

Free - Take One



# Shaqah

שפאקא

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

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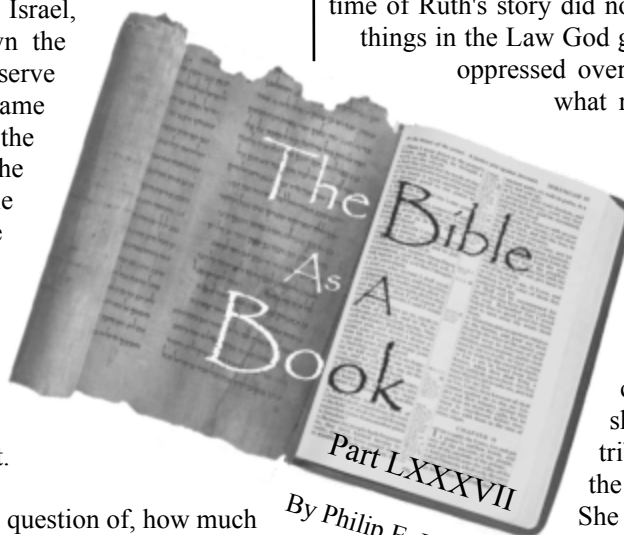
In our last segment we continued the introduction to the Book of Ruth. In that part we had a long discussion about one of the questions we attempt to cover with each book and that was the question of, who wrote the book? That led us to talk mostly about what motives anyone would have to preserve this information and, of course, the person who would appear to have had the most motive was Samuel. We talked about how when he goes to anoint David the next king of Israel, Saul was still sitting on the throne of the nation and that made what God had asked Samuel to do somewhat dangerous in human thinking. For that and other reasons, such as the fact David would be the next king of Israel, Samuel had motive to write down the story we find in Ruth in order to preserve information about where David came from. From there we talked about the placement of this book in the Christian arrangement of the Bible but more importantly where the Jews put it in their arrangement. Thus, by the end of last segment we were only left with one of our main questions about each book to look at when it comes to Ruth, and we will attempt to handle that question in this segment.

The last question left is the question of, how much time does the book cover? As with the question of time between books this question doesn't have as much relevance to seeing the entire timeline the Bible covers and that's because it happens within the time of the Judges. It is by far not just another story that should be told within the narrative of the Book of Judges but because its events take place during Judges, the Book of Ruth doesn't add or take away from the overall length of time the Hebrew Bible covers. All that said, looking at how much time each book covers is not solely about seeing how much time the Bible as a whole covers as much as it is about simply having an understanding of the chronology of events. When it comes to Ruth those events are of particular interest in relationship to David becoming king. In the ways we can, it's always a good thing to have a grasp of where we are in the timeline as well as the time spans of events, and this is due

to the fact it gives us all a better understanding of how people we read about in the Bible are real people who lived just as we live. They lived in a very different time from our modern time of technology but they still had all the same emotions we have as humans. They lived, struggled, and died as we all do whether we like it or not.

God also preserved the story contained in the Book of Ruth because, the book is a beautiful story about people who cared deeply about God and His ways during a time Israel as a whole was failing to serve God as they should. People at the time of Ruth's story did not hold a long-term concern for the things in the Law God gave them and that's why they were oppressed over and over. As we have discussed, what really makes this story amazing is that the main character is a woman who wasn't even an Israelite, yet she wanted with all her heart for The One True God to be her God! A woman not even of Israel cared about God enough to follow her Israelite mother-in-law out of her home country of Moab, to Israel. There she married a prominent man of the tribe of Judah and in so doing became the great grandmother of King David. She did all this against a backdrop of an Israelite nation who had hardly gotten on its feet when it came to being what God wanted them to be before they began to backslide away from God. This makes Ruth a story that clearly shows us it's always up to individuals to serve God!

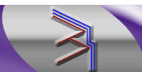
The nation was not experiencing the blessings of God on their land due to their rebellion against Him, and instead they were having things such as famines which is what starts the story we find in Ruth. When it comes to the question about how much time does the Book of Ruth cover, we have touched on all the facts needed to answer this question before now but we want to look at them in light of our final question here. The real chronology can't be nailed down with one hundred percent certainty but we can get very close by using genealogy. This is



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often the common way for figuring out chronology for the Bible. Early on when it comes to the records given near the first of Genesis we can be very accurate about chronology because we are actually told how old someone was before they had their son and then how old that son was before they had the next son in the genealogy. At the time of the flood we are also given specific time periods which help us be precise about most all the facts concerning the flood itself. That kind of precision is not totally possible as the record moves forward because we stop getting the specific ages each person was when they had the next person of the family which carries the story forward. We are given more detailed genealogical information before the flood because we needed a perspective on how long the average person was living before they started having families. Before the flood someone might have lived a couple hundred years before they had children for all we'd know without these details. We just don't relate to what it might be like to think of life as lasting several hundred years!

Now, the cap God put on man's lifespan at the time of the flood helps with what we see post-flood because more and more we can feel confident people lived, married, and had children much like we do today. As man's age settled down to more of what we know on this side of the 120 year age cap, generations, and about how much time they cover on average, gets much easier to know. Thus, we can find the time span of the Book of Ruth first by looking at the generations it takes to walk us back to the first of the book. For that we obviously start with someone we have a good view of their life, and that's David. From there we go back to Jesse, then Obed, and then Boaz. This easily gets us back into the time of the judges and puts the birth of Boaz during the time of the judge named Ehud. Of course, Boaz would have to grow up to be the man Ruth encounters and marries so we know there was some time between there and the events of Ruth.

As we covered in an earlier segment, it makes perfect sense that the famine which takes Naomi and her family to Moab is an event that happens around the time we find Israel had sinned and in doing so rejected God's protection after the death of Ehud. This sinfulness brought Israel under the control of Jabin king of the Canaanites and he oppressed Israel for twenty years. As we talked about when we went through those facts in our overview of Judges, there was not likely an enemy too interested in controlling Israel during the time of a famine or even when it was obvious Israel was on the edge of one, because most of the time what we see enemies of Israel wanting is not so much control over the people as much as they want to use the land as a food source. In some cases we find all an enemy is doing to Israel is raiding the land for that specific purpose. They waited until certain crops were at maturity and they came to steal them whether before, after, or during the harvest process. At times Israel experienced food shortages due to this even when their land was producing just fine. Thus, when the nation's land was on the verge of a famine there was no reason for an outside power to attack the land or want to rule it. Thus, it makes sense that the enemy desiring to take charge was a more internal force; that being the remaining Canaanite power.

If we put all those thoughts together with the genealogical information we can feel quite confident the Book of Ruth starts sometime just after the first of the twenty years Jabin severely oppressed Israel. The land was likely on the verge of famine or already starting into the early stages of the famine when Jabin rose up. He, being a king of people who lived in the land along with Israel, would have suffered the same effects of a coming famine as the people of Israel did. Since the land suffering famine is something God allowed to happen only because Israel's rebellion had pushed Him out of their lives, a superstitious people such as the Canaanites would really have believed the famine was coming because Israel failed to "appease" their God. I put the word appease in quotes because we need to remember that idea is at the heart of the way pagans think, but it's not reality. For pagans, very good or bad things are directly connected to whether you are doing the right things to hold back the wrath of your god(s) or failing in that area. This is such a persuasive thought of people it's how people want to serve God Himself, even when they claim to be Christians. The very basis of the prosperity philosophy comes from this idea. It can be covered over with all kinds of fanciful sounding ideas, but the bottom line is the teaching tells us there are ways to do things right before God and if we do those things correctly we get rewarded. The flip side of that is, if we fail to do those things we get anything from not receiving rewards, to downright punishment of some sort.

