

Free - Take One



Shaqah

שפחה

*“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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As we continue our overview of the Book of Joshua, we covered last time the battle of Jericho and went on to talk about Israel's defeat at Ai. It was thought after the great success at Jericho, Ai would be easy to take. The spies that were sent to look said it would not even take the full army of Israel to accomplish and suggested only two to three thousand men be sent. Joshua would send about three thousand, but instead of easily taking Ai, Israel would be routed and some men killed. Joshua was greatly disturbed by this event, but unlike so many of those just part of Israel, his concern would not so much be that they were able to be defeated as much as he worried about how he would ever get Israel to move forward with their task after such a thing. He wondered how he could get Israel to trust God in giving them more of the land now that this had happened. What God explains to Joshua is the fact that was not the correct concern. The concern should not be how to move forward because there was no moving forward at this point. The concern was not the fact they had been defeated. The real concern should have been, why was Israel defeated? The reason Israel had been defeated was that someone among them had violated God's instructions for what to do in Jericho. Nothing was to be taken from the city save that which would be given into the treasury of God. God instructs Joshua to get the people prepared because He would reveal who had violated His instructions and Israel would have to choose to follow God in punishing them. All this brought us through Joshua chapter 7 verse 13, and we are ready to start our overview in verse 14 this time.

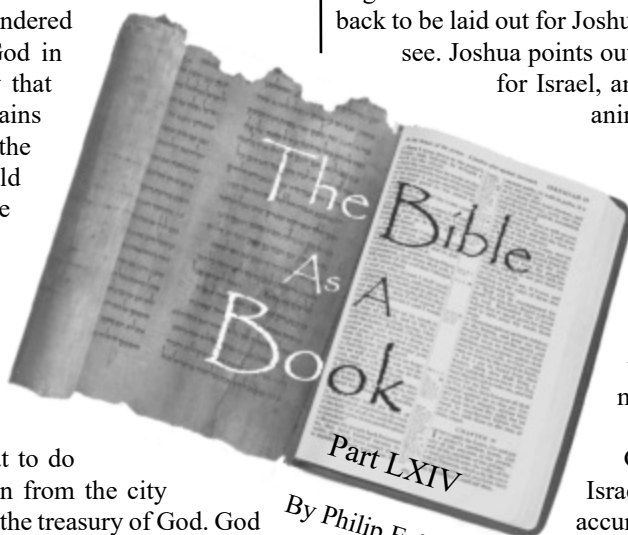
Joshua had been told Israel needed to sanctify themselves for the next day. This was necessary because we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23) In the morning all of Israel would be brought before The Lord, and the tribe The Lord took would then be sorted by families. Because this was more than one household, the chosen family would then be brought by the specific households and one of those would be chosen. After getting down to that, each man would be brought until it was known specifically who had

violated God's instructions. That person, along with their direct family, including all they owned, was to be burned and destroyed completely. The next morning as Joshua rises early to start this process, it is found the tribe of Judah is chosen. The process continued down until a man by the name of Achan was taken. Joshua implores the man to confess what it is he had done which brought about all this trouble, and Achan admits he disobeyed The Lord in taking items from Jericho. He had taken a Babylonian garment he felt he just had to have, also some silver and some gold he had come across while in the city. These items he buried under his tent, which he tells Joshua. Joshua sends men to go confirm these facts. The men find the items and bring them back to be laid out for Joshua, the nation, and The Lord to clearly see. Joshua points out to Achan that he had caused trouble

for Israel, and for this he, his immediate family, animals, and all his personal possessions were taken to the Valley of Achor to be stoned. After these living things had been killed, Israel burned it all with fire just as God had commanded. After that was complete Israel covered it all in a heap of stones both as a way to bury what was left and leave a memory there in this valley.

God's anger would turn away from Israel because they had put away the accursed thing from among them. This was an early but potent example of how the true nation of Israel consisted not just of those who were

of the correct bloodline but more so about those willing to follow God's words. This was not to be the last time Israel was to follow God's Law and put out of Israel those who did not choose to obey God. However, in a show of God's great forgiveness, God tells Joshua not to be discouraged because they would now take Ai. God also shows Achan had been very foolish and impatient, as with Ai the instructions are changed when it comes to the spoil. Israel would be allowed to take the spoils of Ai in much the way any victorious army would have done. The plan for taking the city would also exemplify how God works with man's actions. What the spies of Ai had originally said was likely true in that it would have only taken two to three thousand men had there not been sin in Israel. However, that small a number of men would



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not be used in taking the city this time. Instead, they would actually play on the idea Israel had originally been defeated there. By God's instructions Joshua would send fighting men around behind the city to lay in ambush. Joshua would take the rest of Israel's army and lead them up to the city in what was to look like a normal head-on assault. When the men of Ai confidently came out to fight, Israel would run from them, leaving the city defenseless against the men laying in ambush.

So, Joshua would choose out of the armies of Israel thirty thousand men which he would send to Ai under the cover of night. This would mean the people of Ai did not know Israel's army was hiding nearby. Joshua would stay in the camp with the people of Israel. In the morning he would rise up, count the people to show they were all there, and with the elders of Israel he would lead them to camp across the valley to the north side of Ai. Ai would now know Israel was near, but it would not appear to be much of a threat. Out of the thirty thousand fighting men, Joshua would send five thousand to hold in a position on the west side of the city for the ambush. While this position would hide them well, it did not seem logical to put an army there because it placed them in between Ai and Bethel which were cities invested in each other's safety. The king of Ai would suspect nothing and only be aware of Israel's camp to the north. That night or early morning Joshua and the rest of the men would go down to cross the valley approaching from the north. As Ai awoke in the morning and saw all the men with Joshua they surely felt confident the camp of Israel was empty and all of Israel now stood in the valley below the city. The king would order the men of war to go out and fight Israel, and just as Joshua said, Joshua and his men retreated from them.

This greatly excited the leaders in Ai, and all the men of both Ai and Bethel were sent after Joshua no doubt believing they would destroy Israel completely. Joshua retreated to the wilderness, likely this means they headed east. This would take the battle away from the camp of Israel where the people were and in the opposite direction of the way which the five thousand men would come from to bring the true attack. We are told the action of chasing Israel emptied both cities of all their men, which left both cities even more defenseless than a normal battle ever would have. Joshua had been instructed to stretch out his sword toward Ai and God would give Israel the city. Once Joshua stretches out his sword, the men waiting rose up and attacked the city of Ai very quickly. They would take the city with ease and set it on fire. When the men of Ai and Bethel looked back from pursuing Joshua and his men, they see the smoke from the city rising up and were very disheartened to realize they had been fooled this whole time into thinking they had the upper hand. Joshua would give them no time to gather their thoughts but turn on them with the men that were with him, who were capable of taking the army of Ai all along. The men of Ai and Bethel would not stand a chance. Ai was on fire and all the men of both cities were out in the open at the mercies of the men with Joshua as well as the men behind them who had already taken Ai. They simply had no place to run, and between being killed by Israel and killing themselves out of fear, not a one escaped. Joshua would be sure Ai was thoroughly destroyed that day. All the people of the city would be killed and the king of Ai would be in Joshua's hands. The number of those dead would reach twelve thousand people. Joshua would tear down the city leaving it a heap of rubble. Only the normal spoils of war and

cattle of the city would be spared just as God had instructed. Joshua hung the king of Ai as a public display of his defeat, and then ordered his body to be taken down at evening and cast at what had been the entrance of the city. They would heap stones upon it, and all this would bring the city of Ai to a decisive end.

