roles taking on many of the names held by Greeks, one should not be fooled into believing this in anyway speaks to the chosen nation disappearing. We must remember while the Maccabees, which became the Hasmonean Dynasty, were without a doubt Jews fighting for Jewish causes, the following rulers in the line became very corrupted as power often brings.

In both of the last segments, I have raised the question of thinking about if the Jews were really better off being under this kind of rulership than they were being under some non-Jewish government, and this question is still a point of interest. What had taken place is there was becoming a bigger and bigger gap between the secular rulers, which for the time remained the Jewish Hasmonean Dynasty, and the Jewish

common man, especially as a religious people who desired to follow God. This gap would only increase as the years went by; thus, the Sanhedrin would become more of the leaders the Jews as a people wished to listen to in spite of who was considered the king or ruler of the region. This would become so true that the Sanhedrin would one day become something which could be described as a government over a specific people no matter where they lived or under what other governing power. To the degree of attempting to follow religious law this is certainly true, and it is here at the time of Salome that we see the stage set for why this came to be so true.

To start with the basics, the word "Sanhedrin" means "sitting together." Because of the nature of what this body became, we easily say that translates into simply meaning a council or the like, which is actually a great way to see it from an English speaking perspective. However, let us not forget what we talked about in that, especially during those times the group consisted of individuals from various religious thoughts on what was the right way to be Jewish, one really is talking about their willingness to be together for the purpose of accomplishing anything! What we talked about in the history of such a group forming is the fact there is no way to put a date on the Sanhedrin's establishment, but some like to say it goes back to the time of Hanukkah's events. In looking at it that way, it is to emphasize the fact the Jews, no matter what religious notion they favored, understood there was a common enemy and that was/is, pretty much, everything not Jewish! Now, I realize what an anti-Semitic thing some would interpret what I just said as being, but let's look at the question we're trying to answer in this series, once again.

The idea there are those who believe the Jews as a people have been rejected and replaced by something such as the church, or that there is no real group, such as the Jews, who are legitimately the direct descendants of the chosen nation in existence today, is the true anti-Semitism. The fact the Jews have understood for so long what a threat their very existence is to the plans of men and how that brings along with it a threat to their continued existence is not a mark against the Jews, but a way to point out how much they have fought against disappearing as a people! I have often made the argument in my teaching that the kings of Judah should have followed what they were told by the prophets when people like the Babylonians came to take power out of their hands because the Jews should have just focused on the things of God. This I have done not just because it is what God said, but because one should be able to see why God said it. Secular affairs are very corrupting to a people attempting to follow the Laws of God. The history we are covering now shows us this in a clear way as the Maccabees, who fought so hard to drive back the Greek desecration of the temple, went from being the heroes of the Jewish people to a Dynasty that crumbled into disfavor and

corruption as secular rulers.

What we are seeing in the establishment of the Sanhedrin then is not something of total bad intentions, and the name indicates that. It is the truth that in some ways the Jewish religious leaders were attempting to break away from the secular affairs of government, or, at the very least, act as a shield or voice against secular government's interference into how the Jews lived their everyday lives no matter who the government might consist of. At times the Sanhedrin may have done a good job at this, and at other times they utterly failed because they too were often corrupted by the desire for power. That aside, it was for the cause of maintaining those things Jewish that individuals of various Jewish religious thought were willing to sit together in order to form such a group. In many ways this is the Jews finally doing (in the ways it was still possible) what God had told them to do back at the time of the Babylonians, and that was to make an attempt to lead the daily lives of the Jewish people to remain God's chosen nation in spite of who might be the governing power.

Now, I stress the fact I'm not saying this was always, or at any time, really handled completely properly; and the issue of how this group came against The Messiah can be easily used to say such a group should not have existed. However, what is at the heart of the matter is that by having such a group, as I have said before, the Sanhedrin were in the best position to use their voice to solidify The Messiah at His appearing than any leader or leaders had been since not long after their return from the Babylonian captivity. In a way, God's Law was working, not because there was a core group of the chosen nation that followed the stipulation that Jews desiring not to follow certain Laws of God were to be cut off from their people, but in that only those who cared to go through the strife it took to hold on to their Jewish identity were willing to do so. More and more the secular government was failing to be of any value to the Jew who cared about being Jewish no matter if the rulers were Jews or non-Jews, so they started following the religious leaders who were willing to sit together and try to figure out how to be Jewish in the midst of the tumultuous circumstances which surrounded them!