No matter if you believe the prosperity doctrine directly or not, it's hard as humans not to think along these lines. It was the basic theology taught at the Tower of Babel and while God confounded our language to keep us from all being trapped in one singular false doctrine, the reason the theology was so effective is because it's an easy punishment and reward system fleshly thought relates to. If you want to set up a religion that teaches people how to live, there is no better way to go about it than to teach, do good and get good, do bad and get bad. This totally appears to explain the bad things that happen in life while at the same time gives hope that if we all do things correctly, there will be a reward the likes of which we haven't ever seen! This was really effective at a time so close to the time of the fall of man and removal from the Tree of Life. At first glance the entire story seems to boil down to, God told Adam and Eve what to do and what not to do. They did the wrong thing and were punished for it. From there you can easily make it appear man went forward uneducated in the things needed to appease God and get back the reward of life eternal. In fact, they continued to anger God until one day He wiped out all humans with a flood, save one family. That leaves you with a perfect excuse to say we need to build a tower and a city and figure out what God wants so we can reap the rewards instead of His anger. This effort is always led by people who actually seek power for themselves, but that along with the fact this is not actually how God works is why God came down to see the tower and city and chose to confound our language in order to keep us from all falling for this theology.

I realize I've caused a question in some people's mind by saying all that because it does, in fact, appear to many that is how God works. The fact this is such a major problem among even those who believe they know God is why I go off into teaching about it on so many occasions. If we understand the

# Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment we covered the birth of Jacob and Esau. In doing that we discussed how there was a technical first born which was Esau but Jacob came literally holding on to his brother's heel. We also talked about the names given to the boys and how the verses move very quickly from their birth to the fact they developed into men who never stopped being at odds with each other. That fact led us to discuss the truth Isaac is said to have "loved" Esau but Rebekah "loved" Jacob. This was not bad parenting on their part but the simple fact each parent knew one of their sons much better than the other. Rebekah had more opportunity to know their indoor home loving son Jacob while Isaac knew Esau their outdoors man better. However, none of that had to do with the story we ended last time in the midst of, and that's the story of how Esau came home one day claiming to be at the point of death for lack of eating and Jacob had a stew prepared. As we talked about, it's hard not to see Esau's actions in this situation as being a bit dramatic because Jacob told Esau he could have some stew if he'd trade it for the birthright and Esau's response was that the birthright would do him no good if he died of hunger! That brought us through Genesis chapter 25 verse 32 and we are ready to begin verse 33 this time.

What we really ended last time talking about was the fact the birthright Jacob wanted was the most valuable thing the family owned! Abraham had passed away, leaving everything of his house to Isaac. Isaac was going to leave it all to Esau, but in spite of all the valuable things that included there was nothing as valuable as the birthright itself! The birthright was to be passed to the son who would be the father of the chosen nation God would form using this family. In spite of Ishmael being the first-born of Abraham and having six more sons after Isaac once Sarah was gone, Abraham made sure the birthright passed to Isaac and Isaac alone. This is because he was the son God had given Abraham for the purpose. In the case of Isaac he had two sons born of his God given wife Rebekah, and on top of that they were twins. This might have made the importance of who received the birthright a little less clear because as far as anyone knew at this point, both sons would go on to be part of what God was forming. Therein lies the point, they didn't know! The possibility still existed that only the son who received the birthright would form the chosen nation, and that point meant a lot to Jacob. Obviously it meant little to Esau.

That brings us to an interesting thing to think about and that's the fact it very well might have been God's will to use both sons to form His chosen nation. To this day we don't know for certain one way or the other; we only know God used Jacob and rejected Esau for what should be obvious reasons. (Rom. 9:13) I've said a lot about God using these two men to represent the fact there is in this world only two camps of people. There are those who seek God and those who do not. However, we have to understand God used these sons to represent that truth because of who they were, not because God forced them to be what they were. None of the truth that they stand as a great

example of how some people choose God and others don't, takes away from the fact God might have wanted to go about forming His nation in a different way had they both desired to serve Him. It's hard to imagine things we've not seen, especially when we've seen what did happen. We tend to just accept what is, and in that way we find ourselves not giving God enough credit for bringing about what we need in spite of our failures!

In this story we see clearly how only one of these sons had a desire to serve God. That's what makes this story so very important and in so many ways one that should hold more weight in our thoughts about what happens later in the story where the birthright is finally given. Here we see in about the greatest way possible how little this birthright meant to Esau. He was not thinking about what God wanted, and we know this for certain because if Esau had believed God would at least use the son who owned the birthright, he'd have known God wouldn't let him die just then. That's what it comes down to. At the best end of things Esau believed he really would die; that God would not sustain him in spite of being the heir to the birthright. At the worst end of it he was being nothing more than dramatic which means he really did agree to give up his birthright just because he was hungry. I can't emphasize enough how much due to this incident the birthright was not stolen by Jacob no matter how wrong we want to say Jacob was for going about getting it the way he did.

Here in verse 33 Jacob understands Esau might not be taking this as seriously as he was. He knows that Esau might later refuse to acknowledge their agreement. That's why we see Jacob ask Esau to swear to him concerning the sale. The verse is clear that Esau swears and so sold the birthright to Jacob. Such a simple point but not one that is taken seriously later on by Esau as he says nothing to his father when Isaac is ready to give the birthright. In teaching that later story I've often heard people accuse Jacob of being a liar. They accuse him and his mother of being deceivers because of what they do at that time, but who really lied and when? Here in verse 33 Jacob asks Esau to be serious about their agreement and, at the very least, Esau says the right words to show he agrees to the terms. It might mean little to us today for a person to promise or swear on something, but in the day and age we are talking about during this story, asking someone to swear was as close to a legal contract as most agreements between people got. Paper or some form of writing material was not common so they couldn't sit down and, "put it in writing." However, Jacob asking Esau to swear was their day's equivalent of saying, "I want that in writing!"

It didn't even matter in the end how much Isaac might have disagreed with this decision, had he known of it. If Isaac's attitude had been that he didn't care what deal Esau had made with Jacob he would only grant the blessing to Esau, it would have been Esau's duty to turn around and give the birthright to Jacob as he had agreed to do. On many levels and in many ways

people being honest about what belonged to who is all that mattered in the end anyway. Isaac could give the birthright to Esau in all the official ways possible but the servants and household acknowledging and respecting the tradition would be important to any son receiving a birthright. Because the birthright traditionally belongs to the first-born the assumption after Isaac's death would be that Esau received it no matter who knew what else. Keeping any such problems from arising in the case of Isaac receiving the birthright from his father, is why Abraham was told to do as Sarah asked and send Hagar and his first-born son Ishmael away. (Gen. 21:1-14) It's also why, in spite of Isaac being older, Abraham sent the six sons of Keturah away. (Gen. 25:1-6) There was to be nothing standing in the way of Isaac being the clear holder of the birthright after Abraham's death. The same needed to be true for Jacob to really go forward and do what God would want him to do with the birthright.