After this, Joshua would go and build the altar Moses had told Israel God wanted them to build in Mount Ebal once on this west side of Jordan. This was an altar which was to be made using no tools to carve or change the stones it was made out of. Israel was to build this altar out of totally natural stones they found in this area. There are a lot of reasons why God instructed they do nothing to alter the stones, but the base reason was that this altar was an example of any temporary altar that might be built outside of the tabernacle, or later temple. The nation of Israel, nor anyone, was to build other places to use for worship besides the tabernacle, and later temple. Man chooses to worship so many false gods, and The One True God did not want Israel to be an example of people who did that, nor did He want places meant to worship Him to be left for those who worshiped false gods to use. However, this altar on Mount Ebal was something God specifically had told Moses Israel was to do after they got over the Jordan. The place and the way to do it was all laid out. This was truly led of God and why it was correct to do. Another reason for man's hands to have no more to do with building this altar than the minimal of piling up the stones was to truly give thanks to God for giving them this land and take no credit for it themselves. They were acknowledging that while they may build the altar it was God Who provided the stones, and in turn the fact that they may have to fight some battles but God was ultimately giving Israel this land. No matter how well we fool ourselves into believing we have done or accomplished anything in this life, we are nothing without God. If we go into eternity without God we'll learn this lesson too late, but the truth of it will be unavoidable!

Joshua and all of Israel would in a way dedicate this land to God's uses as they built this altar, and there they sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. Joshua would take this a further step and show us the first example of how Israel was to leave their mark on the land, the buildings they built, and many things among the nation. Joshua would follow God's Law and carve into the stones of this place the Laws of God. (Deut. 27:1-10) While we do not want to leave a place of worship pagans might want to use and see as a place of potential power they can harness for their own uses, leaving copies of God's Word all over the place for all to see is a good thing! This is the tangible thing God gave us to use, study, and learn from. There are weak translations of God's Word and there are downright bad ones, but anywhere at anytime in any language the real words of God can be read by others there is benefit. As sin pushes God's more direct presence further and further away from man, the Word of God stays right here for all to see, even stumble across if you will, and that was the point God wanted Israel to see and accomplish in writing God's Laws on their houses, gates, etc. It is also why we are told in the Gospel of John that Jesus is The Word. Jesus was that tangible presence of God here on this earth, and He will return one day to be so again!

Next, Israel would perform the ceremony God instructed Moses they were to perform once in this place which contained both the blessings and curses. The blessing was obviously about God wanting to give them a comfortable life in

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we talked more specifically about the words Abraham spoke in answer to Isaac's question concerning the sacrifice. In doing so we talked a lot about how great a job the King James Version does in translating these words and holding on to the power yet simplicity of what Abraham was saying. This power led us to talk about the facts of how much living our lives each day in the ways we should is so important to how we witness to others. We also discussed how we do this considering we live in a world so contrary to the things of God even to the point many who claim to be "Christians" might judge us as wrong for doing what is right. All this was discussed within the framework of the fact Jesus is the only man Who has the right to judge us, and that right became indisputable when He came and He allowed sin to take His life yet death could not hold Him! This left us in Genesis chapter 22 verse 8, but we still have reason to start there again this time.

About the only specific we did not cover at this point in verse 8 is the very last words we are told after Abraham answers Isaac's question. Those words are another example of how we often think things in the Bible are just to bridge us from one point to another in the same way written stories of all sorts do. However, there is nothing in God's Word that really fits into that category, and all things are said for some deeper purpose. Here at the end of verse 8 we are told, "...so they went both of them together." We know Abraham was going up this mountain to meet with God and perform this sacrifice because this is where God told him to go. Isaac, while suspecting many things about what was going on, was not privy to all the details, and Isaac shows this in asking the question he did. It's a simple truth Abraham was the only one who had been instructed by God in this matter. How many details his father knows is not clear to Isaac, but he got the answer to the one question that was burning in his mind. Abraham did not evade telling Isaac he was the sacrifice, but it mattered not because by saying what he did, it was clear he was, especially since there was no animal with them. Abraham had not forgotten something or left it behind with the servants, and that means the only thing Abraham had to offer was Isaac.

Thus, Isaac knew many things from this answer, but most of all he was left with a choice! Isaac could choose to walk on with his father and allow himself to be offered as a burnt sacrifice or Isaac could walk away? There was nothing stopping Isaac from walking away, and I'd say most people would be running at this point. Isaac's worst suspicion about what was going on here had been confirmed by Abraham. Who wouldn't run? The answer clearly shown in verse 8 is, Isaac! Here again, we should be struck by the simplicity of these words. The very thing that might cause us to think they are insignificant is the point. There was no further instructions or discussion of any kind. By these words it seems clear there was not even so much as hesitation. It does not tell us Abraham continued to walk up the hill while Isaac stopped to consider this for a moment. Nothing of the sort happened. They were walking together up

this hill; Isaac asks his question; Abraham answers it with a few short words; and the whole time there is no stopping or hesitating in anyway. Both Abraham and Isaac continued to walk up that hill just as they had before Isaac asked or said anything!

That makes the words of the question and Abraham's answer the only words that were spoken this whole time. As we go into verse 9 we see that was not just the simple fact they had some more ground to cover before they got to the right spot. No, verse 9 tells us they reached the spot God had told Abraham to go to, and Abraham begins to layout the elements for performing the sacrifice. This includes building the altar, laying out the wood, binding Isaac and laying him on the altar. Still, nothing is said between them the entire time. Now, before we talk about the specifics of the words that describe this process, let's stop to consider that for a moment. Is it not odd? This is a time when we should really stop to think about how these men were not the revered forefathers of a chosen nation of God at this point. They were not revered because the nation had not been formed nor had they done anything to form it. In fact, the very idea Abraham would take the chosen son and sacrifice him would seem to be quite a step back in the process! So here is the moment we should really think about how this was just a normal, loving, father and son. I know it can be very true that men tend to be less emotional even in times like this than women are. It's true a father to his son will not respond the same way as a mother to her son would. All that said, I don't know of any loving family where a son even so much as enters a risky medical procedure that extra words or actions of some kind are not exchanged between a father and son in acknowledging this might be the last time they see each other on this earth.

Isaac was not just at risk here, Isaac was going to die! If time permits there is often what we call "last words" given before some one dies. There are affairs that need to be put in order or things that might need to be said which no one wanted to say prior to that moment. It is pretty universal in the human mind for this to happen, yet here, it did not! Let's also emphasize again that Isaac was older when this happened than many people who grow up with this story tend to think. He was not a small child who simply yielded to his father's will almost unaware of what was about to happen. He was not so scared that he simply was going along with it not speaking a word. No, Isaac had been clear on the facts since he asked his question and got his answer, yet he says nothing. He did not try to find another way, talk his father out of it, nor had any last things he felt he needed to say to his father before this happened. Abraham as well did not attempt to comfort Isaac in anyway by telling him it would be alright or he'd make it as quick and painless as he could. From the gory thoughts to the more sentimental there is nothing to be had. As with this entire story, this too mirrors how Jesus went to the cross. Jesus did nothing that in any way can be construed as an attempt to push the religious leaders, or Pilot, from the idea of crucifying Him. As a lamb led to the slaughter, Jesus spoke not a word. (Isa. 53:1-10)

Of course, we know that does not hold true when it comes to Jesus speaking to The Father, and that would seem to be what relates more to Isaac and his father in this story, right? Well not completely. When it comes to the story of Abraham and Isaac there is no one but the two of them involved. They were a considerable ways away from their home and family and the many servants it consisted of, save two. Those two servants were specifically left a great distance from the city of Salem itself, to say nothing of this hill. There is no indication anyone from the city was involved in any way with this. Abraham had brought all the supplies they needed including a torch with the fire. There was no need to consult with anyone or purchase anything. All this means, Isaac represented Jesus and Abraham was all other parties involved with Jesus' actual crucifixion. Abraham was the religious counsel, the government, and the people who had convicted Isaac to this fate. He was the soldier(s) who drove the nails into Jesus' hands and feet. The ones who lifted up the cross and dropped it in the hole which had been dug for the purpose. He was all those things, but in truth Abraham actually was a representative of God The Father most of all. This is because it was The Father Who had sent Jesus for this purpose and allowed Jesus to be killed. God The Father could have easily prevented Jesus' death, but He would not because He had given His Son to this world; He would not intervene to take Jesus away. Of course, based on what God had told him, Abraham made the choice Isaac had to die. However, he could have changed his mind at any point and put a stop to it!

