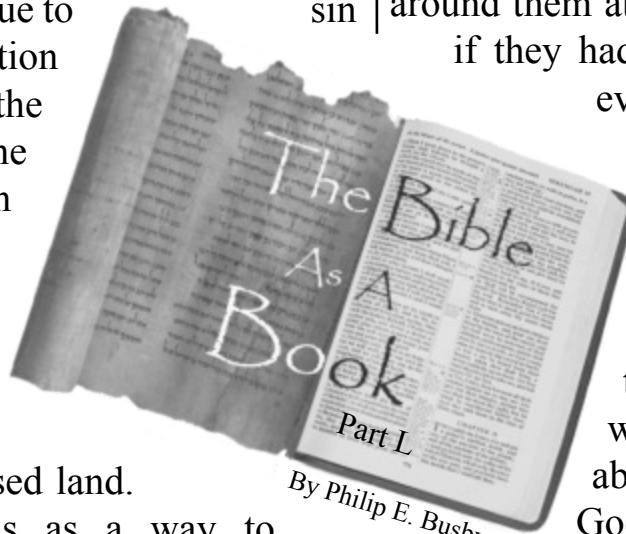




Shaqah

*“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*

In our last segment, we started the overview of the book of Deuteronomy. In that we saw Moses reminding the people of the journey they had taken to get to this place where they would now enter the land of promise. He also reminds them of how much this journey should not have taken this long, but due to sin God had sent the nation out to wander the wilderness until the adult generation which came out of Egypt was gone. This would include Moses, as he would not lead them into the promised land.



Moses uses all this as a way to emphasize how much the nation needed to continue in God's Law without fail through their generations. It was also to emphasize how much the Law was for them to follow on the land not just for their journey to it. In order to remember all these things and how serious it was they continue following God, Moses tells them to think back on how God had met with them at Mount Sinai to speak with them in an audible voice. This is the

part of the conversation we will continue with in this segment of our overview, which starts at Deuteronomy chapter 4 verse 32.

Moses now poses the question to the nation, which is for them to consider all the history they knew along with everything around them at the present time, and think if they had ever known of something even remotely like what they had experienced happening to any other people! He wanted them to consider if ever another nation or group had heard the voice of God in the literal way they had and lived to tell about it. Moses points out that God had never chosen another nation, but He had taken them out of Egypt with all kinds of signs and wonders, including victory in war over people much stronger than they. This was all done for them so they would understand how much God had made them a specific people with a specific purpose. Not only were they very unique because God had done this for them, but this was The One True God of which there is no other, Who



had made it so!

Next, we are told how Moses set apart three cities to be cities of refuge where anyone who had killed a person could run in order to ensure they got a trial and not just be killed out of vengeance. We are given the names of the three cities which were to serve this purpose on this east side of Jordan. This is the land Israel obtained due to God giving them the ability to defeat an Amorite king named Sihon and one named Og. Israel held land stretching from the territory to their south that was held by the Moabites all the way north to the mountains just above the Sea of Galilee. From the east bank of the Jordan river it stretched out to the east to adjoin the land of Ammon. They now stood in a valley of these plains to hear Moses go over the Laws which God had given them. Where they now stood was important to point out because as Moses calls all Israel to hear him, he begins by going back to the point where the nation had stood at Mount Sinai. In spite of the fact they now stood many miles and some forty years removed from that event, he tells them it was them, not their parents that God spoke to. This is due to the fact that even though they were just children this is the nature of the Law, it is as if God speaks the same words He spoke right from the start of the nation to each generation that has and will ever live! Moses had to ultimately go up into the mountain to receive the Law because the people as a whole were afraid to stand and hear God's voice as they had when He spoke the Ten Commandments. However, this just emphasizes how much each generation in the future which reads the

Torah receives the Law in much the same way, because the Torah was mostly written by Moses himself. Thus, we are all hearing the same things that the original generation heard.

With that, Moses goes into what God actually said, starting with those words the nation heard with their own ears. God made it clear that He was The One Who had brought them out of Egypt, and they were to have no other gods before Him. They were not to make images in which to worship, modeled after anything including the powers of heaven and earth which God Himself had made. They were not to bow down or bend a knee to any such object of worship. God informs them He is a jealous God Who does not give credit to the excuses that such things can become traditions which later generations simply follow because it's something their parents did. This goes back to that fact each generation is given the Law, and those who do not follow it are only doing so because they directly refuse to hear it for themselves. However, God will give mercy to those who strive to return to the right by studying His Law.

God had also told them to be mindful of how they speak and use His name because God is always listening and will hear every reference you make to Him, judging you accordingly. The nation was to observe God's day, which was/is the seventh day of the week. Six days humans were given to do all their work and labor but the seventh day belongs to God. There is to be no labor done on this day, not just by yourself but by those whom you have

power to make work or stop from doing work. This includes your family, your servants, as well as your animals. God would even include those who were not part of the chosen nation that were just passing through or living among them. Israel was to follow this ordinance completely and make sure all those within the boundaries of their nation did the same. They were not to use those not of the nation as a way to get work they wanted done, but were to instruct such people to rest even from their own labor. In thinking about how much sense this should make to them as a nation, they needed only to consider how they were once used as forced labor in the land of Egypt and God brought them out of that so they could be His special representative nation.

Israel was to respect the family unit as God had created it, honoring the fact a father and a mother are the basis of human procreation. This does not just include the idea of children being respectful to their parents during the time they are under their care, but no matter how bad one's parents may be or have been, no matter how many broken families there might ever be in their society, generation after generation was not to begin doubting God's wisdom on this being the way a family was meant to be put together. This leaves each new generation with the responsibility to strive to do well in this area no matter how much the generations before them might have gotten off track. Why? Because there are negative consequences to attempting to live one's life outside the way God created us to live, and all these commandments are directly

connected to that specific point!

Man is not to commit murder. We are not to have physical relationships outside the bounds of a committed marriage between a man and wife, which connects back to what was spoken about honoring father and mother. We are not to take something that belongs to another person, but work to obtain what we have through our own labor. We are to be honest, which means there is no such thing as a little lie and a big one. When we speak we are to do so with the intent to inform people of what we know and not try to mislead others. We are also not to desire to have something that belongs to someone else. We are not to choose what it is we desire on the basis that someone else has such a thing. Everything from the person we marry, where we live, to how we live, should be based on our own choices and labor, not guided by our desire to make a show before other people, or obtain the same things they have.

These commandments are what Israel as a nation heard as God made a physical appearance on the mountain in the form of fire and cloud. This scared the nation, but it proved God not only has a desire to speak directly to us, it is possible. However, because the nation was still worried doing such a thing would lead to their death, they desired Moses go and receive the instructions from God and bring them back so they could hear them spoken by the mouth of a man, which is exactly what Moses is doing here as he speaks to the nation on the east side of Jordan. At Mount Sinai God had heard their desire.

and in spite of being desirous to speak to them directly, God greatly desired for such a fear to continue if it would cause them to truly follow in the words He wanted them to live by, for these words would lead to their salvation. Due to this, God told Moses to send the nation to their tents, but Moses was to receive the words of God and teach the nation so they could follow them in their entirety throughout their generations while living on the land God was leading them to.

