

Free - Take One



Shaqah

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

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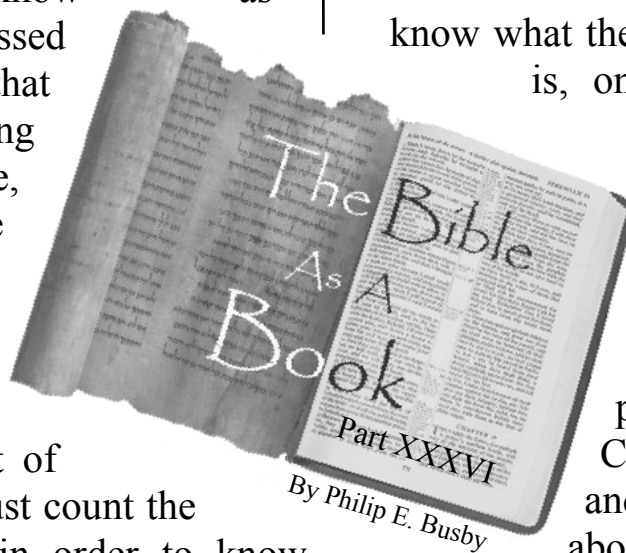
As we continue our overview of the book of Leviticus, we ended our last segment talking about the seven feasts God specifically gave Israel to observe each year. In that discussion we came through the instructions for the fourth of the seven, which is Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks, and what many people know as Pentecost. We discussed how the feast that recognizes the beginning of the harvest cycle, which is on the sixteenth day of the first month and called the Feast of Firstfruits, is directly connected to the Feast of Weeks because you must count the days from Firstfruits in order to know when the Feast of Weeks is to be observed. The Feast of Weeks also recognizes the harvest, but more of the fact the harvest is coming in for the year. This is why the instructions about leaving the gleaning of the harvest for those who are without is coupled with this feast. All this brought us through Leviticus chapter 23 verse 22, and we will begin this segment with verse 23.

The fifth feast of the seven would be given a date, but it is still anchored to the beginning feasts, because knowing which moon cycle is to be considered the first month of the year is accomplished by knowing when the first sheaves are going to come in and the stipulations for Firstfruits can be accomplished. Once you know what the first month of the year

is, one can know what the seventh month of the year is, and the first day of that month is to be Rosh Ha-Shana or the Feast of Trumpets. This feast prophesies of the Second Coming of The Messiah, and as such, is a feast all about sounding of trumpets,

which symbolizes the nation calling out to God, and for God's return to this earth. The day is to be observed like a Sabbath in that no work is to be done on this day. It is holy unto The Lord, and there were to be offerings offered at the temple in recognition of this feast.

The sixth feast is also given a day, as



it is to be observed on the tenth day of the seventh month, and it is called Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement. This feast prophesies of the Day of Judgment when all will stand before God at the true end of this universe's existence. As much as most all the feasts are very solemn occasions, the Day of Atonement is above and beyond the others. Much of the stipulations for what was to be done at the temple had already been laid out, as on this day the temple was to be rededicated and cleansed, along with the nation as a whole, using the blood of offerings and ceremony specific to this day. Because of all this, the Day of Atonement is not just to be recognized as a Sabbath in that no work is to be done, but serious contemplation concerning all the ways each individual and the nation had failed to be perfect before God is to be a big part of this day. Each year every person is to be humbled before God and reminded about how much we should all be striving to be much better than we are. For humans it is important to strip away all the worldly concerns and the pride of our "accomplishments" and focus on all that we have done wrong, along with the ways we can be more righteous in spite of how far any of us think we have or have not come. This was such a serious issue that God even puts the specific instructions in this feast that anyone of the nation who doesn't take this day to do such a thing is to be removed from the nation, and anyone who disrespects the day by doing work, God says He will destroy their soul!

God also specifies that this stipulation will not change no matter how

much time may pass or life's circumstances may shape the nation and/or individual lives. There was/is no level of righteousness that can be accomplished in this world that would cause this day's focus to change! Through all the future generations of Israel, they are to be very observant of this day of rest starting from the sunset on the ninth day until the sunset of the tenth day. God even makes it clear this is how all Sabbaths are to be recognized. Not by a clock or some arbitrary rule that may be changed from time to time by men, but sunset to sunset. Other days of the week can be looked at beginning and ending by whatever criteria man may choose because they belong to men, but the Sabbaths belong to God, and they are to be observed by this rule alone! God also finishes this stern warning by telling us no matter in what light we may view the Sabbaths, they are something to be treasured. Learning that is a large part of the battle in continuing to hold a Sabbath correctly, as humans tend to want what they want when they want it with little to no regard for what God wants!

The seventh, and obviously last of the God ordered feasts, is to be observed beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and it, like the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is a seven day feast. However, this feast, called Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles, also includes an eighth day, and it is a way of recognizing the harvest is complete. This feast prophesies of the true believer finally making it home to be with The Lord when all our earthly labors will be over. This

fact, along with the fact it ends the seven feasts cycle, is why it has an eighth day. The Feast of Tabernacles technically is observed from the fifteenth day to the the twenty-first day of the seventh month. The fifteenth or first day of this feast is, once again, to be observed as a Sabbath which is holy unto The Lord. However, the true end of this feast is the twenty-second day of the seventh month, in that part of correctly observing this feast is to hold a solemn assembly on the eighth day, offer the appropriate offerings, and observe it as a Sabbath.

God concludes this most basic rundown of the seven feasts by clearing up a few details one might ask about. Every day had certain offerings that were to be offered at the temple. Every literal seventh day of the week Sabbath had specific offerings that were to be offered at the temple, on top of the offerings required for a standard day of the week. Obviously, these feast days can overlap any particular day of the week, meaning any particular feast day that was to be observed like a Sabbath, might actually come on a seventh day Sabbath. Thus, what God wants to make clear is that no matter what day of the actual week a feast day overlapped, there was nothing about the specifics for offering the offerings of the feast day that made it unnecessary to offer the offerings that would normally be brought on the day if it had not coincided with a feast day. Observing these feasts and offerings prescribed for them, also was not a way to replace or displace any other offerings that

might be or should be brought by the people of the nation. The everyday bringing of offerings, for whatever reason they were or needed to be brought, had nothing to do with what was required by the feasts, and one can see how this made certain days very busy days at the temple!

God goes directly from this to giving some more specifics about the Feast of Tabernacles, and in this we are told the specific of it being intentionally set at the end of the harvest cycle. It is also talked about more generally as being that seven day feast that includes an eighth day, the first and eighth days both being observed as Sabbaths. Then we are told something interesting that shows us how much the Sabbath is not just about doing nothing one might consider “work,” but a day of setting aside our labor to do what God wants us to do. On this first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the people were to gather boughs and branches worthy of use in praising The Lord, and for the purpose of building a three-sided shed in order to live in for the seven days. These structures are referred to as booths, and this is why some believe the more appropriate name, or translation of the feast's name, is “Feast of Booths.” In contrast to the sixth feast being the most solemn of all the seven, this seventh feast is the one with the specific instruction that the people are to rejoice during it!