Now, in many ways, the concept of the Sanhedrin goes all the way back to the suggestion Moses' father-in-law gave when he saw Moses being over taxed by the affairs of the people. Jethro suggested to Moses that he find honest men to appoint as judges, and they could be the ones who the people brought their everyday disputes, especially secular disputes, to. If there were issues of great importance that came before these judges which was over their head - so to speak - those issues alone would be the ones brought to Moses for a decision. (Ex. 18:13-26) At a much later point in Israel's journey to the promised land, Moses still became so burdened with the people complaining to him to provide everything they thought they needed, Moses asked God to kill him before he succumb to the stress and began to fail in following God's will. We should keep this point in mind when judging Moses for being told by God his life had come to an end after he struck a rock instead of talking to it as God had commanded him to do in order to get water for the people, but I digress. (Num. 20:7-13) At the point Moses became this distraught, God told him to choose seventy

men out of the elders of Israel so God could put some of the burden He had put on Moses upon these seventy men. (Num. 11:1-29) This, not just in concept, but in number, really shows us the pattern upon which the Sanhedrin was formed, because this council consisted of seventy-one men in all.

Some would dispute this fact on the basis the Sanhedrin can refer to the twenty-three men councils that were suppose to be the judges in various cities throughout Israel, and they would not be technically wrong in saying the seventy-one member group might be more appropriately referred to as the Great Sanhedrin. While I admit that in saying this they would not be wrong, most people know little to nothing about the more daily functioning of the nation through the years and only understand the Sanhedrin to be that bigger group of men. This is not a bad thing, but one should be aware that those more into history might want to correct you for saying the Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one without at least mentioning the smaller groups of judges. I have now mentioned it, and we will carry on with the other thought that might come to some people's minds which is, why seventy-one instead of seventy like Moses was told? In asking this, first stop to think about one simple fact, Moses was told to pick seventy men upon which God would place a part of Moses' burden, so how many men had the burden after this was done? Seventy-one, if you recognize the burden was obviously not totally taken off Moses! Coming back to more the time period we are studying here, there is also the fact the person tasked with the High Priest's responsibility, at times would act as the head officer of the Sanhedrin, and this made for seventy members plus the High Priest. In any case, whether the High Priest was involved or not there was what we would more likely than not call a president over the seventy, who as an acting member of the court made it seventy-one. This set up, again, shows us what a perfect opportunity there was for Jesus to simply be accepted and/or, at the very least, listened to!

I will stress again that we do not know at what time this very official version of the Sanhedrin came into existence, but by the later time of the Romans this was the case, and it is no doubt patterned after earlier versions of such a group whether the group acted independently of the governing authority or was ordained, for lack of a better term, by that authority. At the time of Salome, it would definitely seem the Sanhedrin were ordained by her as the ruler of Judea. Salome would appoint her son Hyrcanus II as the High Priest. Hyrcanus II was on his mother's side in going along with the Pharisees (at least in the start of his career), but the power struggle even among these religious groups had become very bitter, and the Sadducees were looking for an ally to continue their power as a group. They found such an ally in Salome's other son Aristobulus II. Whether Aristobulus II was really like his father in agreeing with the Sadducees or not is something only known to the past, if not just he himself. In any case, he saw it as politically convenient to side with the Sadducees, and being that his mother was more under the influence of the Pharisees, Aristobulus II was the one who brought the Sadducees' concerns and issues to his mother's attention. Aristobulus II also made fast friends in the military. Thus, while he held no real power as yet, he was making friends in all the right places to obtain it!

Now, it is during Salome's reign that other important events were taking place around Judea. While Salome had brought a certain amount of calm to Judea by not continuing her husband's conquering desires, this had its downside in that some of the kings her husband was, at least, trying to subdue took this opportunity to do some conquering of their own. Two groups are of importance to our understanding here, and they are the Nabataeans, whom we talked about Salome's husband fighting with, and the other is the Idumaeans, who were what was left of the people of Edom. Just how much this is to say they were the descendants of Esau's bloodline or simply the people who came to live and rule the area known as Edom is not completely clear. However, the name stuck to a certain people for a time. These people were eventually forced out of Edom, and by this time they lived further north and somewhat west in what was the south end of Judea. They, along with this area, came to be known by the name Idumaeans.

Starting with the Nabataeans, one of the reasons Alexander Jannus had went after them is because they were attempting to conquer territory that would surround Judea. While their seat of power was in Petra to the south of Judea, their king Aretas III had marched all the way to Damascus in Syria to the north. He would be successful in taking Damascus from the Seleucids around 85 B.C. While this would bring prestige to the Nabataeans who had up to that time been looked at as nomadic herdsmen and traders, Aretas III showed how much he had been Hellenized as he commissioned some of the first Nabataeans currency, not in Aramaic style and script but in the Greek style using Greek writing. While other powers and circumstances would keep him from successfully holding on to Damascus completely, he would also bring Greek and Roman style back to his capital in Petra. In this, we see how the slow downfall of the Greek Empire in no way washed away their cultural influence.