Moses then clarifies that while the words they just heard were words pertaining to the righteousness of all people, what he will go on to tell them are the Laws God gave specifically to them as a nation, so they could speak and prophesy through their actions to the rest of the world and tell of God's plan of salvation. These are words that if they followed would cause them to grow in the land in the mighty way God had planned for them to do. However, before going into those specifics, Moses tells them the greatest commandment, which is the understanding God is not a grouping of powers like man's religions believe is the nature of power, but God is the only Lord and Maker of all that exists. Thus, we should love The Lord our God with every thing we are made of. This should put the Laws God gave them not just in their minds as in they should know them, but in their hearts so they would have a passion to live them. The nation was to be diligent in passing these Laws on to the next generation, and the basis of this was not at some organized school or church but in their houses. They were to live these Laws every day. From morning to night

they were to speak of how the ways in which they lived their lives was based on the ordinances God gave the nation. These laws were to dictate the way in which they used their hands as they labored and went about building their lives. They were to be forefront in their minds as if they were the light that shined out before their eyes to show them the path they were to walk.

In a very physical way these Laws were not to just reside in some locked away place, but be so physically present with the nation that they were to write them on the very structures of their houses, the doors and gates in particular, so all who passed through them would be able to read them or be reminded of them on a regular basis. This would also help in the fact that when they entered the land, they would live in houses they had not built, drink water from wells they didn't have to dig. They would also eat much of their food from things such as vineyards and orchards they did not have to plant and wait for them to grow. This would give them more immediate comforts, and this needed to serve as a reminder of how God brought them out of Egypt to give them these blessings to remember God, not cause them to forget God. They were to fear God, remember Him in everything they did, and do everything as representatives of Him. They were not to include other gods in their lives even as it related to other people they might be around and have relationships with. If they did such things they would no longer be special, and there would be no point in God having such a nation on the face of the earth.

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we covered the verses that tell us about what ultimately happened to Abraham's nephew Lot. This information showed us how in spite of losing his entire family, with the exception of two daughters, Lot ends up with two sons. This came because of the plan the oldest of the two had, which was to have children by their father without him knowing what they were doing. In this, we talked about the overall way Lot's life and children turned out, and as one looks at it we can see how sad it is to have such opportunity to serve God as Lot did but ignore it. In the end, Lot's family line would go on to serve the purpose God intended for them to serve, but how much different could Lot's life have been? Wrapping up Lot's story took us through the end of Genesis chapter 19, and we are ready to start chapter 20.

Chapter 20 begins a story that makes it clear, in spite of how long Abraham had been in the land by this point or how much he might have been a man that by now should have controlled a great amount of land, Abraham is still traveling to different points throughout the land. This is exactly what God had told Abraham to do, and he had followed that. This is an interesting contrast to what we talked about last time concerning his nephew Lot. Lot had not only gone into the valley to separate his possessions from that of Abraham's, but he had settled down in the city of Sodom. This he did even to the point we are told when the

angels went to get him out of the city we find Lot lives in a house. After leaving the city of Zoar he goes up into the mountains, and even there he does not journey around but settles down using a cave to live in. This truth has to do with why the nations that came from Lot's two sons ended up growing in and taking as their own the area to the east of the Dead Sea and Jordan River.

Of course, one can argue that Lot was not called to go into the land of Canaan as Abraham had been. However, Lot had been brought to Haran by his grandfather, who was taking care of him as a son. The only reason Terah makes this trip and builds the household he did in Haran was because his son Abraham had been called to go into Canaan. Terah played a part in helping Abraham in this calling and was blessed greatly for his efforts. As Abraham leaves Haran Lot could have stayed or went back to Mesopotamia, but he chose to follow Abraham into the land of Canaan. For a time he simply was with Abraham, but once they separated their possessions Lot totally left the path of being with Abraham. As we talked about in our last segment, Lot would end up in the mountains, and the story of the end of his life is not a very encouraging picture. This has much to do with the fact Lot did not continue to follow his uncle's example in seeking God, nor did Lot simply stay alongside or go back to Abraham's side during the latter part of his life. By doing none of these things, which Lot very well could have done. Lot did not continue to see

the kind of success Abraham saw.

In the end it is true Lot's descendants were not going to be the chosen nation, but how much different might they have looked if Lot had continually sought God? In any case, Abraham was not to create a permanent life in this land. This shows us God had planned all along for the course of the chosen nation's development to go through a period where it would not be on this land. All those who were related to this family who were not, or chose not to be, part of the chosen nation gained territory in the region simply as they grew into nations. This made them seem more indigenous, especially to much later history. We have already talked about Lot's sons, but even in Abraham's direct line we see that his son Ishmael became a people who also journeyed in a nomadic way through this land, but controlled much of the vital trade routes. They would eventually settle far south in what, because of them, would end up being called the Arabian Peninsula and throughout history play a major role in the affairs of the entire middle east region.

After the death of Sarah, Abraham would take another wife and have six more sons whom he would give gifts to and send more north and west for the most part. They too would settle down and grow into nations. Contrast all this to the son whom God said the chosen nation would come through - that being Isaac - and we see that Isaac, like his father, also did not settle on the land and begin growing into a nation. He did not gain a large possession in the land that his descendants would claim from then on. Isaac had two sons, and the one that did not desire to follow the path his birthright

had granted him - that being Esau - moved south until he ended up in an area outside the region God intended to give the chosen nation. There his descendants would grow into a people. On the other hand, his brother Jacob, who did desire the ways and promises of God, ended up back in the land his grandfather had come from, and there most all his sons would be born. However, Jacob would not gain territory or land in Mesopotamia.

In a show of how much Jacob desired to follow the will of God for his life, when the timing was right Jacob returned to the land of Canaan, even defying the will of his wives' family to do so along with believing his brother was still waiting to kill him. Then, in spite of his determination to be in the land of promise, he too would claim no permanent possession of land there, and circumstances caused Jacob to leave the land near the end of his life. Jacob would die in the land of Egypt, and while his body was brought back to the promised land to be buried, it would be buried in the only piece of the land Abraham ever bought, which was a cave to bury Sarah in. Of course, Jacob's entire family had also moved to Egypt, but Jacob's death would not mark their return. By then, it was clearly understood, as Joseph shows on his death bed, that the nation of Israel would return to the land someday, but when was not known. (Gen. 50:22-26) This would leave the land as unclaimed by the descendants of Abraham's family as it had been during Abraham's life, and remain so until God brought Israel out of Egypt.

I take the time to go into this because it is important to our understanding of even

modern events that God specifically made space for the chosen nation. The land we call the promised land will only be held by those whom God allows to hold it until God determines the chosen nation is to have it. This did not just become the case due to the fact Jerusalem and the temple fell not many decades after Jesus' first coming, this has been true all along. The people who were as indigenous to this land as is possible for anyone to be were the Canaanites, who descended from Noah's son Ham. These are the people Abraham sojourned among, and they are the people who held the land until Israel was brought out of Egypt. Due to their sin, God commanded Israel to destroy them and take their land. While Israel, to their detriment, never followed through on this in the way they were suppose to, those people we know as Canaanites no longer exist as a people in an even lesser way than many other people we could claim live on in the bloodline of a specific people today.