However, this feast also comes with that same instruction that time and passing generations are not to change this feast's

observance. This is due to how easy it is to become comfortable in our ever growing technological world of protecting ourselves from the natural elements. God knew this, but specifies that living for these seven days in these booths would remind and reconnect the people of the nation to not just a more “primitive” time, but their past and beginnings of their nation as God brought Israel from Egypt to the promised land. This is also part of the prophecy of this feast, in that leaving this world and being welcomed into the place The Messiah has prepared will be a true new beginning like none other has ever been! As man “advances,” this stipulation of the seventh feast does not become less relevant, it becomes more relevant all the time. Thus, it is emphasized that living in booths was not to be changed or lost throughout the generations, and Moses declares all these feasts unto the people!

The next stipulations turn us back to the continual upkeep of the tabernacle and later temple. God specifically instructs that it is the responsibility of the people of the nation to do the work and make the sacrifice of bringing pure oil to be used in the menorah inside the Holy Place. It, of course, would be the responsibility of the High Priest to make sure the oil was replenished in the seven lamps of the menorah, and that the wicks were properly cared for so these lights never went out. However, it was not some pious or burdensome responsibility of the priesthood to supply the pure oil needed. This oil should literally flow into the

temple by way of the nation as a whole being willing to supply it. This, again, is specified as something that time's passage and technology was not to change through the generations. What a great privilege it would be to have the opportunity to produce oil worthy of use in the Holy Place, and what a tragedy it would be if the nation was not willing to bring the oil, and in quantities necessary to assure the lights never went dark!

Now, opposite of the menorah inside the Holy Place is the table of shewbread, and for this there was to be twelve cakes made, each one consisting of a specific measurement of fine flour so they were all equal in size. There is no mention of these being made with leaven, and they are described as cakes, which indicates the same bread as other specifically defined unleavened offerings. This bread was also only replaced each week, and raised bread with moisture would certainly have become moldy. In the description for this, there is also the mention of the offering being an offering made by fire, and leaven was not burned on the altar. That being said, there is no mention of any portion of these cakes actually being burned, but there was to be frankincense put on top of the bread as it was laid on the table. Frankincense was often the major portion of fine flour offerings that was burned. Thus, just as frankincense was put on top of flour offerings (so as to be mostly taken in the handful of the offering the priest would place on the altar), frankincense brought to sprinkle on top of this bread would be

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

As we begin this segment, we are still discussing the events of what happened as Abram brought the unique offering God asked him to bring, and which represented the plan of God for building a chosen nation starting with Abram. Last time, we began talking about the actual words God spoke to Abram as God had brought him into a deep sleep with no imagery or other things to perceive beside hearing the voice of God. In this, we covered the prophecy of there being 400 years of the chosen nation living as Abram was living in that they would not own the land upon where they journeyed, and we ran down the numbers that show this time period actually covered Abram's sojourn. However, God also assured Abram that he would not personally see the affliction part of this prophecy, in spite of having many years left to live. This brought us through Genesis chapter 15 verse 15, and we are now ready to look at verse 16.

Verse 16 says just what we covered in running down the numbers of how the 400 years included Abram's time as well as the later captivity in Egypt. In this verse, Abram is specifically told the Egyptian situation would involve four generations. In discussing the offering Abram had been told to bring, we saw Abram was offering the things he did to specifically represent three generations consisting of himself, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob would still be alive when the family goes to Egypt, but he was old, and his days in Egypt were only to live

among his family during the closing years of his life. Thus, in this prophecy of four generations, we see Jacob's son Levi would have a son named Kohath, who had a son named Amram, who would be the father of Moses. This would make Moses that fourth generation following the three Abram was specifically representing, and Moses would lead a true nation of people out of Egypt to come back to and possess the land where Abram now stood!

The bringing about of a chosen nation is what Abram was concerned about happening, and God was simply explaining there was much more that needed to happen, before there was going to be a nation, than just the immediate concern of Abram having a biological son. God was only starting the work with Abram because these things take time; and while Abram was thinking short term, God's plan was way ahead of world events. This is emphasized in verse 16 as Abram is told the Amorites' iniquity had not come to a full as yet. This is one of those most fascinating pieces of prophecy, in that it is so powerful yet so compact and to the point. God was making clear that things Abram could never really understand during his time period were all a part of what God knew would happen, and these things would open the door for the promises God had made to Abram to come to pass. It is not even to say they would come to pass because God would make it so, but there would be a

reason it would be done as it was, when it was!

God is so much larger than we are, and it was easy even for someone in as direct contact as Abram was with God to lose sight of this. However, God just keeps reminding us over and over. In truth, this little statement at the end of 16 tells us quite a few things. First, is the fact, God did have a plan that was based on a far greater view of world affairs than Abram or any of us can grasp, and one of the greatest points that it shows us is, God does not just act without concern for the lives of individuals, groups of people, and each generation. If the devil wants to accomplish something, his only concern is how to get it done. This kind of thinking is why we call him the "devil." While humans, many times, give themselves too much credit, down inside we all live with the fear we are not very powerful and/or powerful enough to accomplish our goals. Ironically, facing this truth in situations where our lives just seem to be crumbling before our eyes is what drives many people to give up their faith in God, and start acting like the devil.

As humans, we know our time is short, but we fail to keep in mind that this shortness, for those who serve God, is only true as it pertains to our time of walking in this world. For the devil, this time is all he has left before he is judged and it's over for him. (Rev. 12:7-12) Now, for those who do not choose faith in God, this is true as well; but for those who choose faith, it is not, and our lives are to be what God wants them to be in the here and now without concern for our foolish impulses. We must trust and allow God to use our lives how He sees fit,

because He has promised a life after this world that is much greater than anything we could have here. If we panic, we will not allow God to use our lives; and this is based on the inescapable truth we just don't believe God is doing things right, fast enough, and/or the way we want. In doing this, we truly can find ourselves "living like the devil" in literal ways we just don't think about.

Understand, this can and often is true, even of those who do not believe they have turned their backs on faith, because they believe they are still striving to do good works. However, in not listening to God, the work is not good, and we have no idea the damage we may do. This is why it is so vitally important that we trust God and seek daily to hear His voice! We are one element in a greater process of God working that none perish but all come to repentance, and verse 16 shows us God is looking at a picture we cannot even fathom. God was telling Abram that time was needed to build God's chosen nation and do a specific work in a world of growing nationalistic thinking. Thus, there would be three generations before the Egypt experience would begin, and another four that would live through that before the work of possessing the land of promise was even to begin for the chosen nation!

