



Shaqah

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

In continuing our overview of the book of Leviticus, we ended last time talking about stipulations God put in the Law that were to make Israel a nation of people who respected others and should be respected by others for their kindness, decency, and honest dealings among themselves as well as with others. This brought us through the end of Leviticus chapter 19, and we will begin this segment with verse 1 of chapter 20.

Here, God tells Moses to instruct the people about how serious certain offenses are, and how much no compromise should be made on these issues. These are things that go way beyond loss of self-control or sin through ignorance of true righteousness. The first particular is, again, the worship of the false god Molech, and specifically the sacrificing of children to this god. This is pointed out not just because this specific false god is bad, but to emphasize how much the practice of sacrificing children to false gods and/or disposing of one's children is an abomination to God. People who took on such practices were to be sentenced to capital punishment by the means that was very community oriented, and as such, also very public - that being by stoning. Those who desired to even turn a blind eye to the practice of killing children were not just to be separated out from the nation so as not to be a part of doing the representative work of God, but God Himself would not excuse such actions. Such things are so against the knowledge of right and wrong we all have in us, there is no excuse even for people without God's written Law. Thus, God will not turn a blind eye in the here and now or in eternity!

God goes on to list other offenses that fall in this same range of wrong doing, and the fact since God is Holy, only the learning and following of God's instructions were going to lead people into the true ways of righteousness and

holiness needed to do God's service. Thus, another thing that will specifically bring down God's wrath is seeking after those who practice communications with demons to get instructions, and perform what appears to men as powerful acts beyond human capabilities. Seeking out these kinds of things and people is definitely turning one's back on attempting to learn what is right by seeking God for instruction and help. Israel was to separate such people out of the nation, but one way or another God, again, would also deal with people who desired such things.

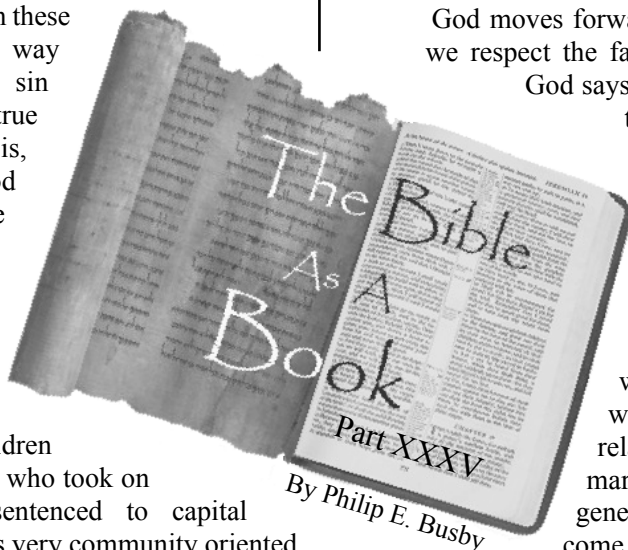
God moves forward talking about how serious it is we respect the family structure as He designed it.

God says that children who choose to curse the establishment of their parents having the responsibility of raising them would be taking any wrong done, even to them, off their parent's shoulders and putting on their own. This action was also to be punished by death.

Breaking the sanctity of marriage was not to be tolerated. Men and women having a physical relationship when even one of them is married to another person, or what we generally call adultery, was also to come with the punishment of death in

Israel. Other forbidden physical relationships that called for capital punishment for both people involved was a man being with his father's wife, a father being with his son's wife, and physical relationships between people of the same gender. If a man takes both a woman and her daughter as wives, all three are to face death, specifically by burning with fire. This has direct relationship with the way people worship false gods, such as Molech, mentioned above. God was turning such practices on their head - so to speak - by making burning in fire a way of disposing of wickedness, not the worshipping or appeasing of it.

In those cases where people use animals for physical pleasure, the person is to face death, and the animal is to be



killed as well. This would ensure such animals were not used as sacrifices, and remind and emphasize what an egregious offense to God's naturally created ways this kind of action is. Relationships that would call for the people involved to be separated from God's chosen nation were siblings, whether full-blooded or half, being together; and men and women were not to be having relations during the time a woman knows she is in her monthly cycle. Also, aunts and uncles are not to be with their nephews and nieces, regardless of if the family relationship is because of maternal/paternal blood or just marriage; and brothers are not to be with their brother's wife, outside the Law's stipulation about raising up a child in a deceased brother's name. People taking on these kind of inter-family relationships are actually to never add children to the nation; and thus, their specific family branch would be in jeopardy of disappearing.

God reminds again, how the items being covered are the exact kind of sins that opened the land of promise to be taken from the people living on it and given to Israel. If Israel wanted to remain on the land, they could not afford to take on the same practices as their predecessors. That truth has to do with the laws of nature and righteousness built into creation. However, God also wanted Israel to know that He had specifically cut the chosen nation out of the world to separate them for His purposes. Because of this truth, the Law was intended to make them specifically look, act, and be different from the rest of the world. Not only should they avoid taking on the practices of those around them, the fact they as a nation were asked to only eat certain foods and live by certain laws that no other nation was asked to live by, serves the purpose of showing God has set them apart. There is no arguing the stipulations of God's Law on the basis no one else has to do such things, and for the chosen nation there simply never can be a legitimate excuse for abandoning God's Laws specifically laid out for this purpose!

After emphasizing this fact, God would turn specifically to those inside the nation whose work is in the things not directly of this world. Those who dealt with demons and spiritual matters would be brought up again, and it was specified those dealing in such things should be stoned to death. The work of spiritual things was placed in the hands of the priests God had given the nation. Thus, there are stipulations concerning the physical lives of the priests, and how they should remain even more separated from the things of this world and life than the nation in general. To emphasize this, the rules would point out the handling of the dead for the house of Aaron. Aaron's house was not to help or be involved with handling the bodies of dead people, unless it was someone within the small group we consider the direct family unit. This meant only for a father, mother, son, or daughter. Because this job traditionally falls on the males of a family, priests could also bury a brother, but even a sister was only allowed if she died having never been with a man. This would mean she was and had always been the direct responsibility of her father, or brother(s) if the father was deceased. Allowing a brother to handle a sister gave flexibility even in cases where the father was still alive but too old, ill, etc. to

handle it.

Priests were also to keep themselves separated to do the work of God's temple by being careful who they married. They were not to marry someone who has sold the use of her body for physical pleasures, or someone who simply is very desirous for the things of this world, and/or is known to long for and/or do things that would not fit with the chaste life a priest was to live. It should go without saying, but God makes sure it is clear priests are also not to marry a woman who has been separated from her husband. The responsibility of the priests' separation extends to their family, as any daughter of a priest who chooses to sell her body was to face capital punishment by burning in fire; again, a symbol this is a way of putting away wickedness not worshiping it. It is a way of bringing an end to those who might produce children they would want to dispose of, not the killing of innocent children that might be brought into this world by the parents' actions.