As I mentioned above about how God used these sons to represent the two camps without forcing them or making them be that representation, the same is true in looking at Jacob's life later on. In the end, Esau did not attempt in any way to see Jacob receive the birthright instead of himself. He certainly was not going to confirm to others after their father's death that Jacob actually owned the birthright! On top of that, Esau would be so angry at Jacob for slipping in ahead of him and taking the birthright that Jacob would flee to Mesopotamia for safety. It would be there Jacob would obtain the wives he needed to become the true beginning of the chosen nation by having twelve sons. Due to this, it's easy to think all this happened because God wanted it to happen just that way. However the truth is, God works around our failures. How much failure God has to work around in any individual's life can only be found by knowing what all God wants to accomplish through/with us and how much we fail to listen to or seek God's will in each situation. Jacob might very well have ended up in much the same situation as he did for how to have the sons he did, had he done everything righteously at every step but how different might that have looked. Maybe instead of a story of turmoil, the story of Jacob having the wives he did and the sons he did would be as beautiful as how Isaac got Rebekah.

The end result is that we don't know how God could have brought about the right things to form the chosen nation. We only know how it did happen after all the intentional and unintentional failures of men took place. Only God could possibly work a mighty plan through such complex circumstances, but from the story of creation we know this much, God wanted our lives to be far more peaceful and fulfilling than sin has allowed them to be! We, and our failures to follow God's will, are what make life the hard thing it is. We suffer not just from the direct mistakes that can be contributed to us personally but from the mistakes of all those around us as well as those man has made through history which brought us to the world we know today. If that simple point was understood, or at the very least considered by most people studying the Bible, God's actions and the Bible in general, would be far more easy to understand than most people think it is!

Getting directly to what did happen. Esau did sell his

birthright in this incident and it was dishonest for him to ever attempt to take it in place of Jacob. However, Esau I'm sure felt he had the upper hand in what we just covered about people assuming the first-born would receive the birthright. While we don't have confirmation of it, there's a lot of reason to believe Esau goes forward from this incident with no thought of honoring the agreement he makes here in verse 33. He knows the tradition and there appears to be no one but he and Jacob privy to this agreement. This is an example of how/why agreements of importance were very often made at the gate of the city in front of elders or in front of two or three witnesses if possible. It's good to have other people who are aware of agreements just in case one party doesn't hold up their end or attempts to ignore it. If there is any argument to be made against the parties making a particular agreement, such as the argument many people make about Jacob being in the wrong here by taking advantage of his "starving" brother, those ideas can be pointed out at the time of the agreement. Thus, people being witness to such things can also take away future arguments that the agreement was unfair to begin with.

To be totally honest, I'm sure on many levels Esau wasn't even thinking about the future at this moment. He just wanted the food. While that would seem to boost people's opinion about this being Jacob in the wrong for even asking for the birthright, we see in the verses leading up to this story that Esau was far more a man who lived by his wits and not plans for the future. At the time the birthright didn't mean much to Esau but when the time came for their father to hand out the blessing Esau was going to go ahead and take it. We just don't know if Esau's later actions are that of a man choosing to ignore the agreement he made with his brother on this day or those of a man who didn't even remember what he had agreed to. What we are told in verse 34 is that Jacob held up his end of the bargain. He didn't just give Esau a bowl of stew, he gave him a full meal. In a show of how not near death Esau was, he didn't eat and go lie down for a rest. He ate and drank and went on about his business as usual. Thus, the end of the verse tells us Esau despised his birthright. The original language word we get the word despise from in this verse is a simple basic word that means Esau lessened the value of the birthright with his actions. This is not in the literal sense because its value was/is great, but in his eyes and the eyes of men in general Esau's actions made the birthright appear to be something so meaningless a bowl of stew and some bread was worth more than it was.

As we step into the next verse which is the beginning of the next chapter in Genesis, it serves to be pointed out the only reason we don't go from the story we have been discussing directly to the giving of the birthright before Isaac's death with maybe only a couple details in between is that Isaac's interactions with the Philistines was/is important. If one remembers correctly Abraham had dealings with the Philistines mostly due to their proximity to the area Abraham had sojourned in. Considering how large Abraham's herds and possessions were it's no surprise he needed a lot of space. However, the story is about more than that. Abraham didn't just come into conflict with another family or small group of families, he came into conflict with what was already a nation of people. Just how large the population of the Philistines was we don't know, but they were a large enough group they had

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part LXI

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 continued our rundown of the Roman emperors as we lead our way up to seeing how Rome eventually came to be considered a Christian empire. At the point we made it to last time we found that while history doesn't declare the Roman Empire as ending for quite awhile yet, the empire was failing to even stay together as one solid entity. While this had a lot to do with outside forces putting pressure on the empire, the real problem was that not everyone who was part of the empire was fighting for the survival of the Roman Empire as much as they were fighting to have their own empire. What we found by the end of our last segment is that the empire had divided into three major sections. I say major because who was loyal to who was getting really murky. That aside, in the west a piece of the empire had broken off to form what history would call the Gallic Empire, and a piece in the east had broken off to form what we know as the Palmyrene Empire. Thus, Rome was still the seat of the Roman Empire but it only ruled over what was able to be held together during this time.

Now, in spite of being called empires we should not confuse these other two entities with the empires we have been following which make up the heads the beast of Revelation grew. (Rev. 13:1-4) This is not just due to their size, or lack thereof. Nor does it have to do with their longevity. The issue is always more about the influence any one government entity had on the world. These other "empires," whether small or large, short lived or long, did not exert an influence that changed or shaped the world at large in the way those represented in the beast's heads did. That's what makes words hard to use in explaining what the Bible is trying to show us. This truth is also why God did not use some more historical explanation to show us the truths of how man would form his world. Instead, God used visual aids or what we might call illustrations like the beast and the dragon (which mirrored the beast) to show us the further picture of what He showed us in the Book of Daniel. In Daniel God also used beasts (more individually) to show us the empires of importance. As we come to our time today so many centuries removed from both those prophecies, much of what was shown to us is now history. Thus, we can do studies such as this and talk about the more specific empires and people the illustrations were showing us. However, we must not get lost in the fact men used words such as "empire" to describe many different governing entities which have existed in our history. If we do, we'll find ourselves entangled in the arguments some people like to use when talking about this subject.

What man chose or chooses to call an empire at the time or in later history is irrelevant to the fact there were powers of human ideas and governance that stood out in this world's

history. The Roman Empire is an obvious example of such an entity, but by the time period our study has made it to we see it was losing its once great power very quickly. The empire would find its way back to being one entity in time and that's why history does not consider the empire at its end during this earlier time. However, the stage had been set for Rome to fall, so the fact the empire could be put back together doesn't hold much weight other than to point out it was/is such an obvious example of an influential governing entity. Thus, we continue tracing its "existence" in spite of how much things had changed. Rome stands out as different than the others in the line because it was not ended by force or taken over by the next great entity. In the hope we can see what I mean I'll run it down here as basically as I can. The Tower of Babel was ended by the fact God confounded man's language. This was not just the way to cause the people to walk away from the idea of the beast in the first place, it was/is what has kept any other entity from actually having all the world in its grasp as the tower had.