Sometimes, I think we say God is great, and we love the platitude God loves me and God loves you, but in reality, we do not apply the truth that His entire plan cares about every person in every generation. God was working a plan that was bigger than the small concern of Abram's that he had no biological heir as yet. God was

orchestrating timing based on the fact, the people now living on the land God had promised Abram were also not the generation that had become worthy of God's judgment on their life in a way which justified displacing them from the land. God was not going to wipe out the Canaanite population in order to make room for His chosen nation just because that land was best suited to serve God's purposes. God had chosen this land, but it was something that had to be available, and that time had not come!

In other words, as corrupt as the land of Canaan was at the time of Abram, it was not as it was in the days of Noah, to use the ultimate example of how this dynamic works. (Gen. 6:5-8, Matt. 24:36-41) Sodom and Gomorrah were getting there much faster than the rest of the populations, and it would soon face the destruction of God's judgment, even in Abram's lifetime. However, this act would prolong the overall Canaanite downfall, in that all of Canaan would see God will only tolerate so much before He acts, and the corrupt population God destroyed would also not be around to spread their corruption to others. Thus, we see God caring for each individual, judging according to their actions, and not just destroying people who are in the way of His plan or "the greater good." Humans are often taught it's noble to think about the greater good, but in many circumstances we are too small to see the true greater good. Only God can make these kinds of calculations and show us what to do!

Now, to the issue of only the Amorites being mentioned here. First, we must look at the plan God lays out for the chosen nation to take the land of promise. Israel was instructed to create a bubble - if you will - where they possessed and controlled land not intermingled with the people of Canaan. However, in the later specific instructions God gave for doing this, there's the fact Israel was not to simply drive out all the people of the land all at once. This was due to the fact God's intent was to, again, use Israel to give people a chance at repentance, and the practical reason given to Israel is that they shouldn't allow the land to become a jungle - so to speak. (Deut. 7:21-24) The nation, at its beginning, would certainly be too small to take care of all the land, and if they drove out all the inhabitants at once, infrastructure - as we might call it today - would be lost to the moth and rust that doth corrupt. There is also the fact about thieves who steal. Emptying the land without being able to inhabit it would only invite other world powers to come in and prey on the land. Yes, God could simply perform miracles to keep all this from happening, but we see God wants to use the lives of people willing to serve Him and not violate the created laws of man's free will, along with the way God established nature to work, any more than is necessary. In the here and now, God's plan is to preserve these things until they are no longer preservable, at which point it will simply all need to end!

Speaking of people being willing to serve God, and that being something God

limits Himself to, brings us to three more important points to consider when thinking about God mentioning only one specific Canaanite people, but that not seeming purely correct. First, God was not talking to Abram just on the basis of what would happen, but on the basis of what was in His plan to happen. This is a bit of a deep subject, but striving to understand such things greatly helps us to accept God's plan with the trust of a child. I know some would argue that's a contradictory statement, but here's the truth: if one ignores how God works, and says, "I'm just going to leave it to The Lord," we so often do not. Especially when we see something we think we can tackle ourselves. We also are not compelled to seek God's instructions on a constant basis, which makes us vulnerable to listening to the wrong voice(s), believing foolishness to be wisdom. However, if we truly attempt to grasp how complex the way God moves is, we expand our mind. In doing this, we understand many things we would not have otherwise, and that's personal growth God wants us to have. Because this is true, it shouldn't bother us that, at the same time, we find ourselves very overwhelmed by the depth of the mysteries of God. This part of it keeps us mindful of the fact we need His direct guidance, and we don't find it so difficult to accept there is a lot we do not understand.

We must remember, God knows what will come about due to human choices, but God desires to move us according to His perfect plan! Our willingness can and does effect many things, but that's why I say God is not talking to Abram in light of what would

specifically happen; He's talking in terms of what was suppose to happen. This takes us to the second point of the three. Remember that when God brought Israel out of Egypt, it only took a year's journey in the wilderness to give them the Laws that would establish them as a nation, and to set all the physical elements in place to represent the prophecy contained in that Law, such as the priesthood and the tabernacle itself. It is also an important note that the tabernacle was mobile, and we think of this as being just for the sake of traveling through the wilderness. However, in truth, it also has to do with that fact Israel was not to drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan at once. In hindsight, God made it pretty clear in sending Abram (by then Abraham) to the land of Moriah to offer Isaac, as well as in the fact Melchizedek was from the city of Salem, that Jerusalem would ultimately be the city where God would place His name. (Gen. 14:17-20, 22:1-2) Simply put, Jerusalem may not have been part of the area taken by Israel at the start, so Israel would need a more mobile "temple," even for a time after entering into the promised land.

This fact becomes of greater interest when one considers after that short year Israel spent receiving the Law and setting up the tabernacle, it was not a long time before God was ready to bring Israel into and give them the southern end of Canaan. This would appear to have been an attempt to bring Israel right up from the Sinai Peninsula and into that southern area where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had most predominantly lived their lives and established a presence in the land. It also would have been a very orderly takeover of

What About God's Chosen People?

Part X

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

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

We ended our last segment talking about how the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem itself was also an important part of what the Jews needed to do upon returning from the captivity and after rebuilding the temple. We talked about how Nehemiah returned from Babylon to accomplish this very task, and discussed how, against all the odds the Jews were facing, they did build up the walls of Jerusalem. This not only restored the city of Jerusalem, but truly reconnected and solidified the Jews who had returned from Babylon as God's chosen nation, back on the land God had promised Abraham the nation would possess.

Is this where the struggles would end for the Jews? Certainly not! After completing much work in rebuilding Jerusalem and helping get the people on the right course, Nehemiah would return to the imperial palace as he had promised the king he would do. However, shortly thereafter, Nehemiah would again be given leave by the king to go back and resume his duties as governor in Judah. (Neh. 13:6) When Nehemiah returned to the land, he found the people, once again, had not lived up to their commitments. Even some in leadership positions had continued to align themselves with the surrounding people, instead of

trusting in God and standing on their own. The struggle to keep the Jewish people together and to re-establish their identity as a people, separated unto the work of God, and again make the land of promise the anchor of all Jews no matter where they might be scattered among the world, would be a long and hard task. As one continues to look at this history, it just re-emphasizes over and over how much there would not have continued to be a chosen nation at all if it had not been God's will that it happen!

The struggle to maintain the nation is not the proof God had or later decided to reject them, but instead, shows us how important to the plan of God and work in this world it was and is that the chosen nation be maintained. God was not going to simply allow His chosen nation to disappear among the populations of the world, and this also emphasizes the point there would be no room for an impostor nation to rise up in its place. Thus, again, the Jewish people are clearly the chosen nation which was once known as Israel. However, all this being true, we must not forget that God will not force people to serve Him, and this means there is a balance, which also proves the point. No impostor nation would have cared to maintain the ways of God by following a lifestyle so unpopular among the world, and this is shown in the fact, even the true nation struggled with whether to follow or turn away. This is why we have the stories of there being the need for men such as

Nehemiah, Ezra, and others who were used to bring back to the surface the willingness of the Jewish people to hold on to, at the very least, their heritage.