This is because, while some Canaanites were not totally wiped off the earth by Israel, they disappeared into the population of Israel and other neighboring nations, most of whom were already related to Israel through the people we just covered. This means - for lack of a better term - the genetics of the family Abraham originally came from dominated this region even to the extent those who were not totally wiped out by Israel could not have hoped to survive as a people. Now, some of the most long-term surviving people could arguably be the Philistines, which Abraham is about to go into the land of in the verses we're covering. This fact is why today people who

want to claim Israel has no right to exist attempt to draw their ancestry to be connected to the Philistines. However, in spite of this being untrue, for even the Philistines did not survive to our day, the fact we clearly see is that it does not matter!

To have any claim on this land one must be either a descendant of some line of Abraham's family who is not part of the chosen nation directly, a member of the Canaanites who originally lived there before God first placed the chosen nation on the land, or someone from the outside of all this who was moved or did move there at a later time. If you are part of the first group, you know very good and well this is not your land. If you are part of the second group, you are part of a group Israel was slated to destroy and thus, even you have no claim before God. If you are part of the last group, you certainly do not have a claim to the land, at least not one that is greater than that of the Jewish nation! In any case, we should see how much this land is reserved for the chosen nation and has been for so long now it is foolish to make any claim to the land if you're not of the chosen nation.

In our world today this argument rages on and on, but as one who believes in the Word of God we should be able to see how much any argument man makes against Israel being there is a pointless one. You might see some success in holding on to some of the land. You may have some success in being a thorn in the side of the chosen nation, as many are today, but as one can see this is not a plan for prosperity, it is only one that degrades your life into misery.

This is what has happened to so many who thought they could resist Israel as the Jews returned to establish their nation once again in our modern time. There were those who fought against the nation and came out on the losing side; some of these have continued to try and find a way to drive Israel off the land. However, many are in the state they are in because they have been used for decades as pawns by other people who wish to see Israel dismantled. This is why the world so readily accepts calling the mostly Arab population they have used to accuse Israel of all kinds of evil, Palestinians. This term is used by the world as a way to try and connect this population back to the Philistines of old. This way, they can holler about the idea Israel is displacing a more indigenous people.

If one takes the time to really look into who the Philistines were, you would find they too came to the shores of this land and fought for their piece of it not being so indigenous as the Canaanites. They also never had possession of a large amount of the land. However, that would be a waste of our space considering what we have already covered about God's will overriding all others. The reason I took the time to even talk about this is the fact the area the Philistines were known to inhabit is the area Abraham is going into, and in this story we see how it did not matter, even in Abraham's day, that these people were already there. Going against the will of God does not come with good consequences, even if simple pride and lack of certain knowledge that was specifically withheld from you is your reasoning for taking actions that affect the chosen nation!

Now, this story has similarity to the earlier story of Abraham going down into Egypt, but there are some big differences. (Gen. 12:10-20) In chapter 20 verse 1 we are told Abraham goes even further south in the land than he was already living, and where he settled is very interesting. We are told Abraham placed his dwelling between Kadesh and Shur. In looking at this verse we must remember the possessions of Abraham were great. Dwelling anywhere for him was not as simple as going from town to town but took a lot of land, especially for herds to graze. What is interesting about this place is that Kadesh is the location in the South where the children of Israel first came as they left Egypt and sent spies up into the land of Canaan. (Num. 13:17-33) If Israel had trusted God it would have been from this very same place that Israel would have begun its northward march in taking the promised land. This means Abraham finding places to dwell had not just covered the core of the south land in which God intended the heart of Israel to be, but he had gone all the way down to what might be considered the southern gateway where Israel would later camp at the time God first wanted them to enter the land.

Looking specifically at Abraham and not his entire household, we see that he went into the land of the Philistines just north of where he had settled to the city/area of Gerar. Like the time he went to Egypt, Abraham understood he was going in among a people different from the general Canaanite population both he and Lot freely moved among. Just like going to Egypt, Abraham also knew he was going into a place ruled by a people who saw themselves as conquerors. There were always kings or

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXIV

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."

In our last segment, we covered the final fall of the Hasmonean Dynasty in the aspect that the last true ruler from that dynasty had been killed. However, we also covered the fact that after this what was to be known to history as the Herodian Dynasty really took the power there was to be had over Judea as part of the Roman Empire. Herod, the one we know as "The Great," did what he could to make this a continuation of the Hasmonean Dynasty. He did this by exiling his wife and child and taking a wife that was part of the Hasmonean family. This opens the argument that the Hasmoneans were still a factor, even up to and through Jesus' coming; but if it had not been for Herod's initial insistence on the idea he was a legitimate Jew and rightful heir to the throne of Judea, any connection between the Hasmonean and the Herodian Dynasties might have been nothing more than some intermarrying.

Of course, the other point we made it to in our last segment was the rise of Rome's first true emperor. That was the man named in the New Testament as Caesar Augustus who made the decree for all the world to be taxed. Some people find the wording about all the world being taxed an overstep on the Gospel writer's part because by no means did

the Roman Empire take in the entire world. However, that is not the reason for the wording. The reason the wording is used in the Gospel that his decree covered all the world is twofold. One is the fact it would make it easier for later generations, such as ourselves, to see where in history this event took place. It would do this by being directly connected to the second point which is that the name "Augustus," as we touched on last time, denotes a religious notion that he was the king over all men, in other words, the world. What is important is that the Romans considered themselves the true "world" in the aspect they believed they were the only authority that mattered!

This arrogance is shown clearly in the use of the religious title for the man who became their first emperor. If we look at the world today, we see the Greco-Roman culture is a major factor in how the world developed, and it's still looked to for how to conduct world affairs today. The ideas of being democratic, and specifically the government structure of a Republic, both came from the Greeks and Romans. This doesn't mean they invented the idea(s), but they are the reason it became such a big part of why our world depends on these ideas to save them today. Thus, even in that sense the decree was truly that all the world be taxed because it went out from a man who ruled the government which would end up affecting the entire world and man's thoughts long after he was gone. When seen in this light, it

becomes more clear why this was the most appropriate wording for the Gospel writer to use, as well as the time for The Messiah to come and walk among us.