What we see in this story is just like Jesus with the religious leaders and governing powers, Isaac said and did nothing to keep his father from or attempt to persuade his father not to take this action. Isaac willingly yielded to it, allowing himself to be bound and laid on the wood of the altar. Isaac, without a word, would allow Abraham to take his life. He would willingly give it so his father could complete what God had asked him to do! Now, this is where we look at Jesus and see the night of his arrest Jesus goes into the Garden of Gethsemane and prays. In doing this, Jesus asks The Father if there was any other way this could be accomplished, He wanted to take that path instead. (Matt. 26:39) However, what we see in Jesus' words is also the fact He yields totally to The Father's will in saying it did not matter if there was another way, He wanted The Father's will to be what made the choice. By saying nothing, this is what Isaac was doing with Abraham. By his actions of nonresistance Isaac was saying, I totally trust your judgment father in doing this. Isaac was not the one God had instructed in any way. This is not like Mary and Joseph when an angel comes to both of them to tell them about Mary carrying and giving birth to Jesus. (Matt. 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38) Abraham is the only one who was instructed, and Isaac simply trusts his father's faith in God that what he was about to do was the will of God!

Of course, we also have the words Jesus spoke on the cross as He cries out in agony about The Father forsaking Him. Before that, Jesus also asked The Father to forgive those who crucified Him because they did not know what they did. Then there were the words He spoke as He committed His Spirit into the hands of The Father. (Mark 15:34, Luke 23:34-46) While some may have heard His words, all these things Jesus said were not to any human around Him during this event but to The Father alone! What effect it would have had if Isaac had pleaded with his father about turning on him or forsaking him in some way,

we can't say with certainty. However, we do know that would have violated the first point about putting something in the way of him simply yielding to his father's belief this is what God told him to do. That aside, the major difference in all this is the fact Abraham would have been the instrument of his son's death by actually plunging the knife into Isaac's body. When it came to Jesus, The Father was the instrument of Jesus' death by asking Him to go through with this in the first place and then standing by doing nothing to stop it. Jesus was mocked while on the cross with that very temptation that He could call for the angels to come save Him. There was also the idea if He really was God, Jesus could prove Himself by coming down off the cross under His own power. In spite of His words, we see Jesus was yielding to The Father's will as He did none of these things.

Thus, Isaac saying nothing and Abraham saying nothing through this whole process was not just Abraham yielding to God's will while Isaac yielded to his father's will, but it was both of them yielding to God's will. By letting his father put him on that altar Isaac was committing his spirit into God's hands just as Jesus makes clear He was doing by speaking the words He did. Isaac's father had not forsaken him, he was the one with the knife, but more importantly when Jesus asked why The Father had forsaken Him, He was not speaking to the idea The Father was responsible for Him dying on the cross. Jesus was experiencing a separation from The Father He had never known, and that's what brings those words from Jesus. Isaac simply goes through no such process. Finally, the third point should need no explanation. As Jesus hung on the cross and asked The Father to forgive those who put Him there, we see the True Saviour giving His life for the sins of the world and becoming that rightful judge of all men. This is something Isaac was not becoming by giving his life. This is where the representation and the true event really part ways. Thus, we do not hear Isaac saying anything to his father concerning the idea he forgave Abraham for what he was about to do. Isaac simply speaks no words, even to his father, in order to show he is in agreement that his father needed to do what God had obviously asked.

Now, we do not want to leave verse 9 without pointing out certain aspects of the words in this verse. Again, there is meaning in all of its details which we do not want to miss. First, we are told they came to the right spot. Not just the right spot in that Abraham figured this was a good place to perform the sacrifice. No, the words specify they came to the spot God had instructed Abraham to go to. It is also emphasized in the next words of the verse this was not a spot which was clear to Abraham because there was already an altar here. They did not just come to the altar or an altar that was already on this hill. This is important for so many reasons. One of the most obvious is the question, if there had already been an altar there what else might it have been used for? If you want to lean on the idea that since this was Salem and the city in which Melchizedek had, at least, been the priest of the most High God and due to that it would be an altar used just for God, remember Abraham asks no one about using this hill or anything on it. While you can make the argument Melchizedek or the like would have recognized Abraham and no permission was needed, it surely would have been customary for Abraham to pay his respects to Melchizedek or whatever priest of God there may have been at the time when entering the city, much less going to use the high altar, yet we

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXXVIII

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 began looking at the events of the Bar Kokhba revolt. This was the third of the major Jewish-Roman wars, and as we discussed it was far better planned than the previous war. The leadership of this revolt would strike the Romans and catch them at a time when they were prepared for a Jewish uprising which Rome felt might come at any moment. However, the Romans were not prepared for an all-out revolt, and a revolt is a good thing to call this war. It was about more than just the Jews in Judea starting a war in an attempt to overthrow the Roman power. It was more than just a sporadic rebellious action on the part of Jews among the dispersed. The Bar Kokhba revolt was started over Emperor Hadrian's arrogant plan to build a temple to false gods on the location of the Jewish temple, and due to this, the revolt drew Jews from both inside and outside Judea to its cause. That in spite of the failure of the past attempts to drive the Romans out. This is another large reason this action caught the Romans off guard. They could not have expected so many Jews to rise up from within Judea along with the support of so many from outside, and for all the troops Rome would eventually throw at this revolt they were still out numbered.

The Bar Kokhba revolt certainly stepped its way through various events. It was planned, and then it broke out and saw not just success but great success in drawing Jews, along with some non-Jews to its cause. This happened very quickly compared to other uprisings, revolts or the like. By the time we see these great numbers of Roman troops facing even greater numbers of Jews, we begin to see just how this would all unfold. The Jews had the advantage of knowing the terrain better and, of course, that of numbers. However, the Romans had the advantage of being better trained and armed. You can go over all kinds of facts about how this offset each other. One important note is that while the Romans had the upper hand in training, this was also a disadvantage in some ways. Knowing the terrain better the Jews could easily use what today we call guerrilla warfare, which is a quick strike technique that utilizes and depends on the element of surprise! It is also not a technique designed to do massive damage that would end a particular battle, but do damage here and there to discourage and slowly weaken the enemy as a whole. This is the war the Jews waged while the Romans were more of the well organized, march up and fight a full battle kind of trained army. It was a bit difficult for them to defend themselves against surprise attacks by the Jews. It just was not the head-on battle the Romans were trained to fight.