The next rules are to separate even further the man who directly inherits the office of being the High Priest. This man is not to involve himself in any traditional practices for mourning, grieving, being in despair, etc. He is not to shave his head, much less put ashes on it; nor is he to rend his clothing at any time! He is not allowed to handle a person's dead body, even if it is for the close relative most people must deal with, which is father or mother. He is not to even allow such events of everyday life to interrupt his daily service to and in the temple, but continue as completely disconnected from those things happening outside that service. As to taking a wife, he is only to take one who has never been with another man. Not only does this eliminate those who general priests should not marry, but even a woman whose husband has died is not to be considered. He is also to be very strict in taking a woman who is of his own nation's bloodline, and in choosing a wife, do nothing that might jeopardize his resulting children from being eligible to serve in the priesthood, specifically as the High Priest. This means the next stipulations God lays out are also important considerations.

Those of the priesthood were to be much as was asked for in the animals offered for sacrifice, in that the priests who handled offerings were to have no physical handicap or physical abnormality, especially things that were noticeable, or might inhibit them from having children to carry on in their place. All those of Aaron's house were eligible to eat of the portions of food given to the priests out of the offerings and sacrifices. Males could serve at the temple in various capacities. However, these stipulations of having no physical defect were necessary for the correct representation to be made when a priest entered the temple to do daily services, such as placing the shewbread, as well as when serving as the priest who handled, and specifically offered, sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering. Thus, only those males who had no physical defects were eligible to work in these things. It is specified Moses makes sure the priests, as well as all the people, were made aware God had laid out these rules.

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

We ended last time still discussing the unique offering God had Abram bring before Him, and all the ways this offering represented different things, as well as paralleled in other ways the Law God would eventually give to Israel. This took us through Genesis chapter 15 verse 11 where Abram had set up the offering and was now watching over the animal carcasses. Because these offerings were not placed on a burning fire, Abram would spend the remainder of the daylight hours driving away the birds, and wait to see what God would do next!

In spite of the fact there are those birds that come out in the dark, as the sun went down, no doubt the birds tended to become less prevalent. On the other hand, seeing down the entire line of offerings Abram had put in place, and observing just everything going on, had to become more and more difficult as the darkness fell. Lighting torches could have helped Abram see, and certainly this would tend to help with keeping away the even more aggressive non-bird predators that would now come out and have interest in the animal carcasses. However, it is not recorded, or likely, that Abram did such a thing. Abram may not have been prepared to do such a thing, because he expected God to move or give further instructions before nightfall. As far as Abram knew, leaving the offerings to the devices of nature would be God's intent in the end; but all this speculation is irrelevant, because as the sun went down, no matter how tired Abram was or was not, God put him into a deep sleep. We are also told a horror of great darkness came upon him.

This is the description of the fact Abram fell asleep, and what he experienced next was not God dealing with him physically, yet Abram was very conscious of what was going on. This is to say, the experience would be as real to Abram as anything he experienced during waking hours. Unlike a dream that might seem real during sleep but end up fading away or making no sense once one is awake, Abram would know and remember. What God had said would make perfect sense after waking, as if God spoke to him audibly while awake. However, in this state, Abram would be given no vision. Dreams or even what we often refer to as "visions," especially when we believe we've been specifically given something of great meaning, customarily come with imagery, some very able to exist in real life and some which cannot. People who study dreams will often talk about interpreting the images one sees and how they can be interpreted in different ways. However, very few agree on the meaning, and may believe only the individual can come to truly understand what the images mean because they are personal to the individual seeing them. To keep all this out of the way of what Abram was being told by God, Abram was simply given no images. While the experience was very real, and even after waking was as memorable as any conversation Abram ever had with

a person, during the time God was speaking to him, Abram was immersed in nothing but darkness. The emphasis here of it being a horror of great darkness would also indicate there was no sensory input whatsoever, save the words God was speaking. There was no smell, feel, etc., but Abram was also not stumbling around in darkness wandering or trying to find where the voice was coming from. All Abram could do was listen to the words!

Now, the words Abram heard were the most simplistic layout of what was happening, and going to happen, concerning what Abram wanted to know. As we talked about already, this entire encounter with God was about Abram wanting to know deeper details about how God was going to fulfill the promise of making a great nation out of Abram, especially considering he had no biological son to even carry on his name at this point. We also talked about how Abram just couldn't see that the process of representation, which the chosen nation would be all about, had already begun with Abram himself, and even the servant Abram mentions as the possible heir to his house. The fact the representation had already begun and would be in three generations of individuals who would stand alone as Abram did, before a nation would even begin to take form in any way, was represented in the animals Abram had brought to perform this offering. All this is important information to keep in mind if one wants to understand what God tells Abram.

First off, God makes clear Abram wouldn't be alone in not seeing the promise of a great nation was coming about. What would happen for some time into the future is not what the minds of men would think of as such a thing happening. Abram's chosen seed would continue to be strangers in a land that was not theirs for several generations. If those of the promised nation were going to hold onto the truth the land where Abram now stood would someday belong to them, they were going to have to believe it simply because God said it would one day happen, and not because it became a reality in their lifetime! This relates directly to an understanding all true believers need in their lives. While we live here, it can often feel like the promises of God are nothing but wishful thinking, and it's easy to begin feeling that maybe living for God just isn't worth it. That things such as Jesus telling us He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly is never going to be something real. Feeding these doubts are exactly what many are doing who teach that God is all about prospering our lives. Countless people have turned from truly serving God in righteousness because doing so seemed to drive them into a deeper hole instead of bring prosperity and happiness. Becoming disillusioned, many turn their backs on God's ways and begin to live a life focused on pleasing the flesh, and attempting to gain what happiness and success they can in this life.

Many churches have even formatted, or reformatted, their doctrines so people can do this and still feel they are living for God. However, not teaching and allowing people to understand living for God can be hard, is a grave error. Seeking to feel good and make things easier is not the right focus. I was asked very recently about believing this way, and if I really have as dim a view about how miserable this life can be for the true believer as some of my teaching makes it seem? My answer was and is yes. We all have our place in God's service, and this is what God was telling Abram in this moment. While Abram had enjoyed wealth and many of the comforts life, of his day, could offer, while Isaac and Jacob would have much the same, Jacob's sons would go to Egypt and be total strangers in a land that would never be theirs. We know from studying the story, that as long as Joseph was alive, being second only to Pharaoh himself, Israel would even be treated well in this situation. For some of the years after Joseph's death, Israel would continue to have a good life in Egypt. However, there would come a day when the political circumstances would change, and a Pharaoh who did not know or care about Joseph or Israel's contributions to Egypt would come to power. The how or why is not important to our point here, only the fact that this shift would turn Israel from being a respected neighboring group of people in Egypt, into a feared race of potential enemies who were a threat to Pharaoh's power.