Caesar Augustus was not literally the king of the world, but the Romans thought of him and their ideas as worthy to be and wished to force them upon the world. Jesus was/is the true and rightful King of the World, but came in human flesh to walk this earth in humility, simply offering Himself to the world at the same time these events were going on. This gave not just the Jews but the world as a whole the opportunity to choose for themselves who they believed was, or at least who they wanted to be, the king over them. Today, we understand clearly that Rome's last emperor died long ago, but the ideas and concepts the Romans left behind for how humans govern themselves, still live on. This is the result of man desiring the continuance of the beast God gave us the opportunity to escape by confounding our language at the tower. Of course, we also know Jesus was crucified by the Romans a long time ago, but rose from the dead and still lives today. What Jesus taught is also available to us, and this means we can still choose this day whom we want to serve! (Josh. 24:15)

What we need is to be clear on the difference between the choices. Man's attempt to govern himself is such a failure that if not dealt with it would eventually destroy the entire world and all life on it. If that's what you choose to serve, you're putting your trust in an already doomed plan. On the other hand, if The One True God is Who you choose to serve, you will be serving The True King of the world Who offered Himself as the solution to our

problems long ago. This will not be easy in a world that has rejected God. However, our life here is not eternal, and Jesus is coming to this world again to take the reigns of power before man's ideas cause the world to completely collapse in on itself. For some, this is hard to believe, even for some who once believed upon Jesus, because as the world gets worse and worse we can begin to doubt there is a God when He allows it to go on as long as He has. (Matt. 24:42-51) Some have and will make the choice it must all be a fantasy or that God is a God Who doesn't care enough to end it before the suffering gets too great. For those who lean in this direction and for those times we all might have such thoughts, let's remember, God needs this world (as much as it is possible) to see for themselves what a failure their ideas have been all along. If God does not allow this to go pretty much off the cliff before reaching in to save it, people will still have the argument they could have done it by themselves if just given the chance.

There will still be many who feel this way in any case, and this has a lot to do with why Satan will have the success he will have among men once he is released from the bottomless pit a thousand years after Christ's return. (Rev. 20:1-10) However, the fact God is allowing it to go this far before He returns is why the idea we could have done it on our own will only be an argument some will make but have no legitimate facts to back it up. It continues to be not just God's truth that He will allow us our free will, but to use this fact to convince as many as possible just how much we need Him. Let us not forget as this world waxes worse and worse, what is happening around us is all man's doing. You may be tempted to be angry at times that God has not put a stop to

it sooner, but keep in mind it would never have gotten this bad if man had chosen God over his own ideas. Nor would it be this bad if there were enough people who chose to cry for God's intervention in this world instead of desire to continue with their own ideas. This is why right up to God putting a total end to this world there always will be a clear two-sided choice between what we want to serve!

Getting back to our historical look, I have mentioned many times the fact that what we are about to get into can be hard to keep track of, especially when it comes to names. Unfortunately, when it comes to understanding the family of the Herodian Dynasty it doesn't get any better. This dynasty is not just called the Herodian Dynasty because Herod the Great was its first real ruler. There seems to be no end in how many of the family held the name Herod! Now, it is only an arrogant title that the first Herod is called the Great, but at the very least it's useful in distinguishing him from the other Herods of the family, even remembering he was the first of his family to rule in Judea under the Romans. Now, Herod the Great did exile his first wife in order to marry a daughter of the Hasmonean Dynasty, but she would not be his only wife, nor would all his children come from Jewish women. In the end, this makes the Herods a real mixture of characters who are not only hard to keep straight due to the fact so many share the same name, but they differ in their possible sympathy toward the Jews due to some having Jewish blood and others not so much.

Of course, we are attempting to cover

Jewish history here, but just as we have taken time to talk about transitions in the Roman rulership, it is necessary to our question that we understand who these Herods, we read about in the New Testament, were. While I'd like to at least lay in what was going on with the Sanhedrin and the Priesthood, at the same time, I think it best we try to grasp the Herodian Dynasty as more a separate issue. This becomes far more practical and of particular importance now that we have followed the history through the gap between the Old and New Testaments. In opening our Gospels, which do in fact, chronologically begin the information we are given in the New Testament, we are looking at rulers who were not really Jewish, standing between the Roman government and the Jewish people themselves. Because the study of history between the Testaments is not something Christians often do, even in a hitting the highlights kind of way, some do not understand just how much the Herodian Dynasty does not indicate the Jews were being lost among the people of the world, and therefore not really representative of being God's nation. The Herodian Dynasty is simply another layer of secular rulers that happened to be over the land of Judea by that point in time, or they would be of no more importance to us than a hundred other rulers in the Roman world.

This is a big reason why I believe it will be more practical to look at the Herodian Dynasty a bit independently for now. We have basically filled the gap between the Testaments and can now refer to many stories told in the New Testament which most Christians are familiar with. In

this way, we are not really taking the subject separately from the Bible, just more separated from the history of the Jewish people, which should be a good thing in understanding how much they really were just another secular ruler affecting, but in no way dismantling, the chosen nation. Knowing who the Herodians were and a little about which one is which in the Bible's history, helps us understand how these leaders affected Jewish history. This becomes important right off in the fact we talked about how Herod the Great is responsible for the "makeover" of the second temple. This was a political move by a non-Jewish ruler, not a commanded act of God as the building of Solomon's temple and the one built after the Jews' return to the promised land from Babylon had been.

By understanding this, we see how the fact there was a very Greco-Roman style temple in place by the time of Christ is no indication the people we know as the Jews were not really God's chosen nation. Instead, we see just the opposite as it should help us understand in a deeper way why Jesus talked so freely about the idea of the temple being torn down. Jesus did not just use this as a metaphor for His death and resurrection, He was also talking about how so many things were being done by man's choices and not God's instructions even when it concerned items that had directly to do with the functioning of God's Law. While the Jews could not have done much about this, especially after the end of the true Hasmonean Dynasty which the Jews had established as rulers until a faithful prophet arose - Jesus could. Not only had John the Baptist, the greatest prophet to be born, come on the scene, but John's whole life was about pointing out the fact The Messiah was

also at hand! (Matt. 3:1-6) Thus, not just a faithful prophet but The Messiah could be completely trusted to properly deal with these issues. However, it was more important to religious leaders to hold on to what power they had at that point than it was to accept The Messiah and allow Him to do the work of setting all things straight. Their choice in all this would not save the temple or their power, but would eventually lead to the literal destruction of even Herod's temple and the nation being driven from their land.

Understanding Herod may have been the king of the Jews in the eyes of Rome but in no way had been given that title by the Jewish people, even in the idea he was some continuation of the Hasmonean Dynasty, also helps us distinguish the difference between Herod's reaction to Christ from that of the Jews. Remember, the Hasmonean Dynasty was the result of the Maccabees who were placed in power until a faithful prophet who could set things straight arose. This meant from the beginning this Jewish line of leadership was meant to be temporary. No matter how much Herod the Great attempted to make himself the continuance of this dynasty, in reality he was the one who had put a final end to it, and he knew it. The Jews knew this as well, but those outside the nation may not have been as clear on this fact. This is what makes it such an interesting fact that this Herod was the one the wise men came to seeking The King of the Jews! (Matt. 2:1-12) It is not likely that these men were completely ignorant of the prophecies and even the fact the current Jewish leadership was awaiting the coming of such a figure, or they would not have put this much effort into coming to worship Jesus. However, being more

unaware of recent changes to the political structure in Judea, they did not know why this was not good news to Herod. This is why Herod gets away with telling the men to continue seeking the child, and once they had found him to report back so Herod could “worship” him also.