It is hard to say how much of this was done during this war or in preparation for this war, but one of the things that gave the Jews success was the fact they had built an elaborate system

of hideouts. This allowed the Jews to surprise the Romans on many occasions both large and small. Large numbers of men could suddenly appear to attack and inflict heavy casualties on the Romans and then disappear before the Roman troops could get organized enough to mount a defense much less an offense. Romans would enter towns or villages looking for rebels and find none, then in a narrow passage between buildings or some other disadvantaged location Jewish fighters would attack and destroy them. Before more soldiers could be moved in to help, the Jewish fighters were gone. To the Jews' credit it would also seem Bar Kokhba's men were vicious. This might not seem like a compliment, but it is in light of how brutal and vicious the Romans were and especially at this point when it came to fighting Jews. This was no time for the Jews to be timid in the hope the Romans would simply go away! When the Jews struck it needed to match the intensity the Romans would fight back with. In some ways that's the point here, both sides knew this was a fight to the death in as much a way as any battle between nations or large groups could be. While it was not going to end in one decisive battle, the final result could only be one thing or the other. Jews were going to win this fight and Rome was going to withdraw from Judea or the Jews were going to lose and face such severe ramifications it would be the death of a nation. This would have been even more of a total truth if it were not for God's hand upon the nation ensuring they had not, and would not, disappear as a people!

Again, the tactics used by Bar Kokhba were not things Rome trained their army to fight against. That said, these tactics were also not going to win a war against a mighty empire determined to hold power. Today these things often work even against large armies from powerful nations because there is a concern for moral of the troops, loss of life, and the question of how worthwhile it is to hold power over a certain area or take it in the first place. However, Rome had no such thoughts. Roman resources were vast and Hadrian was determined. If he allowed Jews to win this fight, place after place in the Roman Empire might attempt to revolt. This very desire is why there were even non-Jews who joined Bar Kokhba's forces. If revolt broke out in places all across the empire, all would be lost for Rome. That, Hadrian would not allow to happen or he would fight to the last man in the attempt to keep it from happening. This is the brutality of men who desire power, and it brings us to talk about another element in the situation that effects how Christianity looks at the fact the core of the church was and is meant to be Jewish in nature.

Many Christian Jews did not believe this brutal war should have been taken up. Typical Christian thinking of today would tend us toward a thought of saying that is due to the fact the temple being rebuilt is not something God wanted and therefore, Christians knew God would not give the Jews ultimate success in this war. It may seem today that is the reason Christian Jews were not willing to join in. However, this is another example of how the devil uses what I like to call the five degrees

off thinking in order to disrupt what people believe and turn them from the real truth. The devil often is not about turning things in the total opposite direction. He simply wants to distort the truth, and what starts as just a small degree of variation at the beginning gets further and further from the truth the further out from its starting point we go. The beauty of it for the devil is the fact that as time goes on we can reinterpret past facts as having logical reasons based on where this skew has taken us much later on. By the time we see Christianity rise to become what we know as the powerful Catholic empire it developed into, this small degree was used to create massive anti-Semitism that has plagued the church ever since. This anti-Semitism is why even today, many in what is known as the protestant church hold these wrong values and the beliefs about the Jews and God's Law which are so wrong; all the while thinking it's based in sound theology.

Just as I have pointed out about the life of Christ, and the matter of Jews who did and Jews who did not believe Jesus was The Messiah, at the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt we also see an internal Jewish matter. What happened is that Jews who had accepted Jesus were saddened by the events of Rome wanting to build over the Temple Mount. However, they knew by what Jesus had told them this day would come. Jesus had told them that, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:15-22

It was not that God did not want the temple to once again stand because of some argument Jesus had replaced the sacrifices of the Law; it was that God, through the sending of His Son Jesus, had given the nation the opportunity to never see the temple destroyed in the first place. What the world did by rejecting Jesus as The Messiah was give up the greatest opportunity man has ever had since the Garden of Eden. That opportunity was to have God walking with us every day in a very tangible, physically reachable way. His throne had already been made long ago by the establishment of the nation of Israel and the giving of the Law which built a tabernacle at the center of Israel's camp as they traveled from Egypt to the promised land! It had been built in its greatest form at the time of King Solomon as God used this king to build the more permanent replacement of the tabernacle which we call the temple in Jerusalem. The nation strayed from God and God allowed that temple to be destroyed by the Babylonians. However, God would give the nation another chance as after 70 years of captivity Jews would return to the promised land and rebuild a much less grand structure on the ruins of the temple Solomon had built. The nation's actions and lack of following the Law and The One True God Whom it was intended to turn them to, led to the Greeks being in power and eventually outlawing God's Law. The temple would be desecrated, and this event was seen by Daniel as part of his vision. This abomination that made the temple desolate

and unable to be used for the purposes of God was something the Jews rose up to fight against. God would help them and they would, once again, take back the temple, cleanse it, and resume the sacrifices. These are the events, and more specifically the re-dedication of the temple, that Hanukkah recognizes and celebrates.

As the Romans came to power and events continued to unfold, a family of non-Jewish blood would take the more direct seat of power over Judea and the temple would be "remodeled." I always cringe to say that because in truth, a new, much bigger temple was actually constructed around and over the top of the existing temple. Once that was done the true second temple was dismantled as it was now inside the new temple. Thus, what I think of as a third temple is officially still called the second temple by history, and the differentiating term is that we then have Herod's temple instead of Zerubbabel's temple. While this was a much larger and grander structure than the one built by the Jews returning from Babylon, it was also "infected" by many Greek and Roman ideas for architecture. Nonetheless, the Jews still had their temple, and this is the one that stood when Jesus came. So we should see the degrading factors over the centuries from what God wanted, which probably hit its peak at the time of King Solomon, and what we see by the time of Christ. From this it should be easy to see, Jesus came when He did because the events that would shortly come upon the nation if He did not come would see the temple totally destroyed and world events go so wrong for the nation the temple would not be rebuilt for a very long time! Simply put, because Jesus was not accepted by the religious leadership and official governing powers of the Jewish nation, these events happened anyway, and that is what Jesus warned those who did believe in Him would come. It was not that God wanted it, for God clearly attempted to give man what was needed to keep it from happening, it was a simple truth it did happen. This because, by and large man greatly rejects what God offers, and by doing so at the time of Jesus, events such as the temple's destruction became inevitable.

Now, Jesus did not end what He had to say on the matter with the words I quoted above. He went on that day to say something we've touched on before in talking about the Bar Kokhba revolt. Bar Kokhba was looked at by some as being The Messiah. Of course he was not, but the fact he was seen as that by some, and at least a great God sent leader of some sort by others, means many followed him because they either accepted the idea fully in their head or at least put their hand to the work. This is the meaning of what we call the Mark of the Beast! (Rev. 13:11-18) Jesus not only warned that dangerous and terrible times were coming for the nation but added that, "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Matthew 24:23-28

What we see in this is that those who believed in Jesus had been told what the outcome of this very war would be. It

should have come as no surprise to Christians that the temple fell as the war took place in 70 A.D. Not because they knew Jesus had replaced its sacrifices and other ordinances, but because the opportunity to keep it from happening had been rejected in rejecting Jesus as The Messiah. As the Romans attempted to repeat, on a grander scale than the Greeks had, the abomination that would ensure the temple remained desolate, by building a temple to their gods on the spot where the temple of God had been, the Christians were not surprised and knew the right thing to do was not to fight but to flee to the mountains. Why? Because the effort to fight it would not be blessed of God. God would allow this to happen as a way to show the chosen nation they could not believe whatever they wanted and still make it to the right end. All these things are messages, not just for the Jew, but for all those who attempt to follow God. It is just plain ignorant to see God allow suffering of the Jewish nation and look at it as some punishment for their wrong and not believe judgment will come to you as well if you do not seek to find and follow the true path of God! This thought can be lessened by the devil if he can get you to believe the Jews were rejected by God for rejecting, as a nation, Jesus as The Messiah. This makes it seem the Jews committed the ultimate sin a group of people can commit. From this we feel comfortable saying, the church replaces the chosen nation, but all that is extrapolation, totally unsupported when looking at Scripture as a whole.