When it comes to the Idumaeans, we are talking about a people who had already been brought under the rule of the Hasmonean Dynasty by the time of Alexander Jannus. They were even part of the groups of people who, while they may have had some Jewish blood intermixed with them, were not Jewish but had been forced by the earlier king John Hyrcanus to take on the Jewish religion. This would be important as it would be clear to those in the region that they were not Jews, but the fact they had a certain amount of Jewish ways about them by the time the Romans were really on the scene meant the Romans did not look at them as such a distinctly different people. On top of this, there was a particular governor over the Idumaeans who was used to administer that region by the Hasmoneans, and his name was Antipater I. This man would successfully straddle the fence between being on the side of the Hasmoneans while at the same time being very close friends with the Nabataean king Aretas III. This fact would become important to the Hasmoneans' rule over Judea as well as the continued independence of Judea.

When Salome died in 67 B.C. she put things back as they so often had been before her reign, by leaving her seat of power to Hyrcanus II. This made him High Priest and king over the land, but as one might suspect, it was not going to be just

that easy! His brother Aristobulus II was apparently already positioning himself to overthrow his aging mother. All her death meant was that he could now turn those plans against his brother. Hyrcanus II would only rule for three months before he would be forced to deal with his brother's rebellion, and he would take an army out near Jericho to meet Aristobulus II in battle. The problem was, Aristobulus II had many friends in the military, and most of Hyrcanus II's men defected to his brother's side. Hyrcanus II would flee back to Jerusalem where he would hold up in the citadel, but his brother would come and capture the temple. This would force Hyrcanus II to surrender to his brother as well as the terms Hyrcanus II give up his throne and the High Priest's position to Aristobulus II. This agreement would last for a time, but this is where the real treachery that would lead to the downfall of the Hasmoneans would begin!

Antipater I, as the governor in service to the Hasmoneans, feared he might lose his position under Aristobulus II. Thus, he became a voice in Hyrcanus II's ear, one Hyrcanus II would listen to. Antipater I convinced Hyrcanus II his brother was going to kill him, and he should run to Aretas III the king of the Nabataeans for protection. Hyrcanus II did so, and after arriving, it would seem Antipater I made a deal with Aretas III that if he helped Hyrcanus II regain power, Nabataean cities taken in earlier times by Judea would be returned to them. Thus, Aretas III would march a large army to Jerusalem and keep it under siege for several months.

While all this was going on the Romans were on the move too. The Roman general Pompey would have military success in his more far reaching eastern campaign, and end up sending his deputy Scaurus back to the land north of Judea to finish off the Seleucids, along with others, and take full Roman control over the Syrian territory. Because the Hasmoneans were supposed to be allies of Rome, both brothers would appeal to Scaurus for help in securing the throne of Judea. They would both send gifts and bribes, but in the end Aristobulus II would be the one to win Scaurus' support, who then ordered Aretas III to withdraw. As Aretas III complied, Aristobulus II used the opportunity to do serious damage to the withdrawing forces. Since Aretas III's attack did nothing to help Hyrcanus II's or Antipater I's cause, the civil war would go on, but not go unnoticed by the Romans. Pompey himself would come to Syria and be made fully aware of the warring brothers in Judea. Unfortunately, both brothers also saw his arrival as an opportunity to send delegates to make their case for power directly to the Roman general. Pompey would tell them both to wait for an answer, but in truth Pompey favored Hyrcanus II for the position since he seemed to be the weaker of the two, and Pompey was now interested in using him to make Judea part of the growing territory under direct Roman control!

Aristobulus II may or may not have suspected this, but in any case, he did not wait, and began to make trouble that caused Pompey to move against him. Aristobulus II and his sons would be defeated on more than one occasion by Pompey, and he would eventually surrender Judea and Jerusalem to the Romans in 63 B.C. The people in Jerusalem did not accept this surrender and attempted to keep Pompey from taking the city,

which caused the Romans to take it by force, damaging the city's fortifications and the temple in doing so. This would bring a sad end to the independence Judea had enjoyed under the Hasmonean Dynasty. Aristobulus II, along with his two sons, would be imprisoned, and Hyrcanus II would be given back the position of the High Priest. While this basically made him responsible for many administrative duties a governor or the like would have under Roman rule, he fell short of Rome's expectations for one in such a position. The man who would prove himself far more capable of representing Roman interests would be Hyrcanus II's supposed ally Antipater I, who took every opportunity to let Rome know how well he could do the job. This laid the groundwork for the complete collapse of what was left of the Hasmonean Dynasty, and paved the road for the rise of the Herodian Dynasty which was in power by the time of Christ.