At that point it probably seemed a bit strange to the wise men that Herod did not already know, especially since they had seen the star two years prior to this meeting, which was also a fact Herod would not have known if he had not asked them about it. However, once they saw how Jesus had been born to such humble common people among the Jews, putting all things together, it probably made perfect sense to them that God told them not to return to Herod. Who Herod is should also take our understanding deeper as to why Herod then goes to such great lengths as to have all the children of Bethlehem, two years old and younger, killed in an attempt to kill Jesus. This very Herod had not long before killed the last Hasmonean ruler. The idea that The One who was to replace that temporary arrangement of leadership had come now had to terrify Herod. On top of this, Herod knew, whether true or not, such an idea might be readily accepted among the Jews, and that would in and of itself be as great a threat to his power and position, which his family had worked so long to maneuver themselves into, as anything!

Of course, we see Herod did not get the opportunity to kill Jesus as all his actions did was fulfill another prophecy that The Messiah would have to be brought up out of Egypt, for that is where God instructed Joseph to take his family to be safe from

Herod. This is a great example of how God does not tell us things are going to happen because He is making it happen but because God knows what our ideas will lead us to, and He is always way out in front of any attempt we could make to thwart His will. So when would God tell Joseph to come back from Egypt? This would happen when Herod the Great died, but again, there is that human reaction that shows us God told us those things He did so we could see the truth as it happened even if those events were clearly caused by man's decisions. We are told, as Joseph re-enters the region he learns political circumstances did not completely shift after Herod the Great's death, and Herod's son now ruled in his father's position for the most part.

I say for the most part because the man Joseph feared was Herod Archelaus. He was only one of Herod the Great's sons to be recognized and given power by the Romans. His mother was not the Hasmonean Mariamne I, but Herod's wife Malthace who was a Samaritan woman. This definitely meant that the Hasmonean Dynasty had made no return. Joseph probably learned of all this quickly after leaving Egypt because Archelaus was given the southern half of his father's kingdom. This caused Joseph not to return to Bethlehem or Jerusalem. It would seem he may have even desired to not stay in the promised land altogether, but God warned him not to make that mistake. Instead, Joseph was instructed to go north into Galilee, and there they would live in Nazareth. This fulfilled the prophecy, Jesus would be called a Nazarene. (Matt. 2:19-23) If you understand what we have been studying up to this point, you know this move did not put Joseph and his family out

of the reach of the Herodian Dynasty in any way, because the man named as Tetrarch of the northern area was another son of Herod by the same mother as Archelaus. This man's name was Herod Antipas. So what made the North safer? Well, one must understand that being called of God to bring Jesus back to the promised land meant the choices available to Joseph were limited. Joseph was simply going to have to trust God even if he had been commanded to go directly back to Bethlehem, but in the North it's true Jesus would be further away from where all the political strife was really going on.

You see, not only was Archelaus ruling half of his father's territory in the South, the Romans had also named him Ethnarch over Judea, Samaria, as well as Idumaea. This meant the Romans had lumped the Idumaeans in with the Jews even worse than before. During the early years of transition between the Hasmoneans and Herodians, Herod the Great's father may have held much of the political power; but as we talked about, Rome had made Hyrcanus II the Ethnarch over the Jews. Now Herod's son was Ethnarch. In the South Joseph and his family would not just have been living in a region where a son of Herod the Great, who had tried to kill Jesus, was ruler in general affairs but over ethnic ones as well. Archelaus very well may have favored the Idumaeans over the Jews, but even if he did not, he certainly had no place commanding Jewish ethnic affairs. In the North Antipas ruled but as a Tetrarch, which was the same position his father held in Judea before becoming more of a king. Thus, Jesus would grow up in an area where Jews were more free to be Jews without the religious or

secular domination that existed in the South. This is a point many people are so unclear on one should not be surprised you might be hard pressed to find even a minister who would not immediately disagree with you if you pointed it out.

One way or another, both Archelaus and Antipas would play a role in the story of the Gospels, but to understand this with clarity you have to know a little bit more. This is where the names get really confusing, especially since all accounts do not follow the same standards in referring to the next two sons. Herod the Great also had a wife named Cleopatra of Jerusalem. The “of Jerusalem” is to make it clear this was not one of the Egyptians. Through this wife Herod had a son we often call Philip the Tetrarch, but in other cases he is referred to as Herod Philip II. This is really bad because Herod the Great had another wife named Mariamne II of Jerusalem, who is not to be confused with the Hasmonean princess Mariamne I. Though it should be mentioned that Mariamne II was the daughter of the High Priest, and this brings more Jewish blood into the dynasty, Mariamne II was the mother of Herod Philip whom we should not confuse with Philip the Tetrarch. Herod Philip is also referred to as simply Herod II. Calling him Herod II likely comes from the fact he was the one originally slated in his father's will to take his throne. Whether the events of Jesus' birth have anything to do with it or not we can't say for sure, but in the end, Herod Philip was not given power over any of his father's territory.

In any case, it was this Herod Philip who was the first husband of Herodias.

Herodias was the daughter of Herod the Great's son through Mariamne I the Hasmonean. Thus, by marrying Herod Philip, Herodias married a man who was her uncle by virtue of being her father's half brother. This is the Herodias who left Herod Philip and became the wife of another of her father's half brothers, that being Herod Antipas. This marrying and remarrying is what was condemned by John the Baptist, and this is what caused Herodias to hate John. Before their divorce, Herodias and Herod Philip had a daughter together named Salome, and this is the daughter who danced for her step father Herod Antipas during his birthday party. Antipas then made the foolish promise to give Salome whatever she asked. Salome, being instructed by her mother to do so, asked for John's head. Thus, John the Baptist was executed, not by the Herod that Joseph feared when coming back up from Egypt, but Herod Antipas, the Herod who ruled over the area Jesus grew up in since not long after Jesus' birth. (Matt. 14:1-12)

In truth, Herod Archelaus did not rule for very long because he was removed in about 6 A.D. by Augustus in favor of making the southern region of Judea a direct Roman province. This is important because we should realize that it really is only at the birth and young life of Christ that one of the Herods ruled over the real heart of Judea. During most of the life of Christ Judea was the Judaeon Province of Rome. This is why Jesus and the work of His disciples were affected by the Herodian Dynasty, but we see the Romans being very much directly involved in events. As Jesus did His ministry in the North, he was in and out of territory ruled by Herod Antipas. When He went into the South, Jesus was then in the

territory more directly controlled by Rome. This is why it was good news to Pilot when he found out Jesus was from Galilee! If Jesus had been from the South it would be totally up to Pilot as to what to do with Him; but being from the North, Pilot had a perfect excuse to say Herod Antipas was the governing authority under whose jurisdiction Jesus more properly fell.