Now, due to the fact I just talked about much of Jesus' words applying to the time directly following Jesus, some would say I am one of those teachers who believes the events mainstream Christians teach as belonging to the "last days" which they say are still ahead of us, have actually come and gone centuries ago. However, that is the totally wrong way of seeing prophecy. What the Jews are is an example of where man as a whole will go. No matter how much God does to put us on the right track, the majority of men will reject God's guidance and assistance. They will jump on the things they like and even blame God for not helping in many times of need. However, far more often than not, times of great distress come not because there is an immediate problem that can be solved. No, distressing times and tribulation come because of the longer term refusal of man to listen to God. Damage is done over decades, even centuries and millennia, then those mistakes eventually catch up to us. Especially since God is only allowing us to suffer the consequences of our own actions, and not doing something specific to punish us, there is no simple fix to these problems. Sure, God could reach in and change everything in a moment, but what would that do other than relieve the immediate situation. That is what man would often want and all our finite, human mind can seem to focus on much of the time. We say, fix the immediate problem we suffer from now and we'll have a better tomorrow, but that's not how it works! If God just continually fixes the immediate thorn in the paw, we never learn to stop walking the path that seems more appealing in the moment but always turns out to be filled with thorns!

Yes it's a truth Jesus was speaking to Jews who would see the destruction of the temple and events like the Bar Kokhba revolt would not be far behind, but He was also speaking about a future all of mankind would eventually face. The chosen nation served, and still serves, as an example of where not following God leads us. The chosen nation suffered consequences of wrong actions as a nation much faster than the world as a whole because

the world as a whole stood by just hoping to destroy the nation of God. This was/is true simply because the nation was/is - of God! However, the world overall will not escape this same fate, and the Jews serve as an example of the dynamics which take place when we follow or refuse to follow God's instructions. As I write this segment, current world events just scream how much man is suffering from his own ignorance and selfish desires on a level I knew full well would come, but which I must admit I am still somewhat shocked to actually see happen so suddenly and to such a great degree! The damage man is doing to his world, and more specifically the very systems he has put in place and relies on is mind blowing to watch. This is true especially knowing it is being done not to save lives, which is the rallying cry to get everyone on board, but as a way to force man more and more into the same thing men were attempting to build at the time of the Tower of Babel. These kinds of actions throw the world into chaos and on many occasions war. In our day this has and will continue to build until it will be necessary for Jesus to return. Why? Because if He does not put an end to it and turn us back into some kind of more correct path, all of mankind will be lost, including those who are seeking the truth in spite of it all. It is for those elect's sake, both those already living and those who are yet to be born, Jesus will return to give an opportunity to.

Sound familiar? It should because it is exactly what Jesus said about the days directly following His ascension back into heaven. War with Rome came and the temple was lost. War continued and lives, freedom, and more things than can be listed here were lost. As not just the temple but the spot the temple belonged on remained desolate, it seemed all would be lost when the Romans decided to build a temple to false gods on that spot. To the religious-minded Jew it made perfect sense that they had to stand up and do something about this, and that started what history calls the Bar Kokhba revolt. However, those who knew Jesus' words saw this as not just an obviously doomed effort by the Jews to gain their freedom, but one which would spur the final determination by the world at large to hunt down and destroy every last thing Jewish in this world! As I hope you will be able to see in this study, this would have happened but God would reach in and help the nation escape. Why? For the elect's sake! Not every Jew was fooled into taking part in this war, not just because they knew Jesus' words but because they understood this was not the right way to gain what they believed God wanted them to have. There were those who wanted the chance to find the truth of what God wanted them to do instead of giving their lives to this effort. These, along with all those who already had accepted the truth Jesus was The Messiah, deserved a chance. For their sake God would not allow this war to go to its inevitable end as He would shorten the days!

It is hard to say how many Jewish Christians joined in the fighting that took place during the first Jewish-Roman war. That war had more of an immediate sense that it was about defending the homeland and even individual communities and homes. However, this third war was led by a man who many were saying, "Come over here, we have found the Christ!" Those who joined in this war did so because they took the mark in their forehead by believing Bar Kokhba was the Christ, or at the very least in their right hands, because they put their effort to the work in simply going along with the events of the day with no mind to what they knew was right and wrong. They were being a good citizen and doing their part as a member of the Jewish nation. On

the other hand, the Christian Jews said, no we can not follow this man even if it were a good thing for the nation to even attempt this war. Jesus warned us not to go after such figures nor to believe their efforts would have success. What was to many Jews a great attempt to finally throw off their Roman overlords, the Christian Jews saw as an ungodly event doomed from the start and which would lead to even greater destruction and suffering for God's people. Christians were able to see Jesus, The True Christ, would one day return to this earth and take the reigns of power, but when He does there will be no need to build a revolt for others to join in. The dead in Christ will be raised and those following Jesus who are alive and remain will be caught up in order to meet The Lord as He comes. (1 Thes. 4:16-18) That event will be directly followed by one decisive battle. It will be the true war to end all wars, and there, just as Jesus said, will be a great slaughter of those foolish enough to take the mark. It matters not that they took it in their forehead or their hand, they simply will be fighting on the wrong side. The eagles will gather to eat the flesh of the fallen, and even some considered to be the greatest men of the day. If we want to avoid taking the mark, we must be seeking to be on the right side. The mark has never been and never will be about something men can force upon us, it's about choosing to follow the wrong path no matter if we do it because it's what we believe in or because it's what we find most convenient. It's not easy but we must never forget, to live for Christ is to be a testimony of Him on this earth, and to die is the gain of being out of it all! (Phili. 1:21)

What we see in the Bar Kokhba revolt is the fact that because Christian Jews would not join into a war lead by a false messiah, they were looked at as traders to the nation and cowards. Just as Jesus' words had warned them, this was the time to run because many Christian Jews would be tortured and killed during this revolt due to their refusal to join. This event would diminish the numbers of Jewish Christians specifically, and be yet another reason it would be hard to see the Jewish Christian church as the real core of the church. This event would even cause many non-Jewish Christians to fear Jews in general even more. Some already feared Jews because religious Jews saw Christianity as a corruption of the Jewish religion. Now they saw their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who were Jews being killed by these religious Jews because they believed in a different messiah. The simple truth is that if Jews did not want to follow a man like Jesus, they certainly should not have followed a man like Bar Kokhba. He had none of the attributes the Word of God said The Messiah would have. He fit almost none of the prophecy they so easily claimed Jesus needed to fit. There is even the fact he did not fit the religious leader's description of who The Messiah should be as much as Jesus did, but Bar Kokhba was a leader bent on throwing off the Romans! This makes Bar Kokhba the perfect example of human thinking and shows us in the Jewish nation how much they cared for only one thing and that was not the ways of God. No, those Jews who craved power wanted the sovereignty to rule the Jewish nation. They rejected Jesus because He did not offer that one thing. In Bar Kokhba was a man they could use to lead the fight against the Romans. He was a man they could share power with and rule the nation. Others would join in great numbers because they believed the religious leaders had found The Messiah, others would join because the freedom

of the nation was what they wanted, and this seemed like a good attempt. Still others would join on the basis they were doing their duty to their community and nation. The numbers would grow, and Bar Kokhba would end up leading an army large enough to hold out, and in some battles even beat back all the Roman forces the empire threw at them. All this being true, Rome was determined to also throw all it took into winning this fight, but for all the efforts of both sides this would eventually bring the war to nothing more than a stalemate, and that was not a good sign for the Jews!