One of Antipater I's greatest opportunities would come as Scourus did not care that Aretas III had complied with his demand he withdraw from Jerusalem, and attacked Petra in 62 B.C. Scourus would find the harsh terrain the hardest factor in taking Petra, which is why the city had held out against many attacks through the centuries. Scourus would call upon Hyrcanus II to help him in this matter, and Hyrcanus II would send Antipater I to negotiate with Aretas III. Antipater I would win favor with all sides as he would negotiate a peace that had Aretas III paying a great amount of silver directly to Scourus. In exchange, Aretas III would retain all Nabataean territory, but it would now be a vassal state under Roman control. Thus, Aretas III continued to be a "king." Rome had gained control over yet another region. By sending Antipater I, Hyrcanus II believed he had helped Rome when he was asked to, but in the eyes of Rome, Antipater I had proven himself a skilled politician which Hyrcanus II was not.

Unfortunately, Antipater I was not just another individual seeking power for himself, he wanted to see his family installed as the rulers of the region. He would continue by Hyrcanus II's side, but his real focus would be on continuing to impress Rome and navigate the political shifts of power Rome was going through. These shifting sands were complex, to say the least, but to be as brief as possible, it should be understood that Rome began as a republic, yet when the political fortunes of Pompey, Julius Caesar, and a man named Crassus came together, they formed a three-man rulership, called a Triumvirate, over Rome in 59 B.C. In 57 B.C. Aristobulus II escaped from prison and incited a rebellion in Judea, which was handily defeated by the Romans. In 53 B.C. Crassus was killed in battle leaving Pompey and Caesar, who were already at each others throats in various ways and for various reasons, to fight it out among themselves, and this they would do! In 49 B.C. Caesar would release Aristobulus II from prison in order to send him back to Judea in hopes of turning it against Pompey. However, Aristobulus II, along with his son Alexander, wouldn't make it to Judea. Aristobulus II would be poisoned by Pompey's men, and Alexander would be executed at Antioch by the Roman commander Scipio. Caesar would suffer a close call in battle in 48 B.C., but later that year handed

a sound defeat to Pompey in Greece, and Pompey would head to Egypt. Caesar would later pursue him there, but by the time he arrived Pompey had been assassinated. Being presented with Pompey's head and seal-ring, Caesar showed his displeasure with this outcome by killing the assassins!

Instead of leaving Egypt, Caesar would get himself involved in Egypt's civil war between a young Pharaoh and his sister Cleopatra. Caesar would side with Cleopatra and end up under siege at Alexandria. Who should come to his aid during this time? None other than Antipater I who had shifted his political allegiance from Pompey to Caesar when he learned of Pompey's death! For his "valor" in this matter, Caesar would give Antipater I Roman citizenry and freedom from taxes along with Caesar's friendship. Antipater I was eventually appointed Roman Procurator in Judea, giving him the authority over financial affairs for the Romans, such as tax collecting. He would use this power to immediately start establishing himself as a ruler. He repaired the walls of Jerusalem which Pompey had damaged and subdued civil unrest, even threatening the people with the idea it was their choice as to if he became a "severe master" over them or continued to be a gentle governor. More importantly than all was his move to appoint his son Phasael, governor of Jerusalem, and his other son, whose name students of the New Testament should immediately recognize, governor of Galilee. That other son's name was Herod, who would later be called "Herod the Great"!

Now, in 57 B.C. Aristobulus II's other son Antigonus II had escaped from prison along with his father, and was part of the failed attempt to attack Roman forces in Judea. Unlike his father, he was allowed his freedom by the Roman senate and was not killed with his father and brother in 49 B.C. Thus, Antigonus II would continue his attempt to gain control over Judea. By 47 B.C. the Pharaoh's forces would ultimately be defeated and Cleopatra installed as Queen. In that same year, Antigonus II would complain to Caesar about his uncle Hyrcanus II being a puppet to Antipater I. Caesar would give greater power to Hyrcanus II by naming him Ethnarch in Judea, which made him the more official governor over, at least, the Jews themselves. However, Hyrcanus II basically did whatever Antipater I instructed, making the official appointment all but useless to what remained of the Hasmonean Dynasty. Antigonus II would not settle for this, and his aspirations for the throne of Judea would continue. Events that followed would help Antigonus II to gain support among the people of Judea and raise a rebellion against Rome as well as his uncle. The details of all this would be one last sad saga for the Hasmonean Dynasty. It would lead to its final demise, which would solidify the rise of the Herodian Dynasty and more complete Roman control over Judea!

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

reversed in this life. This means you may have fallen but you're not getting back up!