From that point on, the individuals of Israel who lived in Egypt would become servants, workers, even slaves to the Egyptians. To them, it would seem they no longer worked to build their own lives and nation, but for the prosperity of the Egyptians. Many would die being a part of God's plan, and yet in this life they would live considering it a good day if they could finally collapse into bed at night having not felt the whip of an Egyptian taskmaster on their back. As the generation that would finally leave this misery behind began to be born, Pharaoh had become so weary of Israel that he ordered all the males born to them be killed. God saved many in Israel, but how many individual mothers and fathers experienced the excruciating pain of knowing their newborn son had been murdered? How many families lived in fear of finding out a child was on the way, and spent countless nights awake praying it would not be a boy, so as not to be in danger? The anguish of those days were nothing short of a nightmare, yet all these were as much a part of God's plan as those who came before and had enjoyed prosperity!

Even after Moses survived this time, and went through years of preparation before being told by God to go back to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to let Israel go, the pain was not over. As the process of even making the request began, Pharaoh increased the hardship of Israel so greatly that Israel started questioning why Moses had come. The promise of being freed from Egypt seemed such a far off dream that leaving things as they had been was, in their minds, a blessed life compared to what it had become! After Israel was freed and left Egypt to travel the wilderness, the very people who suffered these burdens in Egypt questioned, on more than one

occasion, if it had not been better to be slaves in Egypt than to be where God had led them. The point is, it's true some of us could have it better if we would just listen to and trust in God, and many have it better than they will ever appreciate. That aside, it is a basic fact some true believers will have prosperity in this world as Abram, Isaac, and Jacob; and some will have hard lives like those who were burdened in Egypt. There are also many variations in between the extremes. If we trust God, we should seek His righteousness in our lives so we may serve Him. In doing so, we may never know what we have accomplished, or why things were as they were, but we can know that we did not fail our chance to serve The One True God in this world, and the rewards that wait for us after this life ends will make even the greatest prosperity we had, or could have had, seem like nothing but a misery we're all glad to have behind us. This is the faith of a true believer! (Matt. 6:19-21, 6:31-34)

This is the truth Abram was being told point-blank. No matter what Abram saw around him, God's plan was moving forward even at that moment. Abram needed to stop looking at his surroundings and focus only on his walk with God! This would be true of many generations in many different ways for the nation God had promised to bring through Abram over the course of, not just the nation's beginnings, but its history right up to this very day. The fact God is telling Abram he would not be alone in his wonderment of how God is going about building the chosen nation, and the group that comprised its beginning would span from Abram himself, all the way through the Egyptian experience until Israel finally came out to return to the promised land, is in the number given in verse 13. God says the affliction would last for 400 years. Now, there are those who try to say that the 400 years is literally just the time Israel was in Egypt, and they say there is even a verse in Exodus to support this. Exodus 12:40 says, "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." This verse even goes beyond the 400 mark to say it was 430 years. Thus, there are two things we must step aside from our main point and talk about when it comes to the numbers given.

We'll start with the issue of the discrepancy between Abram being told 400 years and Exodus saying 430. For this, we go back to the fact we have been talking about the verses here in Genesis telling us of how God was basically granting Abram's request he be able to see a more complete picture of what God meant by promising a great nation would be made of him. As Abram is given this information, he, like so much of prophecy all through the Bible, is not given a crystal ball - so to speak - in order to tell the future. This, again, is why the verse about Abram's sleep talks about a horror of darkness with no imagery whatsoever. Jesus was asked one day when His return would take place, and the answer Jesus gave was simply that only The Father knows that. However, Jesus gave information about what the days would be like just before His return, in that they would be as it was during Noah's time before the flood, where in spite of all the evil going on around them, people will simply be concerned with going on about

What About God's Chosen People?

Part IX

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

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

We ended our last segment with the fact those Jews who had returned from the Babylonian captivity not only set up the altar in Jerusalem, but under great persecution eventually accomplished the rebuilding of the temple itself. We talked about how what they chose to do was done according to the Law of Moses, and if this law was something made up in Babylon it would not have been so despised by the world. We also discussed how if the Jews were not the chosen nation, then it made no sense for them to take up a law that caused them to become so persecuted. All this brings us to the next segment of the history where another wave of Jews return to the land under the direction of Ezra the priest.

As was mentioned earlier in this study, the story of Esther comes during this general time period we are discussing. As the Jews who had returned to the promised land accomplished and finally dedicated the new temple in Jerusalem, there arose an attempt to wipe the entire Jewish population from among, at the very least, the Medes and Persians Empire. The specific argument made to the king by the man who spearheaded the effort was, "...There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." Esther 3:8 Again, this story shows us how ridiculous it would have been for those known as Jews to simply be a group of people who chose to take up an ancient law that was so hated by the world. It also emphasizes how much these laws were not derived from Babylonian precepts. The Law of Moses was specifically described as "diverse," not just from what the particular king at that time wanted, but diverse from all the other people in the empire. This is a potent statement, considering the diversity that had to have existed among all the empire. All this diversity aside, the Jews were singled out!

If we have or do take time to read the book of Esther, we know/find that Esther, being led of God and given grace by His hand, was successful in bringing a halt to her people being destroyed. The order was not simply rescinded, for that no doubt would have done little to stop many who hated the Jews, but the Jews were given permission to stand up and destroy those who hated them. However, even this, as anyone with historical knowledge knows, did not end the threat of people desiring to destroy the Jews; anti-Semitism continues to exist in every generation. That being said, we need to look at how close all these events took the Jews to the brink of disappearing as a unique people on the earth; and as we do, we see the

miracle of the chosen nation's survival from both the external and internal pressures. The internal event that is significant to this point is in that many years after the first Jews had returned, a priest by the name of Ezra would lead another group of Jews back to the promised land.

Ezra fasted and prayed for this group's safe return to the land, as there were many along the way who no doubt would have tried to stop another group of Jews from reaching Jerusalem and Judah in general. Ezra also wanted to be sure God was granted the credit for their safe journey and he had not asked the king for protection to be sent with them. On top of being Jews, this group would also carry with them some valuable currency and supplies from the king and others, given to be used in Jerusalem to ensure the temple could continue in its service. Now, by God's hand, they did make it safely there; but the details of the journey are not as important to our discussion as what this group did and found when they got to the land. First, is the fact that when they arrived, just as at the first of the altar being set up, this group sacrificed at the temple as one of their first orders of business. The important note in this is that they started by offering twelve bullocks to show again the fact all twelve tribes were still represented in the people known as Jews. (Ezra 8:35)

However, the problem Ezra found was that in spite of all the persecution the Jews who had been back in the land had suffered at the hands of the surrounding people, this had not stopped the Jews from intermarrying with those people. This is another one of those moments where people look into the Word of God and see what they believe is an issue of God promoting discrimination, or even the general idea people should not intermix with races that are not their own. However, this is only a problem for the Jewish people, and its importance is emphasized in the very reasons a question such as the one this study is based on asks. If Israel, or those now known as Jews, do not seek to keep themselves of a more pure ethnic group, they will simply meld into the world and cease to be a distinct people who can not legitimately be denied as the chosen nation God established through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At the time of Ezra, this was particularly true!