As the second phase of the war begins, we see a large part of what we consider the Holy Land today was still firmly in the hands of the Romans. However, Bar Kokhba had taken most of the major cities in Judea and now controlled what Jews knew was the heart of their land. This included Jerusalem for which this war initially began. Bar Kokhba would take the title "Nasi Israel," which basically means "Prince of Israel," and the era of the "Redemption of Israel" was announced, which means they believed this was truly the time Israel would rise up, under the leadership of The Messiah. New coins were struck by what was considered this newly formed state of Israel. These coins were largely struck over Roman coins. In a way, this showed how much they no longer considered a need for Roman coins and saw them as only valuable to use as metal in making new coins. Due to this practice, silver coins found from this time can often have visible traces of being Roman coins while the Bronze versions are hard, if not impossible, to see. This is due to silver coins being left unaltered before being struck as new coins. They did not want to file on the Roman coins and lose any of the silver value they held. For bronze coins this was not such a concern, so they could be filed down prior to being struck as new coins. These new coins were, of course, filled with Jewish symbolism including harvest symbols to represent the Jewish feasts, and the temple. Most all of them also included the words, "to the freedom of Jerusalem."

Bar Kokhba would rule what was considered to be an independent state for two and a half years, and after taking the power of having many of the strongholds of Judea in hand, he would also turn to open and direct battles with the Roman forces. Due to the large number of Jewish men under Bar Kokhba's command, the Romans often suffered heavy casualties during even these more direct assaults. However, Rome would finally decide it was time to stop fighting this war on the Jews' terms. The Romans would have wanted this to be a quick fight they could say they put down by their mighty power, but as the defeats mounted and the months past that became impossible. Thus, Rome would eventually see no reason to continue taking losses, and they would turn to the more long-term tactic of besieging strongholds as well as cutting supply lines from the outside. This was not good news for the Jews as it would mark the peak of the war for them and begin Rome's climb back up to take full control of the region.

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

see nothing of the sort take place. This emphasizes the idea this was not a public display Abraham and Isaac were making. Once Abraham offered an offering on this hill the smoke from that sacrifice would be visible to the people of the city and many might be curious as to what he had done exactly, but that is the extent of drawing attention to this event.

All that covered, we know there was not an altar on this hill, at least not one Abraham would use, because we are told Abraham builds one. This brings us to the second point which is somewhat a repeat of what we already covered. The spot they came to and was known to be right by Abraham was shown to him by God. It was not pointed out by some marker or the fact there was already a temple, altar, or anything on that particular spot to designate it. This is interesting to think about as this spot would be the hill where Solomon would later build the temple. In thinking about that, one has to wonder if it's not possible the altar in the court of the temple was not put on the same exact spot as this place Abraham builds an altar to offer Isaac. There is to this day an outcropping of rock on the top of this hill, and it is said by tradition this is the rock upon which Abraham placed Isaac. To be technical we should grasp that it would only have been the rock Abraham built an altar upon for that purpose. However, that is in many people's minds a technicality I suppose. What is interesting is that tradition does not really hold that this rock is where the altar of the temple was placed by Solomon, but that instead it was in the Holy of Holies. It is even said this rock was left exposed as the temple was built, and upon this rock directly the Ark of the Covenant sat. I for one tend to doubt that fact, but that said, we should understand this came to be the location of the temple because it was the place David found redemption for his wrong in counting the people.

In the Law, Israel is told that numbering of the people was forbidden without every man giving account of himself by paying a certain offering. (Ex. 30:11-16) This could be interpreted in different ways as having different reasons, but the real point is that government or the like was not to be holding what today we would call a census just because they want a count. Government choosing to count the people was not to be a normal practice. This has to do with the fact governments take census for their purposes which are human purposes. If we are clear on the details of how the nation was to be set up, it was not God's intent for there to be a king, or in other words a government, outside the authority given to the priests in the Law. This means there was no point in taking a census. God knows the hairs of our head, He certainly did not need some census to tell Him how many people there were in Israel. (Matt. 10:23-31) If a man ordered a count of the people it would be for his own purposes, none of which are usually good. Man can use the excuse he counts people as a way of knowing who needs what and what needs to be done, but it's really more about maintaining power than it is anything else. Even the aspects of doing it for organizational purposes is about being able to rule over people in carrying out taxation and many other things. None of this was to be done in Israel by a man. If God wanted to call for it, as we see there being some counts of the people early on as Israel came to the promised land, that was up to God and served God's purposes not man's!

In spite of God allowing an earthly man to one day be

established as king this fact did not change. That's why God so easily removes Saul from the office showing that after being The One to put Saul in the position God would remove him if God did not approve of his actions. God would anoint David as the next king long before Saul's death, and with David, God would make the promise David's line would not fail to have a ruler on the throne. (I Kin. 2:1-4) In spite of that, after Solomon, God allowed ten of the twelve tribes to break away and be ruled by a king not of the house of David and yet still selected by God. (I Kin. 11:26-40) These things did not diminish the fact God was/is the true King of Israel, they emphasize it. We could go on and on with this point talking about how one day there was no earthly king in Israel as imperial governments took charge, but that's getting too far off our main point about Abraham and Isaac. The point here is, through it all, God maintained the line of David until one day The Messiah came through that line. Being God Himself, Jesus would ultimately fulfill the promise to David about not failing to have a king of his house on the throne as well as God being the true King of Israel in a very physical way!

However, long before all that, David violated the census law and ordered one to be taken without following God's law concerning it. This he did out of pride, and Israel would pay the price as a plague would begin to sweep through the land killing the people of the nation. So David was instructed by the prophet Gad to go and offer a sacrifice of repentance to God in order to stop the death. It is this hill where Abraham takes Isaac that David was instructed to go to and there he would purchase from a farmer a thrashing floor. What an appropriate thing for this spot to be use for. Thrashing is the process of beating the husk, which you do not want, off of grain such as wheat, in order to be left with just the usable seed. In "modern" countries today this is done by large machines, but in days gone by the grain was put on a surface where it could be beaten by hand until it was clean. The usable grain would be collected and the husks would be left to blow away in the wind. This is truly a process of beating out the unusable from the usable, and in many ways that's what the temple and Christ's sacrifice was/is about. As we talked so much about last time, Jesus becoming the judge Who could make the call as to who does and does not enter the kingdom of God, is this very process. (Psalms 1) Thus, the spot where the temple would be built was not a temple of any kind when it was purchased by David in order to stop the punishment for a wrong he had committed. (II Sam. 24, I Chron. 21)

No matter how specific you want to be about it, Abraham was directed to the spot where the temple would one day be built and where the altar of the Most High God would set. Since this spot does not seem to be revered by anyone prior to Abraham bringing Isaac here, nor is it anything more than a farmer's thrashing floor even by the time of David, it is no coincidence this event with Abraham and Isaac took place here and then later the temple was built on this spot. The fact this spot has been revered in some form since the first temple was built, even to the point it is a major dispute in this day between Israel and the Muslims, all scream it is only revered because the temple of God was placed here. To be clear, just as with the death of Jesus, the temple does not stand in our day due to God's allowance of the facts that keep it from being rebuilt, not because any man can actually stop God when He chooses to move. However, the events we now see illustrate how men

revere spots for power not for the real purpose of keeping them separated for the purpose of God or some god(s).