This is the place Lot was in by being told God had accepted his proposal. Lot had plenty of facts surrounding him which, especially to the outside observer, made it clear he was choosing the wrong path, but we can not judge him on the basis of it. Why? Because he might open his eyes at some point and return to righteousness. This is why God wanted us to know He had already forgiven Lot! However, we can harshly judge his actions. Why? Because as it relates to our lives, we should see this as a lesson that the best way to get on your feet is to get on your knees. A broken and contrite heart God will not despise. (Ps. 51:17) In the heat of the moment it might have seemed to Lot an almost unbearable thought to go from living in the city environment he had known for so long and back to the "primitive" life and hard work of rebuilding his life in the mountains, but once the angel indicated in his words that God had forgiven him for even asking to go to Zoar, Lot should have humbled himself in the sight of The Lord. (James 4:10) We find ourselves in these kinds of situations both great and small, and as I will just keep saying, whether we can, in the moment or even later on at some point, realize our mistake or not all comes down to our faith. Will we allow God to show us the mistakes we have made or do we believe it doesn't matter because we are already forgiven?

Basically what we're discussing here is the difference between forgiveness and salvation. You see, without forgiveness there can be no salvation, but just because you are forgiven does not mean you will be saved! You don't hear many ministers teaching this truth anymore, and it's a little too hard to put on a bumper sticker for the mainstream "churches" to latch onto. However, that doesn't diminish the truthfulness of the statement! Living for God is not a democracy. People will tell you the blood of Christ covers all sin, and this is true, but will you reap the benefits of what that means? Your sins are already washed away, but do you care? Unfortunately, we live in a day and age where many churches love to teach the truth you are forgiven but they are not leading people to salvation. By continually putting the emphasis on a simple fact of our existence, they are leading people away from salvation! Our relationship with God, which is our faith, is what will lead to salvation. God's forgiveness is the reason we can have faith, and Jesus dying for our sins was God proving His forgiveness. God raising Jesus from the dead was God proving faith has value! (Rom. 10:8-11) The problem is that most people, just as Lot was showing here, do not care to walk everyday in faith, they only want what makes their flesh comfortable. Lot might have chosen what he thought was better for him, but the Psalmist said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Psalms 121:1

Moving on to verse 22, the angel told Lot to hurry and do what he desired to do, which was go to that city, because God could not do what He intended to do until Lot had escaped. At first glance this might seem to be saying Lot was of such importance God was obligated to wait for Lot to get out of the way before acting, and we have talked in this study about

how necessary it was for Lot to act or he would be consumed along with the destruction. Thus, let's look at the words a little closer here. Lot is still told to "Hasten" in order to "escape." In these two words he is not just being told God wanted him to hurry, but that he needed to hurry if he wanted to escape. So why does the angel say he cannot do anything until Lot got away? It all comes down to the same thing as when they were told to head to the mountains. God had told Lot he could go to the other city and God would not destroy it. This did obligate God to give Lot the same chance to get to the city as he had been given to get up into the mountains. However, to get out of the path of destruction by staying in the valley at all was going to take longer than climbing to safety!

Basically, the angel was giving Lot an assurance that he would be given the extra time, but God was only giving him the extra time not a free pass to linger anymore than he had been given when told to get into the mountains. This is also an indication that, yes, God intended to destroy the entire valley. Lot and his family would need to get all the way to the city before they would be safe. God would spare that city, but it would be the only safe haven in the valley region! This fact is also why the verse ends by telling us it was for this reason the city came to be called Zoar. Zoar means "smallness," and this is not just an allusion to the fact Lot had given its size as the main reason it would be no trouble for him to go there. It is talking about the truth God would make this a fact in all but destroying the heart of the city itself. In the time period we're talking about cities were not just the main conglomeration of buildings, but the farmlands with their houses and other structures used for agricultural purposes, as well as some other industries. When God was done, Lot likely found Zoar was not as comfortable a place as he had hoped!

Many people who live in cities, especially in what is considered "developed" counties, are more and more losing track of how much their comfort is dependent on someone somewhere doing the agricultural work needed to supply those comforts. They are also dependent on things such as mining operations to provide raw materials the factories use to produce the products that bring them comforts. You can complain about country people, miners, and the like, along with their lifestyles all you want, but the further away you drive such activities from where you live, the further away those things you need to survive will have to be shipped from. At times this will drive up costs, which is something not appreciated in our day of mass production. At times it might actually be cheaper, but the further away things such as fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs, etc. have to come, the lower quality they will be. In Lot's day there was not the ability to transport things over great distances with any speed, and this meant most every city was directly dependent on the agricultural activities nearby. Once God destroyed the valley and all that was left was the city itself, food and supplies were going to get thin. Zoar was going to be set back in a way that truly made it a little place!