Man would resurrect the beast and we see that happen with the Assyrians. The Assyrian Empire was not taken down with one decisive assault, but it did lose its power and sway over the world and even its direct territory in a lot of the same basic ways we are seeing happen to the Romans. In the end we don't dribble along still calling the Assyrian Empire an empire as long as it existed in some form like we do the Romans. We don't do this just because we do not have as good a records for the Assyrians as we do the Romans but because the Babylonians rose to be a significant powerhouse in the world! No matter how much the Babylonians did or did not take down the Assyrians by force, their very existence as a rising influence in the world caused the Assyrians to no longer be looked at as an empire; at least one of any consequence. In many ways we see this same fact with the Romans in comparison to what history calls the Persian Empire that kept attacking Rome's eastern side. The Persians had a considerable land mass under their control. They were at points and times a powerful force that won more than one victory against Rome even during the time Rome was at its higher point(s). Yet their influence over the way the world would be shaped and moved forward just didn't matter so much.

Getting back to the Babylonians, they stand as an example of an empire that when it was done, it was done! God worked heavily with the Babylonians and this is in no small part due to the fact they were the empire that was allowed to take Jerusalem under its control. This brought many Jews directly inside the Babylonian Empire and we see that most prominently in the stories told in the Book of Daniel. However, just like the Babylonians were to the Assyrians, there was another power rising in the world that would become the great influence to replace Babylon. Because God had His hand upon His chosen nation so directly involved with all this, God would be the decisive control on exactly when the next switch would take

place. The Medes and Persians were ready to strike, and when the moment came that God was ready to judge the Babylonian king for his refusal to use God as his guide in spite of all He had shown him, God would lift whatever stay He had put between the Babylonians and the Medes and Persians. This is the handwriting on the wall story in Daniel where Daniel interprets for the Babylonian king what God had written, which was the fact the Babylonian Empire would come to an end that very night! (Dan. 5)

This is clearly why we don't see any belaboring of the Babylonian Empire's history. When God allowed the Medes and Persians to take over, Babylon's empire was done. Thus, the Medes and Persian Empire would have its time of influence on this earth, but they too would meet a decisive end. Daniel would see this illustrated in his visions from God. (Dan. 8:1-7) The Tower of Babel effect would do its job, and as the Medes and Persians drove ahead attempting to make their empire the true world empire, they angered other people greatly! Not the least of these were the Greeks, and that's what brought Alexander the Great upon them. This brought a swift end to the Medes and Persians Empire so just like the Babylonians, there is no drawn out history to cover. When it comes to the Greeks it's hard to put a period on their empire. Very quickly after coming to power Alexander died and his empire was divided. Of course, it was still legitimate to call it an empire because they were all out to conquer the world with Greek ideas, language, etc. We have talked about this extensively at times during this and other studies, but the bottom line is that the Greeks did not represent so much a centralized power or maybe the better word is, "force." This is because their attempt to rule the world was based on culture and the ability to overturn the Tower of Babel effect by reuniting the world under one set of thoughts.

This, of course, was not going to work but in many ways I never cease to be amazed at how close they came! The transition between the Greeks to the Romans is more subtle but Rome did have its major wars with the Greeks. These are common to study in especially college level history courses. In ways these battles between the two powers brings to mind the word, "epic"! However, as it relates to our point here, this is the reason there is not some extensive and long drawn out history to study when it comes to the Greek Empire. Rome won out in the end and as much as the Greek cultural influence remained strong, the Romans brought force back to the idea of being in power! In any case, the historical study (when it comes to empires) easily shifts to the Romans. This takes us through Rome's years of great power and strength but it continues all the way down to those years its power began to wane. In truth, that might be an understatement because no other empire in the line was allowed to really fall off in strength the way Roman did because there was someone else at their doorstep ready to take the world empire title from them.

This is why we have the history we are studying now and have been for several segments. As a group, the world could not settle on who was to be the great centralizing power but it didn't matter because there had always been a great power who wanted the title. The world sat back and watched these transitions take place and then followed or tolerated the winners until the sequence took place again. Now here we are with a

Roman Empire that was threatened on all sides both from the outside as well as the inside. Yet none of these powers were a major threat to overthrow the entirety of the Roman Empire or chew it up even in small chunks to eventually take its place. The world was in a quandary. It might sound silly to put it that way but let's face it, for generation upon generation at this point there had always been a major empire exhorting power over the world. In simple terms, the world had gotten use to this arrangement and they were not quite sure what to do without it. Sure there were people who wanted to rule for themselves over their piece of the pie, but when you look at the facts there just isn't an enthusiasm on the part of the world to see the Romans totally disappear since along with them would vanish the existence of there being one great power and centralizing influence. No one would have put it in these terms but in an unconscious way (that is if you can attribute a consciousness to the world at large), the world was admitting they wanted to get back what was lost at the Tower of Babel.

They thought this string of empires was leading its way to that end but with Rome crumbling and no one to take its place, the world had the evidence right in front of them that, that is not what was happening! A great culture and power is not as easy to come by as these empires had made it seem. Even today we can go to museums and see the great artifacts of the Assyrians, and we're not talking about some everyday trinkets that simply show us the culture existed. We are talking about great statues and writings along with much more that clearly show us what a great influence they were in the world of their day. Babylon is much the same. From the hard artifacts to the incredible lore of these people, Babylon has long fired the imagination of men about what it meant/means to truly sit on the top of the world! This is exactly what God showed the Babylonian king in his dream that could not be interpreted, nor even clearly remembered, by the king himself or anyone until Daniel was brought in. Daniel would remind the king of his dream about a statue made of various metals and the head of that statue was made of gold. Interpreting what God meant by this illustration Daniel declares to the king of Babylon, "...Thou art this head of gold." Daniel 2:38 When we get to the Medes and Persians the lines between them and the Babylonians is more blurred than it is between the Assyrians and the Babylonians, but they too left history and artifacts we revere to this very day. People have all but forgotten who the Medes were as a people, but the name "Persians" (no matter what people it's credited to) is again something looked at as important and even exotic!

Of course, there is almost no reason to even bring the Greeks into this particular subject we're discussing right now; at least not from the standpoint of needing to point out what they left behind. As many artifacts in museums as can be found reminding us of their greatness, they all pale in comparison to the fact the culture they seared into the consciousness of the world is something almost, if not literally, worshiped even well over two thousand years from the time of their greatness as an empire. Even as great as the Romans were, they could not shake the influence of the Greek culture and were in such awe from the very start they had to incorporate it into their culture as much as possible without giving up their own. Again, this is why we talk about the Greco-Roman culture. Yes, the Romans had a culture but it was so heavily influenced by the Greeks it would be

refusing to give credit where credit is due if we simply referred to it as the Roman culture when we talk about what still influences us today. These truths are why God showed us in Revelation a beast with the seven heads and how Satan worked right alongside man in all this, being illustrated as a dragon with seven heads. (Rev. 12:1-5) While the great empires did not lead to an ultimate world centralization but instead died out with the last sparks and sputtering that was the Roman Empire, we don't really have the beast today. What we have is a shadow or an impression of the beast that was. Thus, we know it was and now it is not, but that said, it really does remain with us and so it is. That's exactly what we are told in Revelation. (Rev. 17:7-11) The world now follows after the idea without it existing in any form of reality at this time. We do this in the hope one day we can accomplish what has never fully been accomplished since the Tower of Babel.