The beauty of the symbolism abounds in this story we are covering, and even more points could be made about this fact. However, I will point out a third and final one about Abraham building an altar here and then we will move on. That third point is that God gives a very interesting stipulation in Deuteronomy about how to build an altar unto God after Israel passes over Jordan. That stipulation is that in building the altar they were to use no tools to alter the stones they used to build with. (Deut. 27:4-7) I find this one of the most fascinating stipulations considering the fact sacrifices were not really to be offered outside the tabernacle, and later temple, once the tabernacle was put into use. That said, there are clearly those specific times it happened, and I have to believe this rule was used. One of those times we just pointed to was David building an altar to stay the plague his arrogance had caused. Another time is when Elijah challenges the worshipers of Baal. (I Kin. 18:17-40) So why would such a rule ever exist? In answer to that, let's look at the two reasons this no tool altering the stones was ever said. First, there is the point natural stones are the way they are because of the way nature is. Nature was created by God, so in that sense the stones are God's handiwork. If a man puts a tool to the stone to alter it in some way, he also adds his own corruption to it. It is one thing for God to give instructions for how the altar of the tabernacle, and later temple, were to be built and that work be done by man. It is another to have man choosing to build an altar and making it to his own design. Man's worst thoughts are taken out of the equation if he is not allowed to do anything but use natural stones to build an altar.

The second reason no stone was to be altered for making an altar to God has to do with leaving behind no artifact. The simple description of what artifact means is that it is something recognizably "made" or "used by man." Artifacts of the past help us understand the past because they tell us something about human history. In telling Israel they could use no tool to alter the stones of an altar they built, God created a situation where once such an altar was abandon it was simply left to return to nature and be unrecognized by later men as an artifact. In this is another point, which is that if one built an altar to God it might seem logical to inscribe words and/or symbols in the stone to designate this was an altar of God. God did not want Israel forming "High Places" in Israel other than the temple itself. This was true no matter if those high places were meant to be for worship to some pagan god or The One True God. If there were altars built with inscriptions of some sort designating them as altars to God, it would leave other places to become common places of worship to God outside the temple. Thus, when we see a few of these altars being built and used after the tabernacle, and later temple, existed, we see there was no real evidence left behind as to where these events happened specifically. That was the point, and it's important because there again is the simple fact places of worship easily became "holy sites" used by all people. Pagans think there is great significance to particular spots even if those spots become known by events unrelated to their particular god or gods.

This idea is common because the real foundation of pagan worship is that they do not believe God is really a being. In truth, they want God not to be a true entity because then He can be reduced to nothing more than a power, and power can be harnessed by men and used for their purposes. Oh, the book or books I could write on that subject because that is a problem seen in churches the world over. We may not say in our doctrine directly that we believe God is nothing more than a power which can be harnessed, but in so many ways we see the idea, or should I say hope we see it, in the way man chooses to worship God. Maybe the simplest example is the common practice of people wanting to make deals with God. Even in acknowledging God is an entity, we believe if we scratch His back He is somehow obligated to scratch ours. Nothing says I'm bringing God down to a human level more than that! The fact man wants or believes God is nothing more than a power is why man turned to worshiping the sun, moon, stars, and the like. Animals as well fit into this category, and just as the Word of God puts it, man worships the creature rather than the Creator. (Rom. 1:25) This is due to the fact all of creation is a power of some sort. Its very existence shows us it has power, but none of this would exist if it were not for God. This is not just true in that it would not have been created, it's true even now if God did not sustain it. As much as God tells us we can not and do not really worship Him by worshiping what He created, the real point of why man wants to worship the creature rather than God Himself is in man's artifacts.

The world over we find idols, formed by man's hands as objects of worship. By altering stones used as an altar to God we are doing much the same thing in adding our thoughts about how an altar should look. By leaving such obvious evidence behind that this is a special spot, we encourage others to make use of it. It's the power in numbers theory. If one person found success in this spot so can I. It's the opposite of believing a place is cursed in some ways. Each person who uses a site as a "holy place" just builds the notion that there is power in this place. God wanted none of this to happen due to man's actions in worship to Him, and so He makes the stipulation not to touch the stones. No altar, especially one inscribed with some markings designating it as to God, would be used for wrong purposes. If somehow an altar did stand and get used by others which had originally been built to be use for God, it would be nothing more than people using something that could have been laying around when they got there in any case. So we note again the fact, even this spot Abraham brought Isaac to would not go on to be recognized as something special after this event, and if it was for a time, no evidence of that was left behind and/or became the thought behind why David purchased this place to be used for God. It was God's choice alone as to where His temple stands, and it shall be His alone as to when it shall stand again!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

this land in order to carry out and hold His Law for all men to learn from. The curse is in the fact if they failed to follow God's Law they would not be given God's protection and things would go horribly wrong for Israel, which they clearly saw at Ai. For this ceremony half of the nation, including those who had joined the nation by conforming to the Law, would stand on the side of one of the two main hills there and half would stand on the side of the other hill. Both groups would have the Ark of the Covenant and the priest in full view. (Deut. 27:11-26) After the official words of this ceremony were spoken, Joshua would read the entire law for all the nation to hear once again. It would be very important, and Moses emphasized it many times, that the nation hear the Law read. This was so all could be reminded, and if any of the younger ones or those who had come among the nation had not heard these words, they would get the chance during such an event. (Deut. 31:9-13)

After defeating Jericho and Ai completely, a great deal of the kings on this side of Jordan, stretching all the way out to the coastline, decided the right thing to do was to put aside their differences for the time and agree that fighting Israel was their priority. However, there was a place not too far to the south of Ai named Gibeon. The people of this place no doubt had more firsthand knowledge of exactly what Israel had done and they chose to take a different approach. Instead of fighting, they put together a group of men who would pose as ambassadors who had come from a far away place. To accomplish this they would wear clothing that was worn and old. All the food they took appeared to have been traveling with them for a long time as the bread would be dry and some moldy. Disguised in this way, they would go to Joshua as Israel camped in Gilgal. What they proposed was that Israel make a league with them. The first answer they got was the fact Israel did not know but that they lived right there in the land, meaning they would be one of the people Israel was to destroy, and thus make no agreement with. Even in Joshua asking them where they were from, they insisted they were from a far away land and had traveled very far to meet with Joshua. Their story was that their people had heard of all God had done for Israel in Egypt and in destroying the kings on the east side of Jordan. This prompted them to send these men to make a peace agreement with Israel. They even kept repeating to Joshua that they were his/Israel's servants. The men would show Joshua and the elders of Israel their food, insisting the bread came hot from the oven just before they left their home. They would make similar claims as they showed their wine, their worn clothing and shoes. This is where Joshua and Israel would make their mistake. Instead of going to ask God what they should do, which should have been done in any major decision such as this, they simply looked at what they saw as evidence the men were telling the truth. In being convinced by this, Israel makes the agreement the men wanted.

It took about three days for Israel to end up far enough south to realize these men were from Gibeon and not far away as they had portrayed. In fact, this group consisted of about four cities. The congregation wanted to move forward in destroying these places as they had Jericho and Ai, but Joshua, along with the leaders of Israel, would not allow it. The leaders had sworn to these people they would not be their enemy. They had given their word as people of The One True God, and due to this they would not allow them to be destroyed. This was another setback

for Israel, but more specifically Joshua and the elders as the congregation of Israel would be greatly upset by this. In light of the oath the leadership felt they could not break and the fact these were a people Israel was originally to destroy, they came up with what was to them a good compromise. They would let these people live, but they would make all of them servants to do work for Israel. Joshua calls for the men of this place and informs them that since they had lied to Israel they would become servants for Israel and nothing more. This the people willingly agree to because in showing how many of the details of what God was going to use Israel to do had made it to people outside Israel, they tell Joshua they had nothing to lose. They knew God had instructed Moses to bring Israel into this land and destroy its inhabitants. They were convinced this was going to happen. Thus, if Israel agreed to their deception and it spared their lives in any way, it was better than being killed in battle. If the deception had angered Israel and caused them to slaughter all the people, it would be no different than if they had not tried. So servants of Israel these people became, and it would remain a permanent statue in Israel that they would be nothing more than that.