Verse 23 tells us it took until sunrise for Lot to make it to Zoar, and when he did the destruction came. The next verses make it very clear that what we just discussed was true, because while Sodom and Gomorrah were the focus, God

rained down brimstone and fire that destroyed the cities' infrastructure; the surrounding infrastructure of the valley; all the people who lived in this area; and the vegetation as well. Basically, there was nothing left but scorched earth! It is then in verse 26 we are informed the stipulation about not turning back did not change once Lot was granted his request they go to Zoar, for his wife did turn back and was turned to a pillar of salt. Not only is this one of the best known facts of the Bible, but the reason why this is true is that it probably seems to be one of the strangest! When one only hears the story, especially as a child, it seems more like other mystical tales people tell children. Stories about people disappearing in the woods when they do not make it out before the sun rises, or being turned into animals or even inanimate objects by curses, spells, doing something wrong, etc. These tales abound in pagan cultures and survive to this very day.

However, when one looks at it in context of the story and region, it is not so mystical. The valley area we keep talking about is not just the Jordan Valley so much as the more southern end where the Dead Sea is located. Another name for the Dead Sea is the Salt Sea. This is because the Dead Sea is truly a dead end for all the water that makes it to that area. This also means, in higher concentrations than we find in the oceans of the world, all the minerals that get washed along with the water also end up here. This makes this body of water much more "salty" than the ocean, but it is not just the body of water itself that is affected. The reason the water cannot get out of this area is that it literally is below sea level. Until this entire valley could fill to a point above sea level there is no way for any of the water to flow onward to the ocean. If it could fill to such a point, there would just be a big body of water and no valley at all. This doesn't happen because there is not enough water that makes it to this spot for it to happen. This, along with environmental truths such as evaporation make this so; and today even more of the water is used out of the Jordan and other feeder rivers long before it gets there. The Dead Sea and the valley are also being mined for the rich mineral content, and in these days it's at an industrial level man was not capable of in ancient times.

What the truth of this area means is that it is not just the water which is salty, but minerals abound throughout the valley. In other passages of the Bible and other ancient text we are even told of tar pits that exist in certain areas of this valley to the south. (Gen. 14:10) This made the valley a valuable place and a dangerous place all at the same time. However, getting back to Lot's wife, God had said if they hurried, He would give them the time to escape the destruction which would come; but in the thinking of men there is high value placed on the body even after death. I mean no disrespect to the ideas that have to do with showing respect in disposing of a human body with more dignity than other refuse we throw out, but many cultures go overboard in the way they do it. Obvious ancient examples are places such as Egypt where people believed the preservation of the body was critical to the afterlife. While that is not so much the case in modern times, the ideology still exists in many people's minds, even

Christians. This is why people believe in grave sleeping and the like. My point here is that as hard as it had to be for Lot to realize at some point his wife had looked back and therefore did not make it, leaving her body just lay where it fell would have made the matter even harder.

We don't know if Lot was behind her or in front of her when this took place. If it happened behind him, he still might have looked behind to see her without violating the stipulation he not look back at the cities themselves, because as one takes a journey on foot of any distance, it is impossible to believe family members would never look behind them to others in concern for if everyone was still together. God's instruction they not look back had nothing to do with not helping a family member who might have sprained an ankle or slipped and fell at some point. Lot's wife did not suffer her fate due to doing something so simple. Lot's wife took the time to stop, and with intent look back at what had been her home. It was really the compulsion in her heart to look at what she was leaving behind that compelled her to take the action which brought the punishment, and it's unlikely the others in the family were not aware of when it took place.

While they obviously did not violate the don't look back stipulation themselves, it would have been a similar looking back violation to worry about leaving a family member's body who had violated the rule. Due to this, God left them nothing to worry about. Lot and his daughters could do nothing with what was left of her. She turned into a pillar which tells us she did not simply become indistinguishable from the ground upon which they were walking, but because she had become a substance no different than what the valley is just full of, there was no reason to bury or do anything else with what remained. She, as much as if she had been buried in the ground, became a part of what was the landscape and what would be left of it once the destruction took place. Thus, Lot with his two daughters would go on as God had instructed them to!

Verse 27 makes it clear Abraham had not lost interest in the events of what was to happen to the cities after that conversation he had with God about possibly sparing them. He got up in the morning and, first thing, went back to the same spot where he had had that conversation, to look for himself. His observation confirms again, the entire valley had been destroyed in this event, and most of what he could see was the smoke that rose up as if the entire valley was on fire; and the truth was, that's what was going on. It is verse 28 where we find the fact, saving Lot had to do with remembering Abraham. God had determined He would not do this without forewarning Abraham about it. God gave Abraham a chance to talk about it, and ultimately God had sent His angels to save what Abraham treasured most out of this place, that being his nephew Lot whom Abraham had cared for like a father in days gone by!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

think He has changed to fit our desires. The very existence of the Book of Deuteronomy directly debunks the idea God is constantly morphing what it means to be righteous, and this is why it is also appropriate to interpret the meaning of the book's name as being, "Repetition of The Law." This point goes back to that emphasis I put on the fact the Torah is the true core of God's Word, and why when people ask me where they should start reading the Bible, I always respond - from the beginning! Like so many books, you cannot understand what you read later, especially in starting at the New Testament of all places, if you do not know what has come before.