The chosen nation had already been dispersed throughout the world. Those God had left on the land as the Babylonians carried Judah away had abandoned it to go into Egypt. Only these Jews willing to return to Judah, and specifically Jerusalem, were going to ensure the distinction of the nation as a specific group, and/or, at the very least, maintain the fact Jews, being the chosen nation, had, and always will have, a direct connection to the land God had promised to give them. The fact the intermingling of people the Assyrians had brought about caused many to lose their true

ethnic identity, means many people were already identifying themselves by simply taking on regional names of where they had come to live. This is even seen in the words of the book of Ezra telling the story of the dangers to the Jews intermarrying. After Ezra's group delivered the offerings they had brought from the empire and did their sacrificing at the temple, chief men, who had surveyed the Jews, came to Ezra to inform him of the problem that the Jews who had been on the land for some years now had not remained separated from the people who surrounded the Jews. The groups of surrounding people they intermingled with are specifically named, "...even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites." Ezra 9:1

Many of the people named, especially the Egyptians, no doubt maintained a distinction to some degree as an ethnic group as they had been before the Assyrian incursion; but considering what the records tell us about the Assyrians' actions of removing and displacing the people of this area, there is little doubt the men coming to Ezra are naming the various people mostly by the regions of surrounding land that those people were now residence of, and not that they actually were still truly the Canaanites, and other people Israel had fought with in the centuries before the captivity. They called them by these names because they were not necessarily clear as to what blood had been introduced into the Jewish line, and also to be clear, they were not talking about a corruption the earlier returning Jews had brought with them by intermingling during their captivity in Babylon. What was really bad about this was even, if not especially, the priests and Jewish rulers had taken wives from the surrounding people.

Ezra knew that for all the Jewish people had survived in order to be a distinct people, this internal violation of God's commandment was going to be the true undoing of the chosen nation. Just as before the flood of Noah's day, when the people who served God started intermarrying those who chose not to serve God and destroyed the truth of there being a group of people separated to the purposes of God, the nation of Israel was representative of the fact this kind of separation is ultimately necessary. The need to fulfill this truth as an eternal fact is what heaven is for, and what Judgment Day will be about when the sheep are separated from the goats. (Matt. 25:31-46)

The Jews needed to remain Jews, not just in their actions but in their ethnic identity, and the Jews who had intermarried seriously jeopardized everything the Jews had survived the captivity to maintain. Thus, Ezra is greatly grieved by this news, the solution to which was very perplexing to contemplate, and he seeks God as to what should be done. The solution was, of course, a sacrifice for both the Jews as well as the strangers they had married, not to mention it would do nothing to improve relations between the Jews and the surrounding people. However, it would have to be made. All the Jews would be called to Jerusalem, and first they would be set straight on the fact the Law dictated what they had done was wrong, and mostly because of what the nation faced at that very time. The Jews could not afford to identify the wives who

were not Jewish, nor the children they had with these wives, as Jews. What they would have to do is put them "away." This is disturbing to some readers, as many will interpret these verses in the same way they misinterpret the words of Jesus when He speaks about what we would call divorce and remarriage.

Today, we think of divorce as a separation where the union of marriage is severed, and both people are once again single and free to remarry as they were before the marriage was entered into. In many ways, one could say this is the definition of the word divorce, but this is only an argument for never using this word in the English translation of the Bible. The point is the Biblical definition of divorce is not the severing of a marriage union. This is made clear in the verses that flatly state, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Matthew 19:6 This comes out as the religious leaders were quizzing Jesus about the fact they saw the Law of Moses as contradicting this by allowing a bill of divorcement. Jesus points out it is only because of our human sinfulness God ever allowed what the Law states, but that was not God's original intent which those serving God should be striving to accomplish. Jesus did not argue that their assertion about no man putting a marriage "asunder" was wrong, just the way they looked at "divorce" was. This is why Jesus goes on to explain the ways people commit adultery in divorcing. I get into this because in Ezra's time the solution was not that these men would simply cast aside the wives they had already become one flesh with. Nor would their responsibility to be fathers to the children they had by these wives end.

Just as many of our laws today traditionally call for a male to pay money to a woman they divorce and child support for any children, this and more would still be the responsibility of the men who had taken wives of non-Jews. This is what made the entire situation so painful! God is about love and sticking to commitments one has made. God does not violate His righteous values, but men just make a mess of things probably in no greater way than when it comes to marriage! Thus, the bill of divorcement allowed in the Law was only because constant strife, conflict, violence, etc. are also not values of true righteousness. God never wants marriages to be split up, but because it does happen, God gave a guideline for divorce in the Law. However, here in Ezra's situation it was even more complex as men were being specifically asked to put away wives not even because they desired to or the marriages were bad domestic situations, but because it was necessary for the survival of the chosen nation's identity. That being true, the Law's true intent for how to handle divorce was even more applicable than ever.

Divorce according to the Law was the putting away of the wife, and following that in this situation meant these wives and their children were to be identified as non-Jews. This caused them to be separated from being considered part of the chosen nation, but this did not mean the men who had taken them were no longer responsible for their support and well being. Just how much separation was actually put between them is unclear, and certainly some women may have went back to their father's house or to other relatives among the

non-Jewish people. However, one way or another, the fact they were put away was a commitment that there would be no more physical relationships between these couples, because this obviously had the potential to bring about even more children who also could not be a part of the Jewish nation without growing up and making, according to the Law, their own personal commitment to join it. (Ex. 12:48) A fact that made it hard on the children was that the process would have included erasing the records of these marriages from any official record keeping of who was of whose family. To stop the infliction of further damage, the putting away would also have been the breaking of any marriage contracts, or what we might call prearranged marriages, that had been made but not yet consummated. All this would be of particular importance to the house of the priesthood and the kingly line of the house of David.

Before we move past this bitter situation, we should also consider that this was not just about ensuring there was no non-Jewish blood in the Jew's line. King David himself was a descendant of Ruth who was a Moabite, and the Jews had, in fact, already intermarried far more than they ever should have with the people of the land before the captivity took place. However, the problem at Ezra's time was not just about the size of the group, it also goes back to the fact about not truly knowing the bloodline of the people considered and even called by familiar names of the surrounding nations. One must consider, many people who lived around Israel before the Assyrians mixed up the population were, in truth, family, at the very least, from Abraham through Ishmael and even Jacob's son Esau, while others were descendants from Lot. These branch bloodlines that came from the family God brought to the land out of Mesopotamia no doubt did a lot of intermarrying with those considered Canaanites, Jebusites, etc., in the time before Israel came out of Egypt. Thus, while it was God's intent to keep Israel as distinct a bloodline as possible by having them remain a nation that married inside their own nation, and in spite of the fact God wanted Israel to totally drive out the populations living on the land they were to possess, God knew they would never completely do this. Because of this truth, God actually brought Israel out of Egypt to a land already surrounded and occupied by people with some of the same genetic markers. This advantage had all but been erased by Ezra's day.