Especially since people tend to think so much in the terms that children are one's immortality, most people shore up this immortality thought by connecting back to their past. This is a logical thing to do, in that if your children represent your immortality, you represent your forefathers' immortality. This makes the heritage and connectivity to the past something that resonates in the minds of men; and God used this in making the Law, and very specifically the seven feasts given in it, not just something the nation was given as a burden to preserve. Instead, God laid out the feasts and things Israel was to recognize by setting them on a foundation of being something which actually happened to Israel, and as such, became their history. In the Law, Israel is even instructed that when their children ask why their people observe something, such as Passover, they are to be told the stories about where the nation had come from. (Ex. 12:24-27) This made the Word of God, truly, the Hebrew Bible, and, of course, at the time of the return, we are talking about, just that part most often called the Old Testament.

That point brings us to the third item of the list of things for which time was painstakingly taken to restore during the period of Ezra and Nehemiah. The temple had been rebuilt. The city of Jerusalem had been re-established as a city and cultural center for the chosen nation, but what would be the more continual binding tie for all this to remain something the chosen nation

would fight for as the generations passed? The answer to this is the written Word of God! Something brought up earlier in this series was the fact the Babylonian captivity was really the birth of the religion of Judaism. Again, I say this based on the simple truth that Jews no longer had the temple and were scattered among the world, and this forced the development of what it meant to follow God's Law under such circumstances. In talking about this the first time, I covered the basic reasons why Jews could not build a temple just anywhere, or a mobile structure such as the original tabernacle had been, in order to set up just anywhere. The Jews understood all this; thus they never tried, but what did happen was the development of what we know as synagogues. This, no doubt, started out as a basic idea long before it grew to be the more elaborate and formal thing we know today. However, the synagogue gave Jews a way to have a place which could house any copies of the written Word they might have, or writings based on the memory different ones had of what the Law said. It also gave Jews a place to meet with one another and study the writings, and worship God even in the absence of the temple.

The synagogue is not meant to be a replacement for the temple but a way of recognizing the temple is unavailable for one reason or another, yet Jews are mindful of the Law, nonetheless. As the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt by the returning captives, one could argue there was no need for synagogues or the like, but this is where the hope of perfect circumstances meets with reality. Many Jews were still captive and without means to return to the promised land; others simply did not know the temple,

once again, stood; and some simply did not care because they had settled in where they were and had no desire to return to their homeland. As with any people, there is a whole range of thoughts; and no Jew should be judged by others, for only God can truly know each heart. For all the good or bad in this idea, it should be understood that this was a system of worship that continued, and, in truth, served many Jews well in the aspect of maintaining their heritage no matter where they might reside. It also is true that after the time of Jesus the temple in Jerusalem was, once again, destroyed, but the synagogue system was still in place.

Looking at our question for this series, it deserves mentioning that the synagogue way of doing things also served as a model for what Christians are familiar with, which is the practice of going to church. Now, that's another large subject we don't need to go into deeper here; but if the Jews were not God's chosen nation, the church has some rethinking to do about all its practices! The larger point I wish to get to here is that after the Jews had returned and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, it again was to be the true center of the chosen nation's service to God, if for no other reason than the fact God's Word said it was to be so, and this means it was important the temple be the place that could be depended on. This brings clarity to why Ezra and Nehemiah's work to get and keep it all on track was so important, and no small part of that work would be the collecting and maintaining of reliable copies of the written Words of God! Like most very important work, this did not come with the grand

accolades or show up in the story line as one of the spectacular achievements of the time, but it was!

You see, a great deal of what we know as the Old Testament was in place by the time the Babylonians came to carry away the nation. Certainly the core, which is the Torah, (or first five books), and the early history, such as Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and what the church recognizes as the two books of Samuel were truly solidified. Of course, what we know as the two books of Kings was an ongoing history, the second of the two telling us how the Babylonian captivity came to be; but even these two books were, for the most part, in place before the captivity. The books of those prophets that came before the captivity were also words that had been preserved, and, again, you come to books such as Jeremiah that take you through the direct events of the captivity, making them books along with those like Daniel and Esther, which came about because of those who lived through the events of the captivity. The remainder of the books that belong to the Hebrew Bible were collected during and shortly after the return from the captivity, making these books, for people such as Ezra and Nehemiah, not history but the recording of events as they were happening.

For there to be a true collection, or as it is commonly called, "cannon," of books, there had to be involved with this restoring of the nation the restoring of sure copies of all the writings considered worthy of that cannon, and it can be no coincidence that Ezra was not only a priest of the house of

Aaron, but also a scribe! (Ezra 7:1-6) While the Bible records nothing about the specifics of it all, Ezra is credited with compiling the written Word of God into an official canon that would be maintained at the new temple in Jerusalem, and from which later copies would be made off of for use in synagogues all across the world. It is only reasonable that his work, at least, brought about the finalizing of the writing and compiling into the canon, those books which happened during Ezra's time period and which chronologically bring us to the end of the Hebrew Bible. Josephus, who was a Jewish historian of the first century A.D., references 22 sacred books that, according to him, had clearly been recognized as a complete work since the time of Ezra. He notes that there was at his time no dispute, or history of disputes, about the authenticity of these books being the Scriptures, and this makes it as good a historical fact as any historical fact that the Hebrew Bible was a solid set of writings from the time of Its chronological close to the time of Christ.

Beyond that, the Jewish people confirm to us the truth, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the books we know today as the Hebrew Bible being those same books. As to Josephus' mention of there only being 22 books, we must understand that the books were combined in a little different way - as they still are by the Jews to this day - than what most Christians have when opening their Old Testament. By considering the two books of Samuel one book, and doing the same with Kings and Chronicles, one cuts down the count by three books. Ezra and Nehemiah are also counted as one, and all of the “minor

prophets” are one scroll to the Jews; thus, one book instead of twelve. All this takes us from the Christian (if you will) count of 39 down to 24 books altogether. Josephus takes out one more in his reckoning by putting the story of Ruth into the book of Judges, and another by combining Jeremiah and Lamentations, which were both written by Jeremiah. It simply makes no difference how you divide or arrange the books when it comes to saying we are all talking about the same set of writings!

The importance to our question about Christians saying the Jews are not or never were the chosen nation is the fact that without the Jewish people and their efforts to maintain the written Word of God, the “church” would have no Old Testament! If the returning captives, and specifically God fearing men such as Ezra, had not followed God and ensured the Hebrew Bible was maintained and put back where it belonged at the center of the chosen nation’s life, completing what the Jews needed to truly move forward under the circumstances of there being those both on the land of promise as well as all over the world, the whole story would be different. The Scriptures themselves would have been lost or nothing more than a disorganized smattering of ancient writings spread out all over the place with many various copies, leaving us to wonder which ones were telling us the right information!