In so many ways, the Book of Deuteronomy shouts this truth. As this new generation of Israel stood before Moses, he was telling them how much, for all the passage of time and events that had taken place since the days of their forefathers and the giving of the Law in the mountains of Sinai, had not changed what God wanted to do. One should consider, it had been a very straightforward and fairly easy thing for the nation to bring their offerings and sacrifices to the center of the camp where the tabernacle stood. However, the events that would now make them into a nation, which means they would be spread across a great land, would not change their responsibilities in such things, as those things would remain the point of Israel's existence. This is why everything else we read in the Bible must be taken by looking at it in this framework. The rest of God's Word is given to us from the perspective of how much the nation succeeded or failed at various points and times to follow God's instructions for them as a people. As it relates to the non-Jew, who was not instructed to perform the ceremonies of the Law, it's all very much about how the nations of the world responded to the existence of a nation that had been given such instruction by God for their lives. It's all about how individuals, both Jew and non-Jew, all across the world, and forward from the time the Law was given, has observed or ignored what these words showed and still show us about living our lives in righteousness!

Now, in talking about time, we come to that conversation concerning how much time there is between the Book of Numbers and Deuteronomy, as well as how much time does the Book of Deuteronomy cover? Both these questions are actually pretty easy to answer for Deuteronomy, because as we've already talked about in covering Numbers, God had told Moses he would not lead the nation into the promised land. That job would pass to Joshua, and in doing this God not only gave Moses the blessing of being relieved of his earthly burdens, but it also was, at least in a symbolic way, speaking to the truth, God had said the generation that had failed to trust Him to bring them into the promised land would not get to enter. Of course, if one has been paying attention, we know Moses was not one of those people who doubted God. It is also a fact Joshua was specifically one of the spies who had went into Canaan that first time, who, along with Caleb, was one of only two out of the twelve spies to attempt to convince the nation they should immediately go up to take the land God was more than able to give them. Thus, the nation being given this new leader put an emphasis on the fact God said only the next generation would enter, and at that same time God had made

His judgment clear that Caleb and Joshua would be exceptions to the rule!

Since the clarification that the time had come for this transition from Moses to Joshua had already been given in the Book of Numbers, we should be able to understand how much Deuteronomy is just the capping point of Moses' life. This is why in it we see Moses is the one giving these words. He is also giving them in the same spot the nation had basically been camped for the entire last part of the book of Numbers. Of course, this spot was now a place, along with a lot of other territory on this east side of Jordan, that belonged to Israel. Thus, they were already not a nation just living in the wilderness, and they had experienced what it would be like to face temptations from surrounding cultures, but they had still not entered the promised land God wanted them to primarily hold. The fact Moses is giving these words means he was still alive obviously, but his time was short, and we are told near the end of Numbers that Moses took the time to sit down and rehearse all that had happened during Israel's journey to this point. In talking about those words in Numbers, I mentioned the fact this really gave Moses the time to write or, at the very least, put what he had already written into more of the cohesive form we know the books to be today. It is also reasonable to believe it was in this same mindset and time Moses goes out and verbally covers all this information with the nation, and that's what gives us the Book of Deuteronomy!

What this means to the point of how much time there is between Numbers and Deuteronomy is that there is no reason to believe there is any time. It is more than likely within the time period covered by Numbers that most all of what Deuteronomy covers takes place. This also means talking about how much time the Book of Deuteronomy covers in and of itself is, again, not complicated. It did not take Moses years and years to go over these words. Moses did not have years and years left, and his compiling of this information into a very structured form made the rehearsing of events and laws before the people as straightforward a task as it ever can be. That's why I say this book really is the Torah in a nutshell. It is interesting to think of the Book of Deuteronomy as mostly consisting of the first verbal rehearsal of the Law. In all the other books we see things as they come about, such as God speaking to Abraham about what He desired to bring through his family and Abraham responding. We see this in the life of Isaac and Jacob as well. Then we see this significantly as we move into Exodus where God speaks to Moses and he takes on the responsibilities God was giving him. After Israel left Egypt we mostly see Moses speaks to God and then to the people. The people speak to Moses and he takes the matter before God. As God answers, Moses takes those words back to the people, and we see the reaction to (or in some cases the rejection of) the answer. Through this process we see the establishment of the Law, but now in Deuteronomy we see the first full example of the Law being laid out in its more solid finalized form.