The people living on the land post-Babylonian captivity were more about a total cross section of the human population. To intermarry with these, on top of there being so few Jews left to connect and represent there still was a chosen nation living on the land of promise, called for some more extraordinary measures which would have never been taken in the past. This is all about our question, because if it had been true that the Jews were already some random cross section or intermarried mixed bloodline of people coming out of Babylon, not only would the story of calling specifically for Jews to come out of the empire to return to the promised land be false, but this story of putting away strange wives would not be necessary. I guess the point is, if you believe none of this is true and all of it is just made-up to make it seem those who call themselves Jewish are, in fact, the chosen nation, then there

really is no reason to believe any of the narrative about there ever being a chosen nation. To be clear, there are those who believe exactly that; but as a counter, we swing back to the point of how extraordinary it is that the nation still exists!

One of the reasons some will only go back to the Babylonian captivity to say the Jews are not the true chosen nation of Israel, is because there is evidence that the events of the Jews being in Babylon is fact. People try to deny even this, but the records found by archaeology continues to grow a collection of evidence these people we know as Jews were involved with and in the empires of Assyria, Babylon, and the Medes and Persians. The truth that the Jews we know today do, in fact, date back to at least this time period we're discussing is in man's historical records, showing the Jews were already in place by the time of the empire that came after the Medes and Persians, which was the Greeks. This relates directly to that fact I've talked about before, which is, what we call the Old Testament and its narrative closes right about the time human history begins to be recorded well enough to see the picture of what happened, even specifically to the chosen nation. This can be no coincidence, as the Old Testament guarantees we have the ability to see that the people we know as the Jews today are, in fact, one and the same as the nation God established through Abraham. The Old Testament shows us the transition from Israel to the nation being known as just Jews. Combine this with archaeological findings, and it's hard to dismiss the narrative of there ever being a chosen nation. Thus, the idea of going back even to Babylon as the birth of the people we know as Jews is a pretty tough case to make!

Now, before the Old Testament closes, it also does clarify something else very important to our confidence the Jews are still God's chosen nation, in that God has not rejected them, and in that they are the true bloodline of ancient Israel. That fact is the story about Nehemiah's activities. Ezra would do more than just deal with straightening out the intermarriage situation among the Jews. Ezra would go on to do the exact job a priest is suppose to do in opening the Word of God to the people in order to ensure people knew the Law for themselves. He would help the people do what is described in Ezekiel 44:23, teaching the people the difference between the ways of holiness and the world, and causing them - whether they liked it or not - to discern the difference between the unclean and the clean. Some thirteen years would pass from the time Ezra had arrived in the promised land to do the work God had sent him to do, before the story of Nehemiah would begin. While Ezra was doing what he could, there was more to be done. God would send a Jew named Nehemiah, who still lived and served in the imperial court, to help!

Now, Nehemiah was a man who had the complete trust of the king, for he had been appointed the king's cupbearer. The person with this position had the life of the king in his hand, as such a person could easily poison the king, a very effective and popular form of assassination. However, this also put Nehemiah in a position much as Daniel, Esther, and the like had in helping the chosen nation use the resources of the empire. As cupbearer, Nehemiah had contact with all those from all over the kingdom who brought news to the king

of his empire. One day Nehemiah would have the opportunity to speak with a trusted man and his companions who had firsthand knowledge of the circumstances the Jews who had returned to the promised land were in. The response Nehemiah got to his inquiries was very heartbreaking to him, because he was informed of how the Jews were being afflicted and specifically the city of Jerusalem itself had not been rebuilt. While the temple was and had been an important element to the restoration of the nation, to restore Jerusalem as a city was also very important. It is also no coincidence that the Old Testament ends with a story that shows us how much the chosen nation is truly the ones with the ancient claim on this city. Jerusalem had not been a place of importance to the non-Jews who lived in the land. Jerusalem was not a place any of the returning Jews had to drive anyone out of in order to build the temple there. In fact, the argument Jerusalem as a city was nothing but trouble was even an excuse used as people wrote the king in attempting to stop the Jews from rebuilding just the temple. (Ezra 4:11-16) Only the Jews cared about Jerusalem!

As great as it was that just the temple was able to be rebuilt, God stirred up Nehemiah to take the next step in solidifying the chosen nation's re-establishment in the promised land. Nehemiah would be so heartbroken about Jerusalem not being restored, he would go in before the king unable to hide his sadness. In some cases this would have meant death to one in such a position, but Nehemiah was so well trusted and cared about by the king, all the king wanted to do was know the reason Nehemiah was sad. While the king certainly did not want to give up having Nehemiah by his side and even asked that Nehemiah set a time to return, the king sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem, and appointed him governor so Nehemiah would have the authority to accomplish the task of restoring Jerusalem. Nehemiah would also be granted his request that he be given written notice from the king so those who would try to stop him from even reaching Jerusalem would be scared to act, and those in the region able to supply timber for the work would give him what he needed. We can't know for sure if Nehemiah was fully aware of what the first returning captives had faced in attempting to restore the temple, but he certainly seemed to be preparing for the fact he would face a fight all the way, and Nehemiah was determined to win that fight!

Nehemiah would go to Jerusalem with an escort by the king that ensured he made it safely and in a timely manner. Once there, Nehemiah was no fool who simply rushed in where angels fear to tread. We don't know Nehemiah's bloodline for sure, as in if he had any connection to David's house or the priesthood, but he certainly had the wisdom of a good leader! He would not ride into Jerusalem trumpeting about what he was going to accomplish and how the king had given him the permission and authority. Nehemiah would not tell his intent at all until he had literally surveyed and ascertained the truth about Jerusalem's condition for himself. He would even take a specific survey of the city walls during the night hours so as not to raise anyone's suspicions. He was not there to accuse the Jews, or even give the impression of accusing them of

neglecting something they may have attempted but failed or been stopped in doing. Nehemiah was only interested in stirring up the people's hearts to do the work in spite of the possible inside and certain outside opposition. Thus, only once he was convinced the city, in particular its walls, had simply been left in ruins, he rose up and made the Jews aware of exactly why he had come and the authority he had been given by the king.