Of course, others in the region were aware of what had transpired as well. This included the king in Jerusalem which is just a bit further on south from Gibeon. This king was aware Israel had destroyed Jericho in the way they had and he knew they had totally destroyed Ai as well. However, what really seemed to shock him was the fact Gibeon was so afraid of Israel that they made the agreement they had to become Israel's servants instead of fighting Israel. This amazed the king of Jerusalem because Gibeon was a leading city in the land. It was greater than Ai and its men of greater strength. If such a place had simply given up to become servants, what hope did the rest of the land have? Thus, the king of Jerusalem sent messages to the king of Hebron which is quite a ways south of Jerusalem, and the king of Jarmuth which is a bit south and a ways to the west. He also sent to the king of Lachish which is almost as far south as Hebron and a bit further west than Jarmuth, and to the king of Eglon which is even further south and pretty much straight west of Hebron. These were all lead cities in the land, and their proximity to each other represented a significant portion of the strength in this southern part of Canaan. In fact, these five kings represented the people known as the Amorites. What is interesting is that the king of Jerusalem did not ask they come to help him attack Israel. No, he knew they might be as afraid of Israel as he now was. So what he asked of them is that they come up to attack Gibeon. This was an attempt to invoke what he hoped would be anger in the minds of these kings that Gibeon had chose to become Israel's servants instead of sticking to the plan of focusing on all of them fighting Israel. The enemy of my enemy might be my friend, but if he becomes the friend of my enemy that makes him an even greater enemy, right? In any case, the king of Jerusalem was hoping that might be the thought and these kings would be willing to help him "punish" them.

Whether his plan worked or not is not as important as the simple fact the other kings agreed and came. They would come with their entire armies and march to Gibeon to attack it. Here is where we see yet another problem in Israel making the mistake of agreeing to make Gibeon their servants. Instead of being part of the people Israel could destroy and possess their cities, the area of Gibeon became a place Israel was obligated to

protect. The people of Gibeon would waste no time calling Joshua from Gilgal in order to protect them, and Joshua would gather the entire fighting force of Israel to go out and face these five Amorite kings. If Israel thought it might be hard to take this land a city or area at a time, they now faced the strongest kings of the entire southern part of the land! In this, we see how God can use man's mistakes as an opportunity to show His glory. This does not mean we should make mistakes for the purpose, but in the event we make them, we end up in bigger messes which in turn makes it more impressive when God cleans it up after we repent. God tells Joshua not to be afraid of these mighty kings because God had already delivered them into Israel's hands. Joshua would travel through the night to reach Gibeon with his army and attack these kings. Just as God had promised, these kings were no match for Israel, and in seeing the battle was hopeless they retreated to the southwest. Israel would pursue them continuing to destroy them as they continued south and yet still a bit west in a path that took them back to none of their home cities. One would think this was either because Israel continued to prevent them from turning directly toward one of their cities, or because they did not wish to lead Israel's army directly into yet another city of theirs that would certainly be destroyed.

The other factor that came into play almost immediately as they retreated from Israel was that God began to rain hailstones down on them which were big enough to kill. This would happen until just before they made it to the last place listed as where they ran to, and we are told more men of these armies died from the hail than died by the hand of Israel's army. Once again, God had shown how it is He that would do the work. On top of that, Joshua was so determined to utterly destroy these armies of the South, he commanded the sun and the moon to stand still. The fact God granted this request is one of the most astonishing miracles in all God's Word, and it is recorded in another writing outside the Word of God. When one stops to consider what this actually would mean, it's incalculable in the human mind. God literally stopped or changed the movement of the earth and the moon to make this happen, and it is truly something only God could ever do. Not only that, it is something only God could do in a way that gave a benefit to anyone without causing such great catastrophe all over the world it would practically devastate all life on this planet! In any case, it happened, and it made for a longer day than any day in the history of the world. We are told God never filled a request like this for any man and never was it done again. This was done because God was serious about giving Israel the victory over the people of Canaan, and lest we forget, Israel had already defeated these kings, so this was done solely so the armies of Israel could utterly destroy the Amorites!

Joshua and the bulk of the army would return to Gilgal, but a detachment of Israel's fighting men would remain in the area they had pursued the Amorites to in order to scour the region for any survivors. These men would find and inform Joshua that the five kings of the Amorites had gone into hiding in a cave of this area. They would be instructed to put a large stone over the mouth of the cave to seal the kings inside and then continue to go after any that remained of the Amorite army, not allowing any to return home. This the men of Israel would do until little by little what few men had escaped, likely only as individuals, made it

into the fortified cities. This only meant they would be stuck in these cities until Israel came to destroy those places. Joshua would return to take care of the kings who had been trapped in the cave and have his men remove the stone to bring them out. In the sight of the entire army of Israel he instructed the captains of the army to put their feet upon the kings' necks. This was done as a symbol of total defeat, and Joshua tells his army to never be afraid of the people of this land because God had given all into their hands just as He had these kings and their armies. Joshua would then execute the five kings and hang their bodies from five trees just as he had done to the king of Ai. This made an even more public symbol of their utter defeat and humiliation at the hands of Israel; a fate well deserved for their arrogance against the people of God. However, their bodies would be taken down as the sun began to set and cast back into the cave with the stone put back over the mouth. This would be their permanent burial place, and it would be done before the sun set just as the law instructs so as not to defile what was now territory held by the nation of God. (Deut. 21:22-23)

In that same day Joshua would begin systematically taking the nearby cities, which were even more helpless against Israel now that the powerful kings of the area were gone. On that day Israel would take Makkedah and destroy it like they had the city of Jericho. Joshua would then lead Israel to the next fortified city of Libnah, killing all its inhabitants just as they had done to Jericho. On day two he turned south to Lachish which was the home city of one of the five Amorite kings. They easily destroyed this city just as they had Libnah. None of these cities were any match for Israel as it didn't even take a whole day to destroy each of them. However, there was a king north and slightly west of Makkedah, the king of Gezer, who chose to come down and try to help these cities, specifically Libnah. This was another act of great arrogance, or, at the very least, they felt it was better to try and take the battle to Israel before it came to them. In any case, Joshua slaughters this king and his army until not one of them remained. Without wasting any time Joshua takes Israel to another of the homes of the five kings, the city of Eglon. This city, just like Lachish, was destroyed in that day. Israel would head next to another of the five kings' homes, the city that should be very familiar to all students of the Bible, and that was Hebron. Hebron would also prove to be no match and be utterly destroyed, with all its inhabitants killed just as Israel had done to Eglon. Joshua would turn back southwest to Debir and destroy it just as he had Hebron.

This simple pattern continued until all the cities of this southern region were destroyed and all the kings, along with their people, put to death. Just as God had commanded, Israel had defeated the south of Canaan all the way out to the Mediterranean in taking Gaza and reaching all the way south to Kadesh-barnea, which is the region Israel was in when God originally prepared to send Israel into the promised land over four decades earlier, but they did not believe. (Deut. 1:19-39) This was all done with great ease as God was actually The One fighting for Israel, and the cities/people of this region never had any chance.

Let's stay in God's Word!