Christians could have their New Testament, but they would have no idea of what Jesus was referring to in half of what He had to say. This is true of much of the New Testament's words, and all this continues to solidify the importance of a

chosen nation. If the Hebrew Bible was not necessary, there would not even be a question about there ever being a chosen people or nation of God, especially one that would concern Jews and Christians, because the people we know as Jews would be nothing more than any other religious group and/or race with its own set of beliefs. The fact Christianity, even as just a religion, needs the Old Testament, is the reason attempts to throw away the Old and replace it with just the New Testament have always failed; but following the Old Testament story line, both as a historical account as well as in those things prophesied, we see the Bible is not just another old book in the world's collection of human writings. Christianity, the church, or whatever term you want to use, just doesn't make sense without the Hebrew Bible!

Now, as I believe I've mentioned before, the book of Nehemiah is not technically the chronological closing of the Old Testament, because the prophecy of Malachi actually is. However, as a historical narrative, Nehemiah is, for all intents and purposes, the end. At this point, we are about four hundred years from the coming of The Messiah, but, again, man's historical accounts fill in the gap. This is that point I have mentioned before about how we do not have to just take God's word for the fact the Jews have been around and a large part of the human story for a very long time! Man's account continues to show us how the process, and specifically the events prophesied in Daniel's vision, brought the chosen nation to the coming of The Messiah (without which there would be no "church"), and through to what we know the Jews are today. As I said early in this series,

the Jews survived both outside as well as inside opposition and challenges, but in the face of incredible odds the Jews survived as a people, and to this day remain, even fighting for their right to the land, and specifically the city of Jerusalem. This is why I think, especially by this point in the study, our question is no longer, are the Jews God's chosen nation, but how could they not be?

Now, Daniel's visions were not meant to be detailed accounts of the time period that exists between the end of what we call the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament, but they certainly are a clear overview of events for the purpose of understanding the chosen nation's struggles, and work in this world, were not coming to an end just because times might have seemed gloomy during the captivity. What Daniel saw was the fact the chosen nation would go on into the future and be part of the events man's choices would unfold in this world. The struggles and persecution they would face would also not end just because the return to the land of promise took place. Ezra and Nehemiah's story clearly demonstrates to us that even after their work and lifetimes, the struggle would continue as God gave each generation of Jews a chance to maintain, and if willing, to bring the nation back to where God had always wanted them to be. A fact made very specific in what Daniel saw is that this struggle would continue until the only choice left for God, to really bring the nation to where He wanted it to be, was to send The Messiah to lead the way, and the fact this is the purpose for why Jesus was sent when He was is one that many people who claim to know the Word of God unfortunately don't

really grasp.

It is good that Christians understand Jesus was willing and did give His life to save the world, but a fact I keep having to point out on this issue is that God doesn't set men up for failure. God sent Jesus knowing Jesus would be crucified, but Jesus was sent to offer Himself as the Leader the chosen nation needed, and The One Who without they could not succeed under the circumstances they had come to. The misunderstanding of this point is what causes so many to believe they can make the argument the church, or something else, replaced the chosen nation after Christ. The Jews had, once again, come to a critical point, and it would seem that rejecting The Messiah would be the last straw for them. On the surface this is an easy argument to make, but the deeper truth we are shown in the New Testament, and certainly in what was revealed to John, is not that the nation was to be rejected, but that their path through future events was going to be far more painful than God had given them the opportunity to have. This is all the more reason true believers, no matter from what race or part of the world they may be, should feel a kinship with the Jews and support them, pray for them, and for God to soon save us all by sending Jesus back to this earth to take the reigns of the chosen nation, and the world as a whole!

The fact the chosen nation's path was going to be far more painful than it needed to be is why Jesus wept over Jerusalem and the nation in Luke 19:41. The opportunity that had come to them through His

appearing was greater than any generation that had ever come before. This weeping of Jesus shows us God knew the nation would not take that opportunity, and what would come next would be great tragedy. However, it also makes the point God would continue to use the Jews, not reject them and allow them to simply disappear as a people, even at that time. It's only because the chosen nation would be maintained that future generations of Jews would, from then forth, face a struggle like none who had come before them had! To understand how the nation came to this point in time, where The Messiah would be their only hope, but also be rejected by them, we need to continue to follow the story of what took place in the time between the work of Ezra and Nehemiah and the coming of Christ. This history shows us the continual struggle to get and keep the nation on track as well as how and where they got off track. It also explains a lot about what happened in the New Testament, if for no other reason than it shows us why there are the groups of people and government/religious structures among the Jews which we see at the opening of The New Testament.

All things considered, Ezra and Nehemiah did an excellent job in doing what they could to ensure the founding elements of what the nation needed was put back in place; but like all men, including those who greatly serve God, their lives would come to an end. As always, this would leave the future generations to make decisions as to how to maintain the ways of God they had been called to perform, and hold onto them among shifting political

circumstances in the world at large. With this in mind, the first, and maybe best thing to keep in mind through the events leading to The Messiah, is the Jewish struggle with the issue of national independence versus being under the rule of another government power. This had been an issue before the Babylonian captivity, as we have discussed earlier in this series. The kings of Judah were not satisfied to focus on the work of God without concern for the fact they were a vassal state under a foreign rule, yet that's what God had instructed them to do.

Accepting such a thing is really not such an odd thing to see happen when one considers God gave Israel no king, for God was to be their King; and an earthly king of the chosen nation only came about because the people demanded one. What is interesting when considering the allowance of a foreign king to rule over the land, is the story about how God judged the kings of Babylon during their time of rulership, even bringing their rule of the empire to an end. (Dan. 4:1-5:30) This happened because God is not just the True King of the chosen nation, but of all men; and this simple truth can be emphasized when a power puts itself in the direct line of sight by ruling or attempting to rule over God's chosen nation! This is just another thing we see as a repeating theme in the way God can, is, and will continue to work, and which will bring about the Second Coming of Christ.

What this simply tells us is that the chosen nation is an irreplaceable part of the plan! Again, it's simple to make flat statements about the Jews not being the chosen nation; but when we study the events for ourselves, we have a deeper

understanding that shows us this is not a possibility. They have been and continue to be just too large a piece of the puzzle to have a picture of any kind without them! Now, what one sees by following the history is, for a short time, the Babylonian captivity had firmly put the fact in the minds of the Jewish people that God would allow the nation to fall to foreign powers, especially if they did not serve God. The thought that the chosen nation would never be allowed to fall, no matter how much they turned their backs on God's ways, was the arrogance the pre-captivity kings had staked their lives on, and they had lost. However, the captivity did not put the thoughts and desires for national independence out of the overall picture for the nation, as this issue would come up again and again through the generations. The problem is that human arrogance always finds a way to justify what we want even in the face of being shown what is right.