Why is all this important? Because as we study this part of the Roman Empire's history where we still say the empire exists as an empire, students of the Bible need to open their eyes and see how much the world longed for this to work. We need to see how much the world was not ready to give up on the dream and this is what makes the actions of God justified and make total sense! Not just what He has done but what He will do. False prophecy teachers for decades now have gotten away with blabbing on and on about what will happen during a so called tribulation period just before Christ's second appearing on this earth because Christians don't understand what we're covering right now. They've been able to feed the church the lie that man will accomplish a one world power led by an actual physical human infused with the power of Satan. They teach these falsehoods and then frame the debate about when Christ will return within the context of them. In other words, will Jesus come before, after, or sometime in the midst of this so called "tribulation"? Once you get to lay out all that false teaching it's more than acceptable to teach totally false and misleading ideas about the Second Coming of Christ. The biggest of these is the false idea Jesus is not coming back as the angels told Jesus' disciples who saw Him ascend back to The Father after walking this earth for many days post-resurrection.

The angels simply ask the disciples why they stood there staring up into the heavens because Jesus would one day return in much the same way they had seen Him go. (Acts 1:9-11) Now, Jesus had been walking on this earth physically. This means when He goes up onto the Mount of Olives and begins to ascend into heaven His feet left the ground. The angels were not here to confuse but to help the disciples, including those of us so far removed by time from that event. Jesus will return. It's not complex. To interpret the Second Coming of Christ as being nothing more than a resurrection of the dead event (called the rapture) contradicts what the angels said! If Jesus' return is going to be much like the way He left, then just as he ascended up into heaven, we wait to see Him descend back to this earth; all the way back to this earth! In short, He will put His feet on the ground once again and there is no reason but the false teachings of, at best confused preachers and at worse those who intentionally attempt to mislead, to believe Jesus second coming will be anything but the event we are told of by Jesus Himself and told even more details about in the Book of Revelation. In that event Jesus is seen coming in the clouds

followed by a great army. (Matt. 24:29-31, Rev. 19:6-20:6) The coming is Him simply coming down from above (as we physically understand it), and being seen means He does not do some magical vanishing act of all the "Christians" without being seen and leave the world to wonder what happened to all those people who are now "missing."

You see when you get the first basic facts all messed up and turned every which way, it's easy to build up around it an entire false narrative. After this is accomplished, and believe me it has been accomplished, it leaves this view that says if anyone contradicts that narrative (for example, teaching the simplicity of the truth), they have a mountain of "facts" to explain away before they should be believed. This is why it's so very important we understand the Bible for ourselves and not just think we know it because of what we have been told. It's equally important we don't try to make the Bible fit the narrative we believe to be true or want to be true. This is why I point out a simple fact like that of Jesus' feet were on the ground before He ascended back to The Father is important. When the angels say He will come back in like manner, there's no reason to doubt He will set His feet on the ground once again. You can believe that's a weak argument when put up against the great big elephant of a narrative about a tribulation, rapture, anti-Christ, etc. but if you can understand the narrative is built by the spirit of anti-Christ that has been working in this world since almost the time of Christ's ascension you realize there's no argument to be had. (1 Jn. 4:1-6) Take what the Bible says for what the Bible says and throw all the fanciful stories in the trash can!

The amazing part of it all is that Jesus came to make it so simple for us to understand and yet we're so afraid of the Devil we gladly run right into his web of deceit because we believe it offers a more full explanation of what just has to be a very complex thing! Can it not be so simple that Jesus came to give His life to live among us so we'd have God in the flesh right here with us on earth? Surely His death was not just because this sinful world was so contrary to His righteousness it desired to kill Him? No, that would mean it's totally our fault as humans Jesus isn't still physically walking with us to this day! That can't be right, it has to be that God planned for Jesus to die so His blood could wash away our sins, right? You see, the false narrative starts far earlier on in our minds than almost anyone realizes. That's the false foundation we build on. We don't understand that during the time period of the last empire that should and did show us the beast would never work, God came to us in the flesh as a man. We could have accepted Him as our world leader and with His leadership this world would have known greater peace than it had known since before man took of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is why we talk about Jesus' birth as being a gift from God; the greatest gift! It's why the angels told the shepherds they brought good tidings of great joy which would be to all people! (Luke 2:8-14) The world was given an opportunity it had never seen before!

However, it was not to be. We don't want God, even if He's willing to live among us as a man. The very fact God was here in the flesh was considered such a threat to man's power on this earth, in spite of the fact Jesus showed no sign He would force His way into the rulership position, man had Him killed. We don't want to believe that. We don't want to admit the sin we

have all allowed in our hearts which causes us to fall short of the glory of God would be that selfish. (Rom. 3:23) Nonetheless, it's true and that's why we refused to give Jesus not just the seat of the world's leadership but of any leadership in this world. He would not even be allowed to simply walk as a man using His time to teach and care for those who did believe in Him and accept His guidance. God's physical presence was too big a temptation to be rid of this God who we've been unable to get completely out of our world's affairs since day one. This is where it went off the rails for Satan. As long as Jesus was here in the flesh Satan could tempt Him as he tempts us. Maybe, just maybe, Satan could get Jesus to slip and that, and only that, would be a way to overcome God. Take away His perfection and the righteous judgment only God holds in His hand and is obligated to execute upon everyone who has ever lived goes away.

Satan would have loved to have had year after year, decade after decade, to tempt God in the flesh until the goal was reached, and while I don't believe for a second he could have ever accomplished his goal, sinful man wouldn't even give him the chance. We, not Satan, would falsely accuse Jesus of crimes against the state which He was not guilty of. We would push through many obstacles to make those charges stick. We would cry for Jesus' crucifixion and all Satan could do is stand by and shake his head at the stupidity of it all. If there was anything to be gained by Jesus' death it was to keep Him from one day being accepted as the leader with the solutions to all our problems, but Satan had to know killing Jesus wouldn't stop God from one day showing us the advantages that holds for us anyway. We would kill Christ and He would willingly let us; showing us how much He was not here to force us to accept Him, but Jesus never fell from being perfect. He never stumbled even just a little. His perfection allowed Him to do just what Satan knew He'd do. Jesus just got up and walked right out of the grave! To allow us more time to understand what we had done and also to give us time to try some more of our own flawed ways, Jesus would not remain on this earth after He arose. Man made a judgment call in killing Him. He wouldn't stay dead but God would respect our choice. Thus, Jesus would return to The Father leaving behind a promise all those who believe upon Him could hold in their hearts. When the time is right, Jesus will return!

The important part of the story we really don't get at this point in what the Bible is showing us, is the fact His reason for returning when He does is based on a promise God made at the time of the flood. God said it was not worth destroying His creation in any way like He had with the flood of Noah's day. Man simply is not worth that. (Gen. 8:20-22) Now there's a sobering thought! God has kept that promise and that's why He has done all we have seen Him do to intervene and keep us from getting back to that point where the end of all flesh comes before God. (Gen. 6:5-13) The confounding of our language; the forming of the chosen nation; the committing to that nation His oracles; and the coming of The Messiah are all things God has done to slow us from destroying ourselves. However, God can only do so much when it comes to stop gap measures. We have refused too much of God's guidance for the days of Noah not to come again. So what is God to do with us? He can't break His promise and destroy this world as a way to wipe out sinful men

once again. Thus, you can take all those false teachings about a tribulation where God beats up on us for some seven years and toss them in the, "not supported by the Bible" pile. The tribulation that will come, and already by our time is, is of our own making. Oh, I can't tell you how badly I wish people who call themselves Christians could get that point through their heads!