Nehemiah accomplished what he wanted to in encouraging and convincing the Jews the time had come for Jerusalem, as a city, to rise from the ashes! The people almost immediately began to build; and as expected, the opposition came. The Jews had obviously learned the lesson in building the temple, as the people did not worry about the grander they might have wanted the city to have; but as God had told them of the temple, they seem to build with the understanding God would take pleasure in their willingness. As the non-Jews mocked them for the weakness of the walls (which were no doubt being built mostly with stone left from the original walls being broken down, a fact archaeology is showing to be true) the Jews continued. As the threats of the non-Jews mounted, Nehemiah cause the people to build and be in constant preparedness for war at the same time. Thus, every man built with his sword strapped to his side, watches were set to look for approaching trouble, and people's living quarters were located in more defensible places. This was not a convenient way to build, but in a sign God was truly with them, the people finished bringing the entire surrounding walls together in only fifty-two days. (Neh. 6:15) The historian Josephus disputes this, saying it took a bit over two years; but he may have been talking more about complete fortifications, not just the accomplishment of bringing the various pieces of the walls together in all places.

In any case, when one considers doing the work in the face of opposition and the limited materials available to the Jews, the accomplishment was nothing short of a miracle! Unlike the temple, there was no stoppage in the work; and after the city walls were restored, even before houses were built, certain Jews made commitments to live in the city. Overall, it was decided, just as the tithing amount of one's increase in the Law, a tenth of the Jews living in the land would live in Jerusalem at any given time. (Neh. 11:1-2) The number combined with the random selection of who would live there, beyond those who volunteered, ensured the city never lost meaning as the heart of the Jewish community. A new commitment was also made to the temple and God's Law. This commitment would, once again, show how much these returning Jews were the chosen nation, back in the land God had said would always belong to them, and the city where God chose to place His name!

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

life as usual. (Matt. 24:36-41) Jesus also tells us if we would study the patterns of God's interaction with men as much as we do the sky, we would be able to see much of the troubles and events that lay ahead of us. (Matt. 16:1-4, Luke 12:51-57)

We are never really able to know to the year, much less the day, when any prophesied event will take place. This is why it's utterly ridiculous for people to believe things like looking at Daniel's vision, and the numbers laid out in the revelation given to John, and say there will be a 7 year tribulation period, not to mention the false doctrine that Jesus' Second Coming will precede this 7 years, and there will actually be a third coming of Christ that will take place at the end of the 7 years! Just as Jesus was pointing out, we can look at the sky in the evening and know if there's a good chance of rain the next day or not, we can study God's Word, and look at what men are doing in general, to have a pretty good feel for what might lay around the corner. What we discern may be something concerning our nation or the world, but one way or the other, it's still just about us as individuals being on our guard for the sake of serving God through a potentially rough storm without losing our faith. It's about us not being like those who just want to believe serving God is, or always should be smooth sailing. Prophecy is intentionally about giving us an overall picture that helps us know there are things ahead; and it proves to those who come after, the events that happened were part of what God knew all along would happen.

Simply put, prophecy is not a specific hourglass of sand for us to watch! Because this is true, it is amazing in some ways that God gives Abram as specific a number as He does; but to be clear, God is not being inaccurate as some would accuse, God is just giving Abram the feel for how much what Abram is experiencing, in that he doesn't see the promise really come to pass, is only the beginning of those involved with building the nation who would live without seeing it unfold as one might like. On the other hand, what Exodus is telling us is a more specific number based on the facts having taken place, and everyone knowing the 400 year prophecy given to Abram had been completed. The nation was ready to move into a true state of forming into, acting like, and realizing they were God's promise of bringing about a great nation from their forefather Abram.

Now, the second point is the question of how we feel confident the 400 years was not just the time Israel spent in bondage, but was, in fact, from Abram through to Israel leaving Egypt. For that, we must believe God does not make mistakes. God knew what He was talking about while speaking to Abram, and the truth of its correctness is why we are told in Exodus there was a period of the nation's events that generally lasted 4 centuries. With that in mind, we can simply see the 400 years was not the nation in Egypt's bondage, or even from when the family moved there until they were set free, because it's not supported in the genealogy records the Bible gives. If you insist on crafting an argument

that Israel was in Egypt for 400 years, or even the more specific 430, the best you can do is stack the ages of fathers in each generation. Doing this violates both what we are told, as well as the logical conclusions we should be able to draw from other information we are given. Thus, allow me to demonstrate.

To stack the numbers and get close to the 430 years, you have to go to the genealogy given in chapter 6 of the book of Exodus, and start the sequence by using Genesis to calculate a few things, specifically Joseph's age at the time he brought his father's house to Egypt. If you do this, the numbers go as follows: Jacob was 130 years old when he moved to Egypt. (Gen. 47:8-9) This makes his son Joseph about 39 at that point. Genesis tells us Joseph dies at the age of 110. Thus, from the time of Israel's entering into Egypt to the death of Joseph, we have 71 years. Now, if Joseph was about 39 years old when he brought his father's house to Egypt, his brother Levi would have been about 44. We know this has to be close, at the very least, because of the information given in Genesis, which shows us Jacob had most of his sons during his second 7 year time period of working for Laban. (Gen. 30:25-26) Levi could not be too much older than Joseph, considering Levi was Leah's third biological son.

This is where we turn to Exodus chapter 6. If Levi was 44 when they went to Egypt, he lived for 93 years in Egypt, because we are told he lived to be 137. Now, if you ignore the clear indication in Exodus chapter 6 that Kohath was the middle of three sons for Levi, and say Kohath was the last, and also born in the last year of Levi's life, you can put the full 93 years of Levi's life in Egypt into the count. If, again, you ignore the indication that Amram was Kohath's first son, and also say Amram was born in Kohath's last year of life, you can add the full 133 years of Kohath's life, bringing you to 226 years. If you further say that Moses was born in the last year of Amram's life, you can add Amram's 137 years of life, bringing the total to 363 years. Then you can find by looking at Exodus chapter 7 verse 7 that Moses was 80 years old when he came in to tell Pharaoh to let God's people go. Adding Moses' 80 years brings us to a grand total of 443 years!

Defying logic and stacking all the ages end to end as much as you can, you only come to 13 years more than the 430 year mark. If, for logic sake, you don't want to completely stack the ages as we just did, you only have these 13 years to work with. If you want to shave some more time by saying the 430 years extends to the chronological end of Exodus, you won't get much there. The true chronological end of the book of Exodus' story is Israel finishing the work of building and dedicating the tabernacle, which Israel was told to construct in being entrusted with God's Law. The months are recorded for this time period, and so we know from the time Israel was told by Pharaoh to leave Egypt to the completion of the tabernacle, there is only about a year.

If one does not defy logic, one will consider the post-flood genealogy given in Genesis chapter 11, which

shows an age averaging between the late twenties and the late thirties for the age various fathers had the son listed as the next generation. If you add to that the fact Abram, only through miraculous health given to him by God (which even he and his wife had trouble believing would happen until it did), goes past 100 years old to bear children, you have to believe the generations in Egypt had their children a little younger than stacking the ages would ever come close to allowing. This pretty much solidifies the argument Israel was not in Egypt for 400 or 430 years, much less specifically held in bondage for that length of time. I agree it only stands to reason that what we are told in Exodus 1:8, "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." did not happen immediately after Joseph's death. However, 400 years is a long time, and the generations for it just aren't there.