Between the return from the captivity and the time of Christ, there would be times of virtual independence, or, at least, the ability to manage their affairs without much interference from outside governments. However, they would never truly be out from under the shifting powers of the world. Because of this, the issue could not logically turn again to be the thought the chosen nation would never be allowed to fall, but a thought that brought very much the same issues with it did arise. No matter what the circumstances, there were always those of the chosen nation who believed the nation was righteous enough or, in some way, deserving of complete independence. To be clear, in saying this, I'm not judging those who fought for the right things when it was

the right time to do so! I'm only pointing out that a constant thirst, by at least some, to again not accept that living for God and demonstrating His ways could be done at many points without concern for who the secular authority was, caused much bloodshed when it need not have happened. This is part of what Jesus came to show the correct course on. As Ecclesiastes tells us, there is a time for everything. (Eccl. 3:1-8) There is a time to fight and a time to be content. There is also a time to fight for what needs to be corrected internally (which Jesus attempted to show, and this point explains why He was so critical of the nation on many levels), and there is a time to oppose external wrong.

The nation's inability to see this fact clearly, and desire to seek God for when to act and when to hold off, along with the leadership's thirst to maintain their own power, caused many problems. It also became the main issue in crucifying The Messiah when He arrived and had made it clear what His goals were focused on. Many Jews wanted independence, and Jesus did not show Himself to be the conquering hero they wanted Him to be, but this is because The Messiah was about restoring righteousness, not granting the desires of men. What we end up with is history repeating itself over and over, but in each cycle there is a downward movement as well. This downward spiral is why God will need to bring this world to an end one day, and the repeating cycle is why Jesus mentions the coming of the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, which was something those who know the history understand had already been fulfilled before

the coming of Christ. (Matt. 24:15-18)

Looking at the downward spiral we all create in this world, we can see just how right in one aspect people can be when looking at their children as their immortality. When God originally brought the chosen nation out of Egypt and gave them the promised land, the nation faced a problem very similar to those at the return from Babylon. During both times, the problem was not so much the desire to be an independent nation, but the nation's demise through ceasing to be a distinct people by intermingling with those not of the bloodline. The Jews would struggle with this problem over and over, in no small part because it ends up being another reason people disliked there being a chosen nation. People to this very day will look at Jewish families and judge them for thinking their children are too good to marry non-Jewish children. Of course, there are those in every generation willing to cast this restriction aside; and by doing so, many Jewish families have ceased to hold their true distinction. In spite of all these struggles, God continually urges those who are willing and works for the chosen nation to stay a more separated people, maintaining a distinction with even genetic markers modern science can see today that prove they are a unique race, and not just some jumbling group of people claiming to be a specific race!

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. 8

the land in that as Israel grew they could have simply expanded further and further north. That was more of the reality of what God had planned, but God does not force people to serve Him and do exactly as He wills. Thus, when Israel sent spies into the land, most of them came back with fearful tales about what giants lived in the land and how Israel would never be able to defeat them. These negative, lacking trust in God, voices were the ones the congregation listened to. (Num. 13:17-14:23) Because of their disbelief, the perfect plan of God was not fulfilled. Does this mean God was wrong? No! God had to speak about what His perfect plan was or it would appear the later rebellious generation was right in doing what they chose!

They were not right; and instead of settling down in the southern area of the land, Israel went back into the wilderness to wander for forty years. The point of this was so all those who were adults at that time would pass away and the next generation of the nation could be used to fight the fight. This delay changed what and how things needed to be done based on the changing circumstances of the people in the land of Canaan, and God would work around those changes. After the forty years of wandering, Israel travels to the east of the Jordan River and fights people on that side before entering the promised land on the west side. They also were far to the north of where they would have originally entered. Only God knows all the reasons why this was done so differently than the original plan, but we can certainly speculate various factors. One, is the fact, God took good care of Israel during their

wilderness stay, and no doubt during that forty years the nation grew in size from what it was. Aside from the Canaanite population not being exactly the same as it had been, Israel had changed in that those who were the children in the nation, who may not really have remembered well the slavery in Egypt; the original miracles God performed to bring the nation out; the experience of receiving the Law and original building of the tabernacle, etc., were now the adults. Much of their experience was wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, asking where the nation was going and why.

Also, by traveling to the east of Jordan before entering the land Abram had majorly established a presence in, Israel fought and won many battles before crossing the Jordan. This gave the nation open land to possess in that area, and many families of the nation wanted to stay on that land permanently. Now, it's not as if this land to the east was not always a part of what God said would be Israel's, but taking land to the east actually reduced the number of those committed to inhabiting the land to the west of Jordan, in spite of the fact the males of the families staying on the east side crossed over to fight the battles on the west side. In the end, it doesn't take much imagination to see what a difference even small variations in following God's plan perfectly can cause, and that takes us to the third point of the three I wanted to mention about all this, which is the story we see at Mount Sinai as the Law was being given.

When Israel had waited, what to them seemed too long, for Moses to come

back down out of the mountain, they began to make up their own religion. It was - as we see among most all people - a religion based very much on pleasing the flesh. As God sees the people doing this, He tells Moses to get down out of the mount and out of the way of God's anger, which was going to destroy the people for this. If God had done this, how would there have been a chosen nation? God's answer was that He would have begun again with Moses. This kind of reset would certainly have changed everything about the timing, not to mention many other things concerning the nation's establishment! Now, some would argue God, again, knew this would not happen in the end; and while I won't argue that point, we are shown how much God steps many things out in the time sequence as we choose to live it. We should not be fooled into believing God starting over with Moses was an idle threat. God was fully prepared to take that path. It was up to and only because Moses acted in pleading with God for the nation that God did not consume Israel right then and there!

One could argue God knows all things before they happen, and one would be right. However, this only shows us God's will for human existence is not planned out on the basis we are going to fail! This is, in no way, an attempt to suggest God is not prepared to handle the shifts our failures cause; but by telling Abram what the initial plan was based on, we can compare it with what did happen and see God works with us, and He can't be blamed for not giving us a chance to get it right. Thus, I don't believe the mention to

Abram here in verse 16 of only the Amorites is a way to refer to the people of Canaan at large, nor is it talking about the fact Amorites would be some of the first people Israel would later face as they began to take the land. I think it is a reference to exactly the way God's plan would have unfolded had the people of Israel listened to and sought to serve God's plan to the letter. This should emphasize to us just how much it is each individual's responsibility to seek to serve and listen to God's plan for our lives, while at the same time learning to leave the larger parts we cannot see, understand, or control, in God's capable hands!