What we see in the story is that Herod only wanted to see Jesus perform some miracle which Antipas had heard tell of for so long. However, Jesus was not there to do anything that might convince a ruler to free Him, and so He would not. This caused Antipas to simply send Jesus back to Pilot. This might seem a bit confusing, but the fact I just pointed to about the territories all being intertwined by that point is why Antipas was close enough to what was going on in Jerusalem to get Jesus to and back from him in short order. Antipas had not really wanted to kill John the Baptist but had made a stupid promise which forced him to. When it came to Jesus, Antipas at one time had thought Jesus to be John resurrected. This alone had to have had some affect on how much Antipas may have wanted to stay out of this whole thing. Exactly what Antipas thought by the time of Jesus' trial is not completely clear. However, because the Romans were the ones with the real power, Antipas had no reason to really fear Jesus and any insurrection He might cause. The idea Jesus was being accused of being or possibly becoming The King of the Jews didn't seem such a threat to Antipas, and I hope our look at this history helps one understand why this was true when just a few decades earlier Antipas' father had gone to great lengths to kill Jesus as just a child!

To jump ahead in our history that much more and understand why the Herodian Dynasty was even considered a dynasty when one sees how short a time they really held any power, we will look at some other Herods who played a role in the New Testament. Maybe this part of the story even helps us see how this dynasty is somewhat connected to the Hasmoneans, for surely it was that connection which brought them to hold some power even in the next generation. Going back to Herodias, we should remember she was the granddaughter of Herod the Great through a father born to Herod and Mariamne I the Hasmonean. This is the line that had not just Jewish blood in it but Hasmonean blood, which is why Herod married into the family to begin with. Well, Herodias had a brother, and his name was the man history came to know as King Herod Agrippa I. This is the man responsible for killing the apostle James the son of Zebedee. He also imprisoned Peter. (Acts 12:1-11) It would be Herod Agrippa I's sons who also ended up with a certain amount of power in the region. Agrippa I's son, Antonius Felix, is the man responsible for leaving Paul in prison. (Acts 24:24-27)

All of this shows how in spite of the fact many of these, whether truly Jewish or non-Jewish, could connect the dots of their ancestry back to the great Macabees, who were supposed to be waiting and ruling with their eyes looking out for the faithful prophet to arise, played a hand in persecuting not just that prophet but The Messiah Himself and those who followed Him! This means that as we look at our question about if the Jews we know today are really the chosen nation in the light of

were they rejected by God, we should see that's not a relevant question. There were many who were connected to things that were supposed to be looking for The Messiah who failed in their mission. The very groups calling themselves the church today are failing, and just as it was prophesied Jesus would be killed during His first coming, this fact about the church is shown in prophecy as well. The world would not be in the shape it is in if the true church was the one gaining ground. Instead of waxing worse and worse, things would be getting better, and in truth there would be no urgent need for God to intervene more directly once again. This should cause individuals to stop and take a serious look at their lives and what they are choosing!

As we have already talked about many times through this series, groups can and will fail, but individuals can and do live for God. We do not have to study the failings of the church today in order to see it in studying the very things God gave us to study about the past. This is why we must keep clear in our minds the fact there is a chosen nation and a chosen people. Many are called and will, in fact, be used of God in one way or another to accomplish God's ultimate will, but in the end we are told few will be chosen. (Matt. 22:1-14) So choose you this day whom you will serve!

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.***

rulers to deal with who existed for the sake of defense and organization of life among specific groups. This is true all the way down to the level of tribes as they usually have a chief of some kind. However, there is a big difference between dealing with those who simply protect and organize a group and those who are kings in that they consider their destiny more than just to rule one specific people. These are the kinds of rulers who are mostly responsible for wars and large amounts of resources being spent on military might, even by those nations who do not wish to start wars.

Just such a king and people had come to live in Gerar, and Abraham knew such a people felt entitled to have what it is they wanted. In truth, there is no telling just how much of the region they already considered theirs in spite of what may have been the reality. This truth may have had a lot to do with why Abraham goes there. He may not have really considered where he had settled his household to be their land, but the king of Gerar probably did. Also like the time Abraham went down into Egypt, Abraham was attempting to protect his household as a whole, not just himself. Now, to see this correctly one should look back on the story of Abraham being the one to go after several kings who had carried Lot and much of everything else away after defeating the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was more than able to protect himself and likely depended on this strength as part of why he did not fear so many of the Canaanites. However, when you go into an area held by an ambitious king and people, it's not that simple.

Settling somewhere and feeling confident you can defend yourself is one thing, but this does not mean you want to march into such a place with a show of force. This has a lot to do with why he makes what seems to so many reading this story such a very bad choice in how to deal with Sarah, which is again as he had done in Egypt. From what Abraham says in verses a bit on down, it would seem the arrangement of telling people Sarah was his sister was not just for Egypt but kind of a standing agreement when Abraham felt it a good idea. This was one of those times, as Abraham simply wanted to go into this region to see it, what kind of people lived there, and the response he might get if any. What is clear is that Abraham was not entirely sure just what kind of people they really were, but he knew enough to try and keep a low profile as he did this and see how much they might just ignore him. This because it could not have been an unknown fact to the king that a man with such a great house had moved into the area just to the south.

In his attempt to keep a low profile, Abraham, once again, says that Sarah is his sister instead of his wife. As we talked about with the Egypt incident, this was not untrue. She was his brother's daughter. His brother had died and she had been mostly raised by Abraham's father. In the way family was looked at and considering the translation issues here, the relationship Abraham actually said Sarah was to him was not a lie nearly as much as we would think it today to do such a thing. While I readily agree Abraham should have made it clear she was his wife, especially since they had been through this before, there is

another difference in this situation. When Abraham went to Egypt, Sarah was a “young” woman. While in her sixties, she was still very beautiful and desirable. Abraham was worried that someone powerful such as Pharaoh would want her for a wife and even be willing to kill him to obtain her. By this situation, Sarah is almost ninety years old. This did not mean she wasn't still beautiful, but Sarah was outside the normal child bearing years even for their day and age. This is why she thought it unbelievable that she would still conceive a child when God said that was what was going to happen.

These facts make it more understandable as to why Abraham thought this time there would be a difference in saying she was his sister. Going in as just a brother and sister traveling the land, again Abraham's hope was that no one of power would be desirous to take her as their wife, and anyone who was interested in her would simply be an older person of the community whom Abraham could turn down if they asked to have Sarah. Now, if this was true the next logical question is, why did he not just say she was his wife to begin with? Abraham was not ignorant of the fact he might be known for who he was. If his reputation preceded him, there may not have been any desire to go to war with Abraham in order to take what he had. However, a wife, much more than a sister, could be taken captive in order to use her as a way to threaten Abraham and gain an upper hand. This was a danger to both Abraham and Sarah.

This might still not make sense in

some people's minds, but in the culture of the day a sister might have been something a man would easily give up and walk away from. We see many times in history where daughters are offered as appeasement without concern for their well-being. This very thing is something Lot attempted with the men of Sodom as a way to keep them from insisting on taking the angels who had come to lead his family out of the cities. (Gen. 19:4-9) However, a wife, even one which is not very loved by the husband, is a point of honor. Allowing someone to take your wife away or harm her would be something requiring a response. Thus, saying she was his sister was the way he felt they could most easily get through this visit without incident. All that being said, we see it did not work! Verse 2 tells us King Abimelech sent for Sarah and took her. This left Abraham in an even worse situation!