The way to quantify all this is to understand Abram was 75 years old when God called him to move on into Canaan after leaving his father's house in Haran, and Isaac was born when Abram, by then Abraham, was 100 years old. (Gen. 21:5) This gives us 25 years of Abram being in Canaan before the birth of his son. Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob was born. (Gen. 25:26) This brings us to 85 years. Jacob was 130 when he moved his family from Canaan to Egypt. (Gen. 47:9) This clearly gives us three generations, and a total of 215 years of building God's plan for the nation. Looking at Exodus chapter 6, we find Levi, and he enters the land of Egypt as a grown man; but he couldn't have been as old as Abraham was when Abram came to Canaan. Levi's son Kohath, has a son named Amram, who is the father of Moses. This represents four generations in the Egypt experience, and they did not likely have their sons as old as Abram had Isaac and even Isaac had Jacob. If we consider God was directing all this, the idea that the time period from the entering of Egypt to their leaving accounts for the other half of the 430 year period given in Exodus 12:40, the rundown is actually very simplistic.

Levi being about 44 when entering Egypt and dying at 137 covers 93 years. We know Moses' life from his birth to the release from Egypt covers right at 80 years. (Ex. 7:7) Thus, the time from Levi's death to the birth of Moses leaves us with a very reasonable 42 years in-between. One can easily see how that from the time Jacob moves his family to Egypt until the time Moses leads them out, there is 215 years completing the 430, and fulfilling the prophecy of 400. This is also a true breaking point; as Israel leaves Egypt, we clearly see the nation's time begins to be counted on the basis of the calendar God gives Israel to use. Moses is told the month in which the original Passover took place, and Pharaoh told Israel to leave, would be the first month of the year unto Israel. (Ex. 12:1-2) We are also told the raising of the tabernacle, which is the final event of Exodus, took place right at the start of the first month of Israel's second year. (Ex. 40:17) This shows us a one year period after leaving Egypt and the true establishment of what Abram was asking about here in Genesis chapter 15 had come to pass.

In verse 14 God also tells Abram exactly what we started off by talking about, which is, the nation that oppressed the chosen nation would not go unpunished for their actions, neither would the labor and strife of the generations that live through this time do so without being a part of building the nation. Just as Abram had trouble seeing his role in the grand plan, these would face their own doubts, but God assures that even their sacrifice is not in vain. God says the chosen nation would come out of this 400 year period with great substance. In truth, we see Israel departed with much of the substance they created while being oppressed. This is what Exodus shows. Egypt would be devastated and set back irreparably, but Israel lost nothing in the plagues. In the end, Pharaoh is so desperate to get rid of Israel, he instructs the Egyptians to give Israel whatever they need to get out of their land, which had to be pretty much the last things of value Egypt had left. In one last push to defy God, Pharaoh even gave God the chance to show Israel the fulfillment of this prophecy in a way that assured them Egypt would no more be a threat to them as they journeyed to the promised land. Israel would not travel looking over their shoulder weary of Pharaoh's approaching army, because they had seen that great army dead and its equipment destroyed as it washed up on the banks of the Red Sea! (Ex. 14:26-15:19)

To cap off the point, this 400 years was the entire process from Abram to the time of Israel leaving Egypt, God did not go on to speak as if all this 400 years' events were far into the future. In verse 15 Abram is assured he would see none of the bondage. If God was not speaking in terms of Abram being a part of the whole 400 year prophecy, why would this assurance be needed? God didn't want Abram to fear, and was telling Abram there was nothing he could do to avert it, in spite of the fact he was living in the cycle of events that would lead to it. God makes it clear, Abram not seeing or reaching this time of the nation's bondage also wasn't going to be because he would die shortly after God told him all this. God tells Abram he would only be gathered to his fathers after reaching a good old age. We should bear in mind that Abram was already 75 when he left Haran for Canaan proper, and this was before the birth of Ishmael, who was born just over 10 years into Abram's sojourning in Canaan. Abram was worried about not having a child to carry out the promise, as he was already in his late seventies and early eighties, but God assures him he has a lot of life left in him. However, Abram would simply not be a part of the events of Israel's bondage, which later people of the great nation in this 400 year cycle would have to endure. Again, we each play our role, and that's the way it is!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

The priests were also to be aware of the fact that when they were ceremonially unclean by any means any of the common people would be made unclean, they were to refrain from handling or eating those things that were theirs as part of their service as priests and their families. Things such as leprosy or a sore that would make anyone unclean, made a person of the priest's family unable to partake of things from the temple until (and if) they had been declared clean again. Things that made a person of the nation unclean for the remainder of the sunlight hours applies to the priests in this same way; and regardless of if it would normally be required of a common person or not, those of the priest's family were also to wash in water before they could be clean and again partake of the holy things. Also, while a common person of the nation would be unclean until the proper things had been observed, those of the priest's house were simply never to eat of animals that had been killed by other animals or died of themselves. Those of the family who violated these rules were to be removed from being considered a part of the priest's family, in much the same way certain things could cause a common person to be separated from the nation as a whole. As a member of this family, one was not just responsible for themselves, they stood under God's direct guidance, and He took responsibility for who they were. Thus, violating the holy things of God could even bring death!

The fact the families of the priesthood could partake of and even depend on the items derived from their service as priests, still did not mean the holy things were truly theirs to do with as they pleased. None of the food items could be used to feed one who was not eligible to eat of the holy things, even if they were a guest of the priest's house or someone hired to do work for the family. However, if a priest had purchased a servant in a way that made them part of the priest's house, such a servant could eat the food items as well as any of the children born to that servant, who were also considered part of the priest's house. If a daughter of the priests married outside the priesthood's family, she would no longer be considered eligible to partake of holy things, because she now would be of her husband's family. The only way this could change is if she was sent out of her husband's care - what we would call divorced - or if her husband died and she rejoined her father's house. However, if she had children by that time, her children would bind her to her husband's house in a way she could never again be considered part of her father's house. Now, if anyone not eligible to eat of the holy things did so without realizing it was holy, they were to return an equal portion of what they had taken along with another fifth (which is like a half tithe, for they are not giving to God, only returning what was His already), back to the priests. Such things are important because the people should desire to help the priests not make mistakes, as no matter who was at fault, the priest would stand before God for it.