If God lets us continue we will bring the end to all flesh and do it by destroying our world even more completely than the flood did. If we were not worth destroying creation over and over to give us a fresh start, why would God stand by and allow us to annihilate it? Especially considering when we do it, it certainly will lead to our total destruction, not a fresh start of any kind! The answer is, God won't stand by. Just as He has not been standing by, when we get to as it was in the days of Noah and something just has to be done, that's when Jesus will physically come back to this earth to forcefully do what He offered us the first time around. God will at that point be fully justified to do such a thing. If man wouldn't accept Jesus at the point He offered Himself the first time, men in the same state as they were at the time of Noah, will do no better! By the point Jesus splits the eastern sky and returns in like manner as His disciples seen Him go almost two thousand years ago, there will be only two choices. One, God can bring an end to all that we know. Two, Jesus can give us what we have wanted for so long now and that is a totally centralized power from which all the world can and will be governed.

What the Bible clearly shows us is that God takes option two. It's the entire reason God told us Jesus will return to walk with us as a man once again. Because He has literally walked away from death once He will not be mortal and thus, vulnerable in any physical way this second time. Because it will be as it was in the days of Noah, there's no great expectation that a multitude of any number will gather to Him immediately and be on His side. So how will He rule using the general principles a human government is able to rule? He will resurrect all those who've walked in faith with Him from all time periods of earth's history starting from the creation and including those few still alive and remaining at the moment of His return. This resurrection and "catching away" of any that are at that time alive and remaining people of faith, is what is being described in the verses false teaching uses to define, "The Rapture." Man will get the centralized world government he so greatly longs for but it won't be some anti-Christ at its head, it will be the actual Christ! Be careful what you believe in or you might just find yourself on the wrong side when that day comes.

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**

more than some tribal counsel to make decisions for them, they had a king. In spite of being such a national group, the story about Abraham's dealings with them makes it pretty clear he was respected as a force by the Philistines rather than just some single family they could run over. This is why the Philistine king wanted to make an agreement with Abraham that they would deal well with each other. (Gen. 21:22-32) This very well may have been an agreement the king had no intentions of upholding should it serve him not to at some point, but the king's desire to make such an agreement shows the Philistines understood Abraham was a power to be reckoned with.

This was certainly the case as we look at the story of the kings from the northeast who came into Canaan and attacked the land taking several prisoners to no doubt use as slaves. (Gen. 14) One of those prisoners was Abraham's nephew Lot, and the entire conglomerate of kings in Canaan seemed helpless to do anything about it. Abraham showed he was not! He went after the invading kings, defeated them, and not only recovered the prisoners but all the wealth they had stolen as well. Now, it's hard to say but I doubt very much the Philistines were as powerful a people at the time as these kings that came from the northeast. If Abraham could defeat them using only his household men to do so, the Philistines would be in big trouble should they get on Abraham's bad side. In any case, the agreement Abraham and the Philistines had was simply that they would not treat each other unfairly. As one thinks upon the conflict that continues between the state of Israel and the Palestinians one should keep this in mind. Let's be clear, the people known as the Palestinians today are not the descendants of the Philistines of the Bible. They only hold that name because the Romans, in an attempt to wipe the Jew's claim to the promised land from the collective memory of the world, named Canaan "Palestine." In other words, the Romans reached back to a people they knew from history had been important in the region and used their name to say the land did not belong to the Jews as God's Word clearly shows us it does.

People who would filter into the land, many of them of Arab decent, during the time God allowed the Jews to be largely off the promised land took on this name in more modern times for the same reason. Borrowing from the propaganda the Romans employed long before, the non-Jewish people living on the promised land found it convenient to take on the Palestinian name. This was an attempt to connect them all the way back to the people Abraham, Isaac, and later on the entire chosen nation had dealings with before the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian displacement of all the more native people of the region. It's a great example of a lie being drug on for such a long period of time, people believe there is evidence in the past which proves the lie true. Case in point, I have seen people show very old maps that predate the modern existence of the state of Israel to show the promise land is listed as "Palestine." People attempt to use that as proof the Palestinians have a more ancient claim on the land than the Jews do. If it wasn't so serious it'd be almost laughable that people point to ancient propaganda as modern day "proof" the same propaganda must be true today. The truth is, if the Philistines survived to still be a people by the time of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, and mind you there is little to no evidence they did, they go down in the

history books as another people the Assyrian and Babylonian displacements of people wiped out.

Of all the powerful people who existed around the chosen nation there is no evidence any of them survived as a recognizable people past the time of the Babylonians, with the slight exception of the Edomites, and even that has some shaky ground under it. The Jews, on the other hand, not only survived but were specifically called by the empire's king to gather together and return to their land. This is why we have the books of Ezra and Nehemiah; books which the Jews see as one book. From there we can continue to trace the Jews through the time of the Greeks, which is where we find the account of why Hanukkah is celebrated. From there we come to the time of the Romans and we can follow the persecution of the Jews which caused many of them to flee the promised land to many places in the world, not the least of which was Europe. As much as it is true the promised land was never totally devoid of a Jewish presence, the trend of the Jews fleeing their land turning around and becoming the place the Jews fled to really picks up after the Holocaust carried out by the Nazis during World War II. Because God's nation has acted, since their beginnings, as a lightning rod for the world's hatred of God in our affairs, Israel has been and continues to be discriminated against in every way this world can think to inflict upon them. That's where and why the Romans and the powers that be following the Romans attempted to rename the entire promised land as if it had been the land of the Philistines when in fact the Philistines even at their height only lived on a small portion of the far south end along the sea coast.

That is why people who by their nature are very nomadic roamed the promised land during the time the Jewish population was sparse and in the end these people took on the name "Palestinian." In fact, if you really dig into it there isn't much evidence the people themselves originally took on the name as much as it was more something thrust upon them as a way to make them seem as if they were the more indigenous people. Those people have long since found the political advantages they gain by embracing this name, but none of that changes the fact there are no descendants of the Philistines in existence today. If any group believes they can actually trace their heritage back to the Philistines it's not a large national group as the Jews remain. The real point in all this is that no matter what is or is not true about the people today fighting to see the Jews removed from the promised land, they have no right to the land. If, in fact (and it is a fact), they are not the Philistines of the ancient past, they have no ancient claim on the land that comes anywhere close to that of the Jews. On the flip side of things, if they actually could be proven to be the Philistines of old, those people had an agreement to get along with the Jews; an agreement that dates all the way back to the time of Abraham. That agreement should be considered in spite of the history we see in the Bible of it being broken over and over by the Philistines. In any case, God certainly is not going to bless them by giving them the land.