We do not know exactly why the king took Sarah, but we do know that he didn't do it to threaten Abraham. This would seem to indicate he sent for Sarah because the exact thing Abraham feared was true. They did know of Abraham's greatness. However in the typical custom of the day, the king wished to make a connection with Abraham through marriage. Now, in no way do I intend to take anything away from Sarah in saying this, but the fact she was well along in years probably has a lot to do with why Abimelech did not touch her right away. He was not taking her as a concubine in the aspect of being a children producing woman, and this leaves the issue to be one of simply wanting to make a connection with Abraham's house. What was Abraham to do then? He could go and tell the king the

truth about her being his wife, and while it might seem he did not need to worry about fearing the king using Sarah to threaten him, now he had to fear it would anger the king to find he had been misinformed in the situation. Again, we see how much even a man as righteous as Abraham can make the same mistake more than once when we choose to take things into our own hands!

Fortunately, God was there to get Abraham out of this predicament. God comes to Abimelech in a dream and warns him that even taking Sarah made him worthy to be a dead man. In this verse we have the confirmation he had not touched Sarah, and Abimelech pleads his case on the basis he did not do this with bad intentions, even pointing out he had been told by Sarah herself she was Abraham's sister! To this, God eases the king's mind by letting Abimelech know He was only giving the king a chance to speak this with his own mouth because God already knew and had even played a part in keeping Abimelech from committing an unforgivable act with Sarah. At first glance we might want to take this as simply the relief that it was all going to turn out fine because no adultery had taken place, but it goes deeper than that. When God came to Abraham at his tent on the way to see Sodom and Gomorrah, He said the time was coming for Sarah to bear the son of promise. Indeed, Sarah was in that time frame where anytime she was to conceive Isaac, and if it had been known that Abimelech had a physical relationship with her there could have been doubt as to if Isaac was really Abraham's son!

This was avoided and would be confirmed by others in that Abimelech

would make this conversation with God widely known among his servants. God tells Abimelech that he was to restore Sarah to Abraham because Abraham was a prophet. God used a term we see translated as "prophet" here because it was a way of letting the king know Abraham was a great man of God being used in God's service, which Abimelech was interfering with by taking Sarah. God makes it clear that even this was a great enough offense that Abraham would have to pray for him. This is another point many may find unfair since it would seem it was Abraham's choice to call her his sister that caused all this. However, Abimelech had just made the argument they were a righteous nation. In this light we see that what God was saying back to the king was, if they were truly as upright as they believed they were they should have recognized Abraham as not just a man with great wealth and power to whom they want to forcefully make a political connection. They should have seen him as the man of God he was and feared doing anything with anything that concerned Abraham without asking him first!

This becomes more vivid if we look at other kings' responses to prophets such as Balak and Balaam. (Num. 22-24) Yes, the king wanted something from the prophet, but even as Balaam did not give him what he wanted, which angered the king, he still feared the prophet enough not to attempt harming him. Even prophets who lived very natural lives without the luxuries of the world were feared by kings who were wise enough to do so. If Abimelech had been truly right in his actions, he would have been in tune with God enough to know Abraham was not just a wealthy stranger in

the king's land. It was this that brought about the need for Abraham to pray for Abimelech! On the other hand, if Abimelech decided to allow this situation to harden his heart and attempted to defy what he was being told and not restore Sarah, he would pay with his life as well as the lives of those around him. Abimelech had opened himself to this by using the word “nation” in describing what was righteous. Thus, if no one had the ability to discern this was a bad move in the first place, standing in defiance against God's instructions for how to correct it was going to come down on more than just the head of the king, it was going to affect his “nation”!

Abimelech wasted no time in following these instructions, as he rose early in the morning and called all his servants before him in order to inform them of what he now knew. It was important no one take any negative action of their own choosing or there would be a price to pay for all of them! Then he calls Abraham and asks him if they had offended him in some way that caused Abraham to intentionally lead them into sinning in this matter. The king wonders if Abraham saw something about them that caused him to intentionally do this. It is here in front of Abimelech that Abraham explains how he feared the people in this land did not know or respect God in a way that would keep them from killing him for his wife. This caused him to use the standard way he had told Sarah they would deal with such a situation. In this Abraham even describes how Sarah was the daughter of his father but not his mother. This is again true in the context that both Sarah's

father and Abraham came from the same father, but they certainly would not have been born of the same mother.

Unlike the end of the Egyptian incident where Abraham was expelled from Egypt, Abimelech shows he is not going to risk making an enemy of Abraham along with The God whom he serves. Thus, he tells Abraham he can dwell anywhere in the king's territory without having to ask the king anything. This brought not a rejection from the land, but a rejection of any close relationship between them. There would simply be this understanding - so to speak. Abimelech was so convinced he was dealing with a man whom he needed to do right by in spite of the fact he may have wanted to blame Abraham for all this, Abimelech gives Abraham gifts in the form of animals and servants. He even makes it a specific point to inform Sarah that he had given her “brother” a thousand pieces of silver. This was because it was traditional to pay the father or other male in the family who had charge over a woman a dowry in order to marry her. The idea something of value was exchanged for a woman was done among equals, but Abimelech had not considered Abraham an equal and originally just taken Sarah. Now he wanted to correct that mistake, and it did not matter that she would not be his, Abimelech desired to be as fully absolved of his part in all this as was possible!

Until next time, Shalom!

Moses specifically warns the nation against repeating what happened as the nation first came into the wilderness and doubted God just because they found no water. (Ex. 17:7) God will always be able to provide, but the nation was going to have to stay in tune with Him by following the commandments God was giving them to live by. This trust had to be in their hearts as they went into the promised land in order to see God drive out before them all those whom He had told them to drive out in order to obtain the land. As generations passed and the younger generation began to question what the commandments God had given the nation were all about and why they followed things other nations did not follow, they were to keep the knowledge alive of how God had first brought the nation out from servitude in Egypt, and in doing so had shown His mighty power. They were to tell how God brought them to this land just as it had been promised to their forefathers, showing the fact they lived in this land was all in God's will and something only God could have brought about. They were to tell their children God set this up so they could observe His commandments, and these ordinances are what keeps the nation on the land and gives the nation its purpose.

Moses then names seven nations which Israel was to destroy once on the other side of Jordan. These Canaanites are the ones whose sins had now come to full, and God was using Israel to wipe them out. (Gen. 15:12-16) This is why Israel is told to show no mercy to these nations, and they certainly were not to intermarry with them.

If Israel was to give their sons the daughters of these people for wives it would only serve as a way to lead their sons into the very sin Israel was to be destroying. This would make Israel a place no purer than any other place in the world, and destroy the blessing God was granting them with in making them a self sufficient nation. If that was to happen, again there would be no reason for Israel's existence. This is also why it was not just the people who were to be destroyed but all these people's cultures, especially their religions. Israel was to wipe clean their places of worship by cutting down the trees used to define their high places, dismantle the altars, and leave no worshiped artifacts, even using fire to completely destroy the graven images. This is because Israel was to be a nation set apart from the things of this world which the everyday believer must endure. Israel's ceremonies and traditions would not need to be debated as to how much or how little pagan or humanistic influence they might contain if they would just follow the Law. This was the amazing opportunity God was giving the nation!