God would go on to be specific about what is a person's choice and what is not when selecting animals to bring for sacrifice, and that these rules apply to both those

blood-born in Israel as well as those who join the nation from outside. When a person is offering because they made a vow that requires a burnt offering or they are simply bringing a burnt offering of their own free will, it is still to be a male; but they are perfectly in their right to choose if they want to bring from the cattle, sheep, or goats, as long as the animal is a prime specimen. Those animals with imperfections are not accepted by God. If a peace offering is brought for a vow or of a person's free will, they are also free to bring of the cattle or sheep, but, again, they must be a prime specimen. God gives a list of examples that disqualify animals from being prime specimens, but tells of one specific exception that applies only to those offerings that are freewilled and not even for a vow. Because God respects what nature brings about, the animal can have a limb that is longer or shorter. This really would only be a defect in the animal's natural birth, as another list of examples is then given of things that disqualify an animal, and these make it clear nothing that could have come to this state by an injury is to be accepted. Animals with imperfections simply are not to be placed on God's altar. It is even emphasized that there is no exception for animals one might obtain from someone outside the nation who does not know the Law. It's not about where the animal comes from, because the imperfection is in the animal itself. This would discourage Israel from even accepting any animals that were not the very best when being given, trading for, or buying animals from those outside the nation.

The next detail has to do with the fact many of the animals called for to be offered must be young, even of their first year. However, God specifies that no matter whether it's of cattle, sheep, or goats, a newborn animal is not to be used as an offering until it has come through a seven day time period of being with its mother after birth. This helps give time to see if the animal is truly of a good enough quality to offer, and anything such as unstable walking or weakness an animal might exhibit is or is not just the animal adjusting to life outside the womb. This also shows a certain amount of compassion for the mother, as most mammals take a keen interest in at least knowing their offspring survived the initial days of life after birth. From the eighth day forward an animal is available to be offered, but in another point of compassion, no mother and its offspring are to be brought to sacrifice on the same day. Sacrifice is just that, a loss and meant to bring the reality of the destruction sin brings, not to build a callus emotional state in the one who offers it. It is a natural part of a mammals existence and ability to care for their young that mothers are often able to recognize the cries of their young, and the young its mother. The animal is dying as a representative replacement for the fact we deserve death due to our sin; trauma to the animals being offered is to be recognized and avoided in the ways it is completely unnecessary. The people were also to remember that offerings of thanksgiving were to be eaten in the same day and not left or stored longer. Going against even the smallest details or attempting to work around them would not be accepted. The things of God are separated from the things of this world, and the people of the chosen nation were to be as well. It was for this purpose God brought them up out of

Egypt!

The next part starts a specific rundown of the seven feasts God would give Israel to recognize through all their generations. To understand some of what God would specify for certain of these feasts and give a foundation for their purpose, God starts off by referring back to the truth He built into creation that seventh day of the week as the Sabbath to God, and there should be no work done on that day. Six days were made for man to do work in, but the seventh God made for man to rest from earthly things and think upon The Lord. Remembering this originally created cycle is the fourth commandment of the ten, and it certainly was to be held by all those of the chosen nation no matter where they may live or be.

While not all the days these feasts involve are Sabbaths, all feast days should honor The Lord. The first feast would, of course, remember where Israel's freedom from bondage and existence as a true independent nation had begun. God had already told Israel at the actual occurrence of the Passover, which set them free from Egypt, that the month in which this had occurred would be the first month of the year to them. Thus, they already understood that the fourteenth day of the first month was the day they had prepared the original Passover meal to be eaten that night, and Pesach or Feast of Passover, was to remember that event each year. The nation of Israel also recognizes sunset as the start of a new day, not sunrise. This is obvious as to why, when one studies the creation process and certainly the rules in the Law concerning things such as many actions that make a person unclean until sundown. So, while the fourteenth is Passover, the meal is eaten as the fifteenth day begins at sundown. This fifteenth day is also the start of the second feast, which is Matzot or Feast of Unleavened Bread. This feast lasts seven days, and the fifteenth or first day is to be observed in the same way a seventh day Sabbath is to be, meaning no work is to be done. The last day of this feast, which is the twenty-first, is also to be observed as a Sabbath. All seven days there would be sacrifices offered at the temple, and the people were to eat no leaven in these days, to remember the hasty journey they took out of Egypt.

Going back to the layout of the fourteenth being Passover and the fifteenth being the first day of Unleavened Bread as well as a Sabbath, God says the third feast would be the day after this Sabbath. Thus, the third feast, called Bikkurim or Feast of Firstfruits, corresponds to the second day of Unleavened Bread on the sixteenth day of the month. This would obtain more historic meaning for Israel as they got to the promised land; but also, once there, this day would anchor when a year would start. The month of the earliest grain harvest would be the month to consider the first month and begin this feast cycle, as the people were to eat nothing of the new harvest until this day came and its offerings had been brought before The Lord! The first sheaves of harvest

were to be brought to the priest on this day of Firstfruits to be waved offered unto God, and along with this was to be offered a perfect specimen male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering. There was also to be the plant-based offerings of a specific measurement of fine flour mingled with oil, and drink offering of unleavened juice, all presented in the prescribed manner for such offerings.

This day would also be the direct anchor for when to have the fourth feast of the year, as the fourth feast would not be given a day or a month. The day of Firstfruits would be the first day in counting seven sets of seven days. Representative, it's as if the cycle starts with Passover as a sixth day of the week, or what we call a Friday, and Unleavened Bread starts on a seventh day or Sabbath. This makes Firstfruits a representative first day of the week, or what we call Sunday, and as such, a perfect day to continue counting representative days until you come to the seventh representative Sabbath of that count. Just as Firstfruits is the day after the representative Sabbath that is the first day of Unleavened Bread, the fourth feast, called Shavuot or Feast of Weeks, is the day after the seventh representative Sabbath of the count that started with Firstfruits. This makes the count fifty days in all, and that's why it's also known by the name Pentecost, which means fifty in Greek. On this day there is to be offered plant-based offerings made from the new harvest, the grain of which has had time to be processed into fine flour. With this new flour there are to be made two loaves of leavened bread of a specific size to offer before God. Along with these are to be brought for burnt offerings, seven lambs in their first year, a young bullock, and two rams, all with the required plant-based offerings that normally go along with each animal as such. Then there was to be one young goat offered as a sin offering, and two lambs in their first year as peace offerings.

The two leavened loaves of bread were to be put with the portions of the two peace offering lambs that were waved before The Lord, and these items would then belong to the priests, as the Law prescribes. This feast day would also be observed in the same way a Sabbath is, in that it is to be a day of no labor, and instead, focusing upon the things of God. This day was truly a day to stop and give thanks to God for all He had provided, and in doing that, it was a good time to remind the people again of how when they harvested their crops they were not to put effort into going all the way to the edges, or raking up every last portion that could be gathered off the ground. They were not to put extra work into picking every last portion of the fruit on a tree or vine. They were to simply gather the abundance, and leave the gleaning work for those who did not have an abundance because they were poor or just traveling through the land; and thus, what they gleaned could be theirs. God wanted it to be known that all were free to be blessed by what God's promised land provided, and show what a group of people who follow His Laws of righteousness can bring about, even in this world!

Let's stay in God's Word!