Now, verse 17 shows us exactly this point, in what would be the last physical representative part of this unique offering. In this verse, we are told a smoking furnace and burning lamp "passed" down the middle of the animal halves, which Abram had been instructed to lay out. To understand this, we only have to go back to our discussion about how these offerings were not placed on an altar to be burned in the traditional way; and because of this, Abram spent the remaining daylight hours driving the birds from the carcasses. As darkness set in, Abram was unable to see well enough to continue this protection, but that didn't matter because God took him into a deep sleep anyway. At that same time, God took over! Some will say Abram witnessed this action by God, but I don't think so, and the placement of this verse's words show it. This verse is placed after the entire explanation of what Abram experienced, including what God said to

him, which comes with the emphasis Abram was put into great darkness. Verse 17 specifically takes us back to the fact the burning furnace came just at the same time Abram was taken into that darkness, which was at the setting sun. This verse also completes our view of how this offering was handled, just before we are given closing words about what all this had accomplished.

So, what does the furnace and lamp thing mean? The answer is very much related to the story of the very first blood offering brought by Abel, where we are told God had respect unto Abel's offering. (Gen. 4:3-5) Having respect may be losing something in the translation, but the shorthand is that Abel's offering was also not placed on an altar to be burned. However, God showed that blood offerings were to be consumed by fire, and this response to Abel's offering, which did not happen to Cain's non-blood offering, is what made Cain jealous. What we see in verse 17 is that same setup, in that Abram was not instructed to place the offerings on an altar or burn them in any way. However, one of the main points of blood offerings being burned is not just that the blood, or life of the animal is shed, it is that the burning turns a great deal of the offering into smoke, which rises into the air. As we have talked about before, this is to represent the fact a part of us returns to God once we die. From dust our flesh was made and to dust it will return. (Gen. 3:19) This is the ash left on an altar after a sacrifice, but the smoke is the parts of us God created by breathing into Adam's nostrils. (Gen. 2:7)

It's important to note, verse 17 does not just say a lamp passed between the pieces, but a burning lamp! The burning lamp was created by the fact God was consuming the offerings with fire, in much the way God consumed Abel's original blood offering. This work was done by a furnace. This is simply to say there was a source of heat, which is the purpose of a furnace, that was consuming the offerings. In doing so, it was producing smoke, just as any offering placed on an altar with fire would produce. Of course, because there was more than one small animal to burn up, this furnace created what appeared as a burning lamp of light, as it moved down the line of offerings! One might ask, if Abram didn't get to see it what was the point? Now, that's the right question, and the answer is, Abram had to kill the offerings: meaning he sacrificed the animals. Abram had to cut the bodies in half and lay them out as God had instructed: meaning there was work for Abram to do. Also, Abram had to drive the birds away as he waited for the sun to set, which means there was more work to do than just the initial process of offering.

In other words, there was work to be done over time; but in the end of it all, God had to complete the process and in a way only God could have! When Abram was taken into the darkness, his work in the matter was done; but when he woke up, he found that in his "absence," the sacrificing process had been made complete. Because it was physically done and God did not simply make the offerings disappear, Abram could witness the scorched ground and see the ashes that were left. He would know the offerings did not just disappear

because animals, or the like, drug them off while he was listening to God. God had done the work, and this showed Abram there was only so much he, in his lifetime, was going to be able to do. Abram had to trust God that the work began with him would go on far beyond him, not just the work of a nation existing day by day, but the work of there being one in the first place!

Verse 18 tells us God made a covenant with Abram, which is a sure promise that God would bring it about, and He tells Abram the size of territory that specifically was reserved for the chosen nation. This description, again, shows us God speaking in terms of what could have been one day, in spite of the fact the nation pretty much never accomplished following God in a way which allowed them to obtain all of it. The boundaries of the promised land are even greater in this description than in the incident where God tells Abram to look all around him, and all the land he could see would one day belong to his seed. (Gen. 13:14-15) Here, God gives the specific marker of the river in Egypt, which is a clear reference to the Nile, and specifically names the river Euphrates, which is the western border of the Mesopotamian Valley. This is a great territory, and it covers the north area Abram had crossed in leaving his home in Mesopotamia to come to Canaan, as well as the Sinai Peninsula that Israel wandered in after leaving Egypt, which is land the modern nation of Israel has possessed at times. This description means, during most all the time the Bible historically covers, Abram and the seed of the chosen nation

primarily resided on the land God said could be theirs, starting from the time Terah moved Abram, Lot, and their wives to Haran.

Now, unlike verse 16, verses 19 through 21 do give us that list of people living on the land whose transgressions would one day all come to a full, and whose land would all be part of what was promised to the chosen nation. The closest the chosen nation ever really came to controlling all this territory was during the latter years of King David's reign and the days of Solomon. However, God is not slack concerning His promises! We should keep in mind the fact that Lot's descendants possessed much of the land to the south and east of the Jordan River and Dead Sea, which means it was in the hands of family. Ishmael's seed possessed parts of, and certainly began to dominate the trade routes across this territory, and the six sons of Abram's second wife, Keturah, were sent eastward, which in reference is also north of Canaan proper. (Gen. 25:1-6) Esau, who was in the direct line of the chosen nation, also possessed land to the south of where Abram sojourned; and other factors, coming right up to this day, continue to show us Abram's descendants certainly are a primary people in this entire area, whereas the people listed in these verses have been relegated to the pages of the history books, at best!

Until next time, Shalom!

burned, and only a remnant would be used to sprinkle across the twelve cakes. This connected the cakes to the burning on the altar in much the same way other plant-based offerings were.

As the seven lights of the menorah represent God's number of completion for our creation, the twelve cakes would represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Every Sabbath (meaning the seventh day of the week) fresh cakes were to be laid out on the table of shewbread in two rows of six cakes each. This bread was to be there continually without fail, so just like keeping the menorah burning, there would always be these cakes on the table of shewbread. The responsibility for ensuring the fine flour and frankincense needed for this bread was available would, again, rest on the people of the nation, and be something to be done throughout all the future generations as part of the never ending agreement they had made with God to follow His Law. This is another one of those offerings described as most holy unto The Lord, and to respect the deep meaning this had in representing Israel's tie to God, the priests serving in the temple were to eat this bread in the Holy Place. This represented The Messiah taking unto Himself, not just our sins in order to wash them away as the eating of other offerings did; but being unleavened bread, this represents the fact The Messiah will take on an eternal responsibility in order for us to be saved from this world!

The next law would be shown

through an illustration of the people seeking to know God's will in a particular matter. One day a man whose mother was of the tribe of Dan, but whose father was an Egyptian, ended up in a confrontation with a man of pure Israeli blood. During the altercation this man would curse the name of The Lord, and there would be more witnesses to this than just the Israelite man he fought with. Especially since he was not purely of Israeli blood, the people wondered what the rule for doing such a thing should be for such a person, and they brought him to Moses for instructions. The man was detained while God was sought on the matter. God's answer was that the man be taken outside the camp, and those who witnessed the cursing were to put their hand on the man's head, to represent that those who heard the cursing took up-close responsibility for the fact the man was sentenced to death based on their testimony he had done something worthy of it. The man was then to be stoned to death by the congregation. This is the appropriate punishment for all those among the nation who curse God and/or just the name of The Lord, no matter if they are blood born or a stranger!