Israel is told God did not choose them because they were the largest and most deserving nation, for in truth, they were a small nation. God was not depending on their strength, He was using them to show the world His. God had promised to give them this land long before they were a nation, which means He could not have chosen them for who they were, but because God was going to make them into what He wanted them to be. This, God did to show them how much He is the only

True God, and The One Who not only keeps His promises but is able to keep them generation after generation across more time than we can fathom. He will bless those who love Him and seek Him, but He also does not fail to punish the wicked. No matter how it may seem to those who look for God to free them from the wicked or how much the sinful believe there is no consequence for their actions, God does not fail to see and remember. Each will be judged according to what they have chosen, and each shall know to Whom they will answer.

The nation needed to be clear on the point that if they kept their end of the covenant God would never fail to do what He had promised. Keeping God's Law would put the nation in a position where it would serve God's purposes to bless them and multiply them. This would be seen in their children, their crops, their animals, and all the things a nation would be blessed to see increase. Because Israel would be in the direct service of showing forth God's plan of salvation, they were to be blessed above all the other nations of the world. It would not be Israel which was unable to continue as a people for lack of being able to bear children. Israel would not experience sickness and plagues. This would serve as a contrast as those things would come upon other nations that chose not to serve The Lord. Israel was slated to destroy all the people who stood in their way, and they were not to be content to simply live among them or those people's ungodly ways would drag Israel down. If Israel ever doubted their ability and strength to destroy a people

God had told them to, they should cast those fears aside remembering how God easily brought them out of Egypt, which was one of the mightiest nations on the face of the earth. God is more than able to do unto any people what He did for Israel in Egypt.

God goes on to make the promise that it was so much about His strength and not theirs that He would destroy any remnant of such people who might be able to hide from Israel. Thus, small groups of rebels who would one day seek to return and regain their place would also not be a threat Israel would have to worry about, as long as they were willing to do the initial work of driving the nations God told them to off the land as God had instructed. In fact, they did not have to worry about doing it all at once, but Israel was to drive out those nations from the land they needed and could care for. Then as Israel grew they could continue to take more and more of the land, gaining the same benefit of having vineyards, orchards, wells, houses, etc. in working order instead of a wilderness ruled by wild animals which would then have to be rebuilt. In order to do this it was really important they continue to remember God is able and willing to keep His promise, because they should make no mistake about it, these nations were to be utterly wiped from existence in the end of it all. Even the existence of their traditions and religions should be detested by Israel and never absorbed.

Israel is then reminded that they stood on the threshold of going into the

promised land, but it was the forty years getting to this point in which God tested them and reproved them to make them ready for this moment. God would not have brought them to this point if they were not prepared to do this, and they should not doubt. God had allowed them to go hungry and thirsty in order to teach them the right way to respond to these things, which was not to complain or doubt God but look to Him in asking for what they needed. By providing manna for them to eat in a wilderness that provided nothing for them, God showed man does not live by bread alone but by every word God speaks! This showed in the physical facts, such as the truth their clothing did not fall apart as it should have under normal circumstances such as these. Their bodies continued to take the punishment of traveling for forty years in a place very inhospitable to life. The bad things that happened to them were something they should be able to understand by looking at the way a good parent corrects their child so they may grow to be productive wise individuals.

This was very important to keep in mind because they were not to be a nation of children but of understanding, so they could reap the benefits of going into a land where there would be plenty to eat and build from the best materials. Israel would lack nothing in this new land, and when they had experienced that, they needed to be able to thank The Lord for all these blessings, using the ordinances God had given them to do so, and not just become spoiled in thinking it was all nothing more than what they deserved or came by the work of their own hands! If they did this they would forget The Lord and all He had

done for them, and God calls upon that day as a witness against them that when they did such a thing The Lord would no longer bless them, but turn against them in much the same way He had destroyed nations before them. It was for disobedience to the ways of God that Israel was being given the task of destroying other nations, and Israel should not think they could afford to become like those nations without suffering the same fate.

Now, as Israel went into the land they needed to expect to see walled cities like they had never seen before. They were going to see people the size of which they had never seen before, but of whom they had heard stories about how impossible it was to defeat. Indeed these were the same things their parents had feared as they first were told to go into the land, and none of this had changed. However, none of this was something they should fear because God was not just going with them but before them. It was He Who would be the consuming fire that would destroy these people others thought could not be defeated much less destroyed. Because of this, the nation also needed to be warned that as this fact becomes obvious they should not think it was their own righteousness which caused God to act on their behalf. It would not be for the righteousness of Israel that God destroyed these people and gave their land to Israel. It would be the sin of these people that caused God to pass judgment upon them. This was something God had known He would do in their time since the time of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and this is why God made the promise of this land to them, long before this generation which now existed in Israel

was born.

God goes on to humble them in reminding them of what a rebellious people they had been the entire time from coming out of Egypt to being where they now stood. Moses tells them how they had made God so angry by doing what they did as he was in the mountain receiving the Law from God that God was determined to destroy them right then and there. After spending forty days and nights with God, and being given two tablets of stone on which God had written the commandments the assembly had heard with their own ears, God suddenly wanted Moses to leave. Because Israel had turned away from God so fast He was determined to destroy them. After doing this, God was going to begin again to build a nation that would serve His purposes, starting with just Moses. Moses tells how he came down out of the mountain to find Israel had not just taken on a false god from another people that had corrupted them, but they had built their own god of gold to worship. This made Moses so upset he broke the stone tablets that were in his hands, and the people witnessed this. Moses tells how he would have to turn back to God for another forty days and nights, fasting in the same way he had before, because he feared God's wrath so greatly upon himself. However, Moses would not have even had this chance if God had not yielded to what Moses begged Him to do, which was to spare the people. Since God was as angry or more so with Aaron as with the people during that time, Moses was all that was left to do such a thing, as he even had to pray for Aaron. Moses reminds them how he took

the false god they had made and burned it to show it was nothing powerful. To magnify the point, Moses also ground it into powder and threw it into the water source Israel needed for drinking.

He reminds them how they had angered God in disobeying at various points, but very much so when God was first desiring to send them up into the promised land from Kadesh-Barnea. There they did not trust The Lord to give them the land. Moses says they have been a rebellious people for as long as he has known them, and yet at the mount, Moses once again fell down before The Lord for forty days and nights and pleaded with God not to destroy the nation whom He had brought out of Egypt with such a mighty hand. Moses pleads for the sake they were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He pleads for God not to look at how stubborn, wicked, and sinful the nation had been in these times, because the nations whom God had brought them out from and around would see that God had destroyed Israel and not understand the real reason why. Moses pleads on the basis Israel was God's inheritance and that's why He had brought them out to begin with. Upon this, God told Moses he would have to cut two stone tablets himself in order to replace the ones God had given him and which Moses had broken. On these, God would, once again, write the words of the Ten Commandments.

Let's stay in God's Word!