As Bible believing people, there is just no justifiable argument to be made that the Jews don't have the right to live on their ancient land. The Jews are not the ones who want war, and while they have taken steps to ensure the state of Israel remains

primarily a state for the Jewish people, they have no problem with living side by side with those non-Jewish people who live there as long as they don't believe they are above the laws of the land. From the very first votes of powerful nations which officially were to form the modern Jewish state, the Jews have taken what was given to them while the other side has immediately attacked for no greater reason than the fact they don't want to live with or beside Jews. The Jews have gained more control over more and more of the land through the years because the attacking forces have always lost to the Jews in the end. The world has kicked at the Jews constantly as if they are doing something wrong by governing this land, and the whole time the other side has proven over and over they have no ability to govern it themselves. None of it makes any logical sense. So should we feel sorry for the Palestinian people? Some of them yes, are innocent who have been born into a political nightmare, but the real evil in the situation is not Israel, it's the wider world who themselves don't want real peace in the Middle East if it has to include the Jewish people, and they will continue to use the Palestinians as a weapon to vilify God's chosen nation every chance they get!

God knew what modern events would hold and that's part of why the story we are told in Genesis chapter 26 was preserved for us to read. It is important because it tells of another interaction between Israel's forefathers and the Philistines. Interestingly enough, this story has striking similarities to the story of the time Abraham and Sarah came to live close to the Philistines very early on. (Gen. 20) However, no matter what we take from these stories the really important point is that God showed both the Philistines as well as those of us reading these stories well over three thousand years later, the Philistines had no right to disrupt God's plans to form and have a chosen nation on this earth! In spite of the propaganda that the so called church is responsible for which attempts to tell us the chosen nation, if not the entirety of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is nothing more than history with no real sway on our time, God will continue to use His chosen nation. I point out all the time the words of Jesus Himself when He told us even the smallest letters of the Hebrew Bible will not pass away until all things be fulfilled, and why? (Matt. 5:17-18) Because the New Testament is nothing more than a continuance of God working among men; the view of which Jesus' work made even easier to see and understand. Jesus was telling us God will continue to use His chosen nation for the purposes they were formed for and neither what falsely calls itself the church or what is the actual church can take the place of the chosen nation! Thus, when we read stories such as the one we are about to embark upon and see how God punished the Philistines for making a mistake in dealing with Israel's forefathers, with no regard for what part the forefathers could possibly be blamed for the errors, we should be left with no doubts as to what side we should be on when it comes to the modern conflicts Israel faces!

We are told in verse 1 of chapter 26 that there was a famine in the land of Canaan and this was not the same famine Abraham faced in his day. This is specifically pointed out for a couple predominate reasons. First, there is the fact God wants

us to be clear the promised land did not suffer a famine so long that the same famine Abraham had to survive was still afflicting Isaac and his family decades later. The second point, and probably the more important point as we read this for the history it is, is that God wants us to be clear this is not a mistaken repeating of the story of Abraham and Sarah. The son (Isaac) goes through such a similar situation with the Philistines as his father (Abraham), it would be easy for us today to think this story gets told with the claim it was the father in some cases and the son in other cases, but in actuality it only happened once and we don't know which telling is correct. The opening verse clears up any such thoughts we might have. That's what I so love about these little details in the Bible. God doesn't just put them in there for those of us who pay attention to pickup on and glean the importance of them, such details are proof God prepared His Word to be read and understood by you and me!

We are so very far removed from this story, not just in time but by culture and blood. If you're not a Jew, these are not the stories of your ancestry, at least not on a human level, yet God wants us to be clear on the facts even today, but why? Why does a simple story of Isaac's journey in the promised land long before it was taken and settled on by the full chosen nation matter so much to use today? If you believe what a lot of people claiming to be Christians believe it doesn't, and that's because they have been falsely taught Jesus mostly did away with the importance of the Hebrew Bible other than the moral tales it contains. However, the reason people want to believe this, even when they call themselves Christians, is because they don't want to trace our heritage to the roots of the Jewish nation. Instead, people claiming Christianity act like the world and don't want to stand side by side with the Jews through both the good and in particular the bad. We want to be the prosperous replacement of the chosen nation who only traces its heritage back to the apostolic age!

It goes without saying that a large portion of the church is not composed of people who would identify as related to the Jews through blood, yet as true believers, we are related by more than blood! Also, if you read what I write on a regular basis you just know I have to bring up the Tower of Babel, so here it is. Mankind only split into what it sees as separate people when the confounding of our language caused us not to be all coerced into pulling in the wrong direction against God. However, the truth remains we are all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. The human family was even bottlenecked down to one family again at the time of the flood. That family is only more diverse in its blood than being just that of Noah and his wife because their three sons had wives who came into the ark with them. Like it or not, we are all one people. We are all created by God. That means the only thing that matters is if you're in the camp that serves God or not. The chosen nation was intended to represent that camp of God-fearing people in a very physical way. If you serve God you are adopted into that reality. If we claim to believe the Word of God, we should think about that as we listen to what the world has to say about God's chosen nation!

Until next time, Shalom!

## The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

facts right in front of us in the Word of God we should see the differences between the theology of punishment/reward and the faith God has been trying to lead us to from the start. The One True God is a God of love. He has given us a chance when we deserved nothing but immediate death. He has continued to reach for us even when we are totally ignoring Him; all so that if we actually do turn to look for/to Him, He's right there waiting. That's not a punishment/reward system. That's a truth and consequences system. The truth is, we were built to commune with God. That communing would/will in time teach us things we need to know in order to grow into the people God wants us to be. Along the road of God offering this to all mankind we have done things that have made the road much harder than it ever should have been.

This is seen clearly in the fact we started in innocents; living physically in a world more than able to provide for us the basics we needed. That's to point out food was readily available and the world was not the inhospitable place it has grown more and more to be. We were even placed in a garden where God's presence could always be reached in a tangible way and which contained a tree whose fruit could sustain our physical existence forever! It's not punishment/reward that we can't get back to that place and that tree. It was in our own best interest that once we obtain the knowledge of good and evil without waiting upon The Lord, we not have the Tree of Life, and with the lose of the tree came the lose of the garden. This is not something we can get back no matter what we do in the here and now. When it comes to this life, the Tree of Life is just not something we can reach for. Punishment and reward says when you do wrong you get punished. Like, don't do your chores and don't get a cookie but the cookie isn't gone. The cookie was and still is the reward we can have if/when we do our chores. This is exactly how we train animals because fleshly things are all they know. However, for us the Tree of Life was something we had access to as long as we didn't take on the knowledge of good and evil the other tree God gave us access to could give. Once we did take it, we lost access to the Tree of Life and there's no reversing that in this universe. So the question is, do we still want what God was offering before we took of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? If your answer is yes, the good news is, God is still offering that!

That first step was truly the most obvious step down from what was to what is, but by far it is not the only step we as humans have taken. Talk about a subject an entire book could be written on! We keep going down hill but God keeps offering us what He created us for. What most Christians would argue is the "reward" for accepting what God's offering is a new life in heaven. While we can look at it just that childlike, the higher understanding we need to have in order for God's actions along the way of this human journey to make sense (both for us as humanity as well as us personally) is that getting to live eternally with God is simply how the system was built to work when God is Who we truly desire to be with. It's why we were given the Tree of Life in the first place. Losing that tree was a consequence of how we chose to live this life which in turn means we will all face the consequence of dying one day no matter what we choose now. If living here, in this physical universe, exploring and finding all God made here is something

you'd like, it's not going to happen. We live too short a time here, and if you argue most people who claim to be Christians don't live wanting this life, I would ask you to consider that thought again. Evidence abounds that each of us have things we wish we could hold onto. Those things are not always bad things like the sins of this life but very "human" things like the desire not to leave one's family.