No more questions and answers as to what the Law consists of, just how do we follow what we've been given and apply it to our daily lives as they currently exist. This is in no way to suggest a direct and continual relationship with God is

not necessary, because it is faith that these Laws should lead all individuals both Jew and non-Jew to seek first and foremost. However, it brings us back to the point, once again, about how much we do not serve a changing God. What He wants from us has been clear from the beginning of our creation. How to walk as best we can in what God wants from us, with consideration of the environment men who do not want the ways of God have caused, is what we see becoming the bigger and bigger issue starting with Adam's and Eve's first missteps, and it only gets worse from there. I should say as we continue to talk about all this that we are not discussing the idea of all people becoming Jewish, and certainly not that they all follow the religion of Judaism, for that was never God's intent. What we are talking about is the truth of what it's like to be told how to create an environment on a national scale which is directed by laws God specifically gave. In looking at such a thing we see just how much difficulty there is in doing this, because it has everything to do with individuals being willing to cooperate and obey God in order to bring it about.

If man was so determined at the Tower of Babel to work together to build a world based on man's thoughts, the question was/is, can there be a group of people who can build at least one nation on the basis of God's Law? Sadly the answer is, not one with great cohesion for any length of time! Not in this world at least, and that is the answer we needed to know before we as a human race can fully see the justification of God having to destroy this world one day. If one nation could not accomplish, and even be fought so hard against establishing one small spot in this world where people lived exclusively by a set of laws given directly by God, what hope is there that man can build a world of peace that is worth more than generation after generation living and dying in their sin which is useless? Is this meant to bring despair to this world? Yes. Is this meant to bring despair to the idea of living our lives according to a religion? Yes. Is this meant to bring despair to an individual's faith in God? No! Why? Because individuals living in a direct relationship with God is all each of us have any control over. Whether we get to do that among any others who also truly seek faith or whether we must do it all by ourselves is something God's chosen nation proves is just dependent on when and where we might live, because, again, it has to do with each individual making their own choices!

With that, we will turn to the question of who wrote the Book of Deuteronomy, and that question is just a little more complicated but not by much. You see, if Moses is speaking most of the words we read in this book, the question only turns to, did he really write them? In a way this is a bit of a trivial point, because since it's true most of this book is Moses speaking, this book consists of his words as much or more than any of the others. The fact he may not have physically been the one to write them down is no different than the way many people write books today, which is to simply dictate them to a person or computer that does the actual "writing." However, what is more interesting about discussing this point is the fact the book is really written in the third person, meaning we are given this picture of Moses standing before the people

speaking most of these words. While this is true at a lot of points in the other books of the Torah, it really comes home in Deuteronomy when we see it ends by giving us an account of Moses' actual leaving this world. It would seem pretty clear Moses did not sit down after he left this world and give us the account of that event.

Thus, at least a portion of this book we can say with a great amount of certainty was not put in writing by Moses himself, and the answer as to who did is often passed off as simply being the next leader Joshua. However, I'm not so sure that's the best way to look at it. What we see later on, especially in the times of the kings, are scribes who keep the written records of events. This is literally where we get the books of I & II Chronicles. Later, in New Testament times, scribes refers to those who literally made the copies of the Word of God, but what I think we are seeing in Deuteronomy is another truth the nation was starting to act like a true nation. Moses was as close a thing as they had to a king at this point, and Joshua would be so after; and what you get the feeling of in reading Deuteronomy is that some other person took up the work of a scribe as it was typical for the day. That would mean this person actually records this history for us!

This takes nothing away from this being a book of Moses, but does speak to yet another step in development of the nation recognizing they should not forget their history. The person or persons who more likely than not took up the work of writing this permanent record are also most likely the ones who ensured the other books of the Torah were initially preserved. This is one of those moments I hope we can all appreciate because this job was of the utmost importance! It was not enough for Moses to make sure the words were down in print before he left this world. He may have understood this better than anyone, and that had a lot to do with his passion in speaking the words verbally to the people here in Deuteronomy. While this, of course, was done at the direction of God, it set a precedent; and, in fact, the nation had been told on more than one occasion to be sure to tell their children of these events so they would not be forgotten. However, that all being true, there were these unnamed people working in the background that made sure these words got preserved in any case. Outside of just giving God the credit, which is where it truly belongs, these individuals are the reason we can read the words for ourselves today. It is my hope that this would encourage every believer in two specific ways. One, pick up your Bible and read it! It has taken the hard labor of many people through thousands of years, who followed God's direction in order for you to have this privilege! Two, in light of this you should never think that your work for God is in vain no matter how insignificant it may seem to you or others at the time!

Let's stay in God's Word!