This is followed by making it clear other stipulations are also to be punished equally without regard for if the person committing the crime is blood born into the nation or not, for God is The God of the entire world no matter who does or does not choose to recognize it. God takes this opportunity to give general guidance for how to determine punishments. In Israel, murder is to be punished by the

death of the one who committed the murder, and other things follow this same line of thought. The damage done to others should be punished in equal losses for the one who did the damage. If a person kills an animal that is not theirs, they are to give the owner an equal animal to replace the one that was killed. Under these guidelines, there is nothing to be gained by injuring another person due to anger, and people were to be careful not to injure another person no matter what the reason, because whatever injury a person inflicted on another was to be inflicted on them in return. This entire incident is wrapped up by making it clear the people went out and did exactly what God instructed them to do in stoning the man who had cursed God.

Next, we see the concept of the weekly Sabbath is expanded even more, as it is not just represented during the feasts but it is to be observed in sets of years as well. God told Moses that once the people entered the land of promise they were to start numbering the years, and every seventh year was to be a Sabbath for the land itself. For six years the people could plant crops and trim their orchards and vines, gathering in the harvest of these crops every year, but on the seventh year, the land was to be allowed to take a totally natural course. The fields were not to be plowed or planted. The trees and vines were not to be trimmed or worked with in any way, but allowed to grow wild - so to speak. Anything in the fields that grew naturally was not to be harvested, and the fruit was not to be specifically gathered.

This did not mean the things that grew were not to be eaten by anyone or anything, but it was to be like the garden of Eden, in a way. What was eaten was to be picked and used for immediate purposes only, such as for the next meal of the day. In this year the animals would be allowed to eat what they wanted of what grew, and the people were to do the same; but no gathering was to be done for the purpose of selling, storage, or the like. This meant every seven years the people of the nation were to trust God that He would provide such an abundance in the preceding six years, they would have no trouble letting the land have a year of rest.

There was also to be a counting of years that mirrored the counting of weeks between the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Weeks. Israel was to count these sets of seven years until they came to the seventh year to be held as a Sabbath year. Then in the next year there was to be a year of jubilee observed. This means that from the first year they started the counting of years in order to hold a seventh year Sabbath to and including the year to be considered the year of jubilee, the total count would be a year of jubilee coming every fifty years. The year of a jubilee would also be a year of allowing the land to rest in the same way a Sabbath year was to be observed. However, there would also be other specifics to the jubilee. One of the most predominant is that the Day of Atonement would include much of the same as the Feast of Trumpets, in that the trumpet was to sound

throughout the land on that day. This has some of the same implications as the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles in representing that conclusion of this universe and the living on the other side of Judgment Day. Once everything in this universe has been completed, something that cannot be done without going through many cycles of smaller completions, the Day of Atonement will no longer be prophecy of Judgment Day, which is something to fear. For those who have been chosen, there will only be rejoicing in knowing sin will never take us from God ever again!

The other main stipulations of these jubilee years are the returning of land and the freeing of what is most properly described as indentured servants. Every tribe and every family was to have an inheritance in the land of promise, and that land was to be there for future generations of the family. However, for the sake of money and other factors too numerous to mention and/or know, land may be bought and sold to different people of different tribes and families. Also, there would be certain people who would end up owing debt they could not pay, and a common way of paying such a debt was to become a servant to the one owed until the debt was paid off in the form of labor. In representation of the fact God actually owns everything, God tells Israel the proper way to view the promised land, and their very lives, is to see everything the nation consists of as belonging to Him. Thus, while man makes changes, such as buying and selling land, and even transactions involving servitude of people,

God wanted there to be a year of resetting everything to the way it was before man's changes. The year of jubilee was the year in which to do all this.

Land that had been purchased and not actually part of your family's inheritance was - in a way - only what we would call leased until the year of jubilee. In the year of jubilee, the land was to be returned to the rightful tribe and family. Persons becoming servants in exchange for debts owed would also go free in this year of jubilee. All this was a good year to do such a thing, as the year before a jubilee was a Sabbath and the jubilee was treated the same in not working the fields and such to bring in a harvest. This means there would be no disputes over work done to produce crops, orchards, vineyards, or the like. If someone didn't want to do the work knowing they had to give up the land just the next year because the next year was a jubilee, that was alright because they weren't to work the land anyway. Someone doing the work and believing they still owned the crop(s), in spite of the land needing to be returned, would also not be an issue. The double Sabbath would clarify many things, as normal work of improving and using labor to improve properties was not to be done the year before by the one holding the land and servants, and no work on land or by servants for such things would be needing done in the year of jubilee.

In spite of how much this made for clarity on these issues, God goes on to add that this was also not something people selling land and making agreements

should attempt to take advantage of. Because land and indentured servants were more like a lease than a purchase, the price for such things was to be set with the jubilee in mind. This means land prices and service in exchange for indebtedness could be highest just after the jubilee, as there would be many decades before anything would be reset. On the other hand, the value of such things would go down year after year in accordance to the fact there was just that much less time before the jubilee was to reset everything again. In general, this practice would also discourage the selling of land to one outside those who were to inherit. Selling land would only be done because someone felt they needed the money or wanted to only do what we would call leasing. It would also greatly discourage the practice of indentured servitude from morphing into full-blown slavery, as history has shown it to do on many occasions in many places. Among those of the chosen nation there could be no group legally held in servitude indefinitely, as the year of jubilee would set every servant free every fifty years! Observing and not attempting to find ways of abusing the fact the nation was to do this reset in every year of jubilee is also specifically pointed out as something to be done because one should fear God!

Also, the nation was not to doubt God's care for them, but trust that following God's Law was the way to see the land supply the nation's needs and be protected by God in order to live in peace

on the land. In this, God says something very related to the fact Israel was, at the time these Law's were being given, gathering bread God gave them six days a week, called manna, which supplemented or supplied their daily diet. Manna did not appear on the Sabbath day, but Israel was allowed to gather twice as much as they would need for a day on the sixth day so as to have food for the Sabbath. God makes this same kind of promise concerning the Sabbath years, which the people would no doubt worry about surviving. God said in the year before the Sabbath year, He would provide a harvest yield of three years. This would give enough food to survive the Sabbath year, as well as the next year in which they would have nothing from the Sabbath year stored up to eat while waiting for the harvest of that eighth year. They also would not fall behind by eating up the eighth year's harvest as soon as it came in, because there would be food from the sixth year that lasted all the way into the ninth. This provision by God would also cover the double Sabbath years the jubilee brought about, and this would be especially true when considering the general overall excess each seven year cycle could build up as the nation approached a jubilee!

Let's stay in God's Word!