I could carry that forward a lot more but the fact is, we live in a truth/consequence system not a punishment/reward one. In spite of that many people go forward believing that's incorrect or that there isn't a difference, but there is, and the difference is like day and night! How it relates to what we are covering here is that the Canaanites likely believed the Israelites were being punished by their God for not appeasing Him and (this is where one of the real glaring differences in how knowing or not knowing the truth affects your thinking) if they took charge they could serve their gods "correctly" and get a better result! The end result is, it didn't work because a famine came and got so bad in the land, people like Elimelech and his wife Naomi began leaving the land in search of better circumstances. As much as this would be drastic times calling for drastic measures for anyone of any nation, such a thing is clearly outside anything people of Israel should have done. This wasn't just their homeland; a place their forefathers and current young men of the nation had bled and died to gain and defend. This was the land God had promised, given to them, and told them was a land flowing with milk and honey. To leave it was not just to look for better circumstances, it was to abandon the promises of God!

I want to emphasize that last point because it really brings light to the truth it was Ruth's faith this story is about. Again I bring up, there were two daughters-in-law with Naomi when she turned to go back to what remained of her family in Israel. One of them easily turned back to her home country from following Naomi when the logic of life being too short was laid out to them by Naomi. Only Ruth said, I don't care why you're returning and I don't care what problems lay in front of us, let the God of Israel be my God! On a much, much smaller scale this is like the fact God looked at the world and determined the end of all flesh had come before Him, but Noah found grace in the eyes of The Lord. (Gen. 6:6-8) The facts of Ruth's story are so inspiring I can't stop talking about them long enough to answer our question so let me attempt to get back to that. It was sometime after Jabin (the king of the Canaanites) had taken control of Israel that things got even more desperate feeling for people in the land. A famine was bad enough for Israel but the fact they're not serving God and coming under His protection had caused them to be oppressed by Canaanites of all people made it so much worse! Elimelech would take his wife and two sons to go into the territory of an enemy but a people who in spite of that truth were more family than the Canaanites because Moab was birthed of Abraham's nephew Lot. (Gen. 19:36-37)

As we go into an overview of the book we will run down all the details of what happened next, but when it came down to Naomi being left with only the two women of Moab her sons had taken for wives, it seemed clear the plan of coming to Moab had failed. Due to this, as well as the fact Naomi had

heard God once again caused the land of Israel to bloom, Naomi would pack up to go home. From the wording in the Book of Ruth it would appear this family's downfall in the land of Moab happened quite quickly. Elimelech it would seem didn't live long after they got to Moab, and with their father gone I'm sure there was an urgency for the two sons to take wives and carry on their father's name. This they did, but it would seem they did not live long after doing so for there is no mention of any children being born to either of them. They must not have died too far apart from each other for this to be true, especially considering the fact God's Law and thus the tradition of Israelites was to take your brother's wife if he died having no children and raise up children in his name. If this tradition was followed by the brother who outlasted the other, that is if they didn't both die in the same circumstance and time, there was obviously no time to have children by either wife before he died as well. This we know because, the point that Naomi was left without grandchildren until Ruth gives birth to Obed is made clear by the closing part of the Book of Ruth.

What this all means is that the time spent in Moab was not a years upon years condition. I will add in support of that point the fact there was no sadness by anyone in Moab, if even recognition, that Naomi was leaving. There's nothing in the story to indicate anyone, such as neighbors and/or friends hated or loved to see Naomi go. There isn't even an indication that this happened for the sake of the two daughters-in-law in spite of them being native daughters of Moab. Naomi and her family were there so short a period of time and made so little impact on anyone, packing up and leaving was something no one noticed for any reason. Thus, it's safe to assume the time spent in Moab was not more than five years at most. Even if Elimelech and Naomi had come here right at the first of the time Jabin had begun to oppress Israel, that oppression only lasted twenty years. I use the word "only" there to point out it was not a generation long oppression by any means. That means when Israel begins to turn and cry out to God for help, it would be then, and only then, the land would begin to see healing. Not only was that the promise of God but in light of the way pagans would quickly jump on such an event to say their gods had started to make things better, God was not going to heal the land for any reason other than His mercy on those who cried out to him. (II Chron. 7:14, I Jn 1:9)

Of course, land returning to fruitfulness is not something that happens overnight. Even if God immediately turned the land around, crops take time to grow. The news Naomi was hearing was that of recovery. The first of the fruits and field crops of value which showed the famine was ending were growing and the news of that hope was spreading even to places like Moab; if for no other reason than the fact Israel's enemies were keen on looking for opportunity to steal what Israel had if they could at all. Thus, land/famine recovery was coming about in Israel but this does not mean the twenty years of oppression was over, it just marks the fact enough of Israel begins to turn to God that God begins to move on the land. The freedom from the Canaanite king would be something God would have to send a judge to handle as had been the case many

times. Rare was the time Israel believed in God as a whole so that they as a nation could/would rise up needing little more than the encouragement of a prophet that God would give them the victory. The freedom from the Canaanite king and his powerful army would come at the hands of the female judge Deborah. There would be an army in Israel to stand in opposition to the Canaanite king's army during these events, but the real key victory would be gained by another woman named Jael who killed the Canaanite general really responsible for holding onto the power. The Canaanites' twenty year oppression of Israel would end with this general's death bringing much more hopeful times to Israel all around!

This much more hopeful state is also found at the end of the Book of Ruth. The main cause of that hopefulness was a combination of Ruth's marriage to Boaz and the birth of their first-born son Obed. We read this story today and see that hopefulness in light of the fact Obed was David's grandfather, but at the time of the story itself the real joy is just in the fact Naomi's family would not die! Ruth is so giving in this for she is more joyful for Naomi than she is for herself and her husband. Again, we can't say for sure the events of Obed's birth and Israel's freedom from the Canaanites came at or around the same time, but there is a spirit to the way the Book of Ruth is written that indicates there was hopefulness for the nation all around. This comes first from God Himself and the way He compelled these words to be written but as we talked about last time, this book might very well have been physically penned by Samuel. He was a man of God no doubt and he also had the perspective of recent history. He could have looked back on these events knowing the time they happened and no matter how much Samuel might have feared Saul, the fact God had chosen another man to lead Israel as their king at the very least gave Samuel hope for the future. Let us never forget, when things look most grim, God is still at work!

So how much time does the Book of Ruth cover? The answer is a guess but it's an educated one! We have many reasons to believe Elimelech left Israel sometime after Jabin came to have his hand on Israel's collective throat. After a disastrous short stay, Naomi leaves Moab to head back to Israel on the word things were looking up for the land itself. Little did she know, she brought with her one of the greatest women of faith the world has ever known and God would bless Ruth with being in the line and lineage of The Messiah! Now, obviously Ruth's marriage to Boaz and giving birth to Obed took some time to develop after they returned, but there's every reason to believe the entire story takes place inside the window of the twenty year Canaanite oppression. When we take all things into account it's reasonable to say the Book of Ruth covers around ten to fifteen years. Even if you lengthen the time you believe the Moab stay took and the time between Ruth and Boaz's marriage to Obed's birth there is still no real reason to believe the book's time period is more than twenty years at it's greatest extent.

Let's stay in God's Word!

