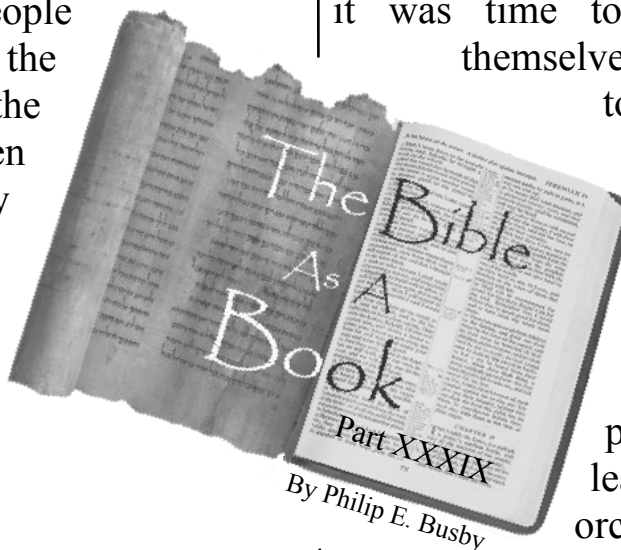




# Shaqah

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

In our last segment, we began our look at the book of Numbers. We talked about its chronological place in the Torah and from what perspective the book should be looked at. We also discussed how Numbers is a shift from looking at why and how God was developing a chosen nation, to seeing the people of that nation begin the journey of living under the Laws God had given them. This is a very important point to keep in mind as we begin our overview of this book, which is what we are ready to begin this time!



many ways, it could simply be said the nation had come through one full cycle of events. It had brought them from being slaves under Pharaoh's rule to being a true independent nation of people with a Law given by God, and a tabernacle with its elements which the Law established. Now, it was time to organize the people themselves. No longer were they to be just a mass band of people traveling through the wilderness, but a true nation prepared to defend itself and go forward to take the promised land God was leading them to, in an orchestrated fashion!

Chapter 1 of the book of Numbers tells us God spoke to Moses in the tabernacle while Israel was still camped at the base of Mount Sinai, in their second year of being freed from Egypt, on the first day of the second month. By this time Israel had observed their first Passover as the Law prescribed it to be done, in recognition of the actual Passover they had experienced in being freed from Egypt. In

To do this, Moses was to count every male who was twenty years old and up. He and Aaron were to take this tally not just as one big group, but in a breakdown that looked at how many there were in each tribe; how many families each tribe consisted of; and how many adult males each family had. The count was to be a very good record of just



exactly who and what the nation consisted of, which was not just helpful in having an initial record for future generations to look at, but a base by which the numbers could be constantly revised in general. The Law prescribed that every male child was to be circumcised at eight days old, and this would give the priests a pretty good idea of how the population was growing as the years went by. (Lev. 12:3) When males reached the age Moses was to use for who to specifically count in this initial tally, they were considered adults and would become personally responsible for things all males of the nation were to do according to the Law. After this tally, the priest would always have a fairly good grasp of just how many males there were year by year.

This counting by Moses and Aaron would also include the official designation of who the head of each tribe was to be, which would make up what we might call a representative counsel. If nothing else, these individuals would coordinate with Moses and Aaron to create the core of the organizational system. To some degree, the tribes and families already had people they recognized as leaders; but now that the Law had been given, it was time to make such things official. This would also solidify the tribes of Israel so as not to lose one of the originals or begin to recognize and/or argue over offshoots being equal members of the system. Making this very clear right at the start was of great importance for reasons such as, there would not officially be a tribe of Joseph, but instead two tribes, that are often

recognized as “half tribes,” bearing the names of his two sons. Because God wanted to make it clear who and what He recognized officially, along with showing the nation He was truly their King, God would tell Moses who the head of each tribe was to be. Due to the fact Moses, and more long term, Aaron (whose family was to perpetually serve as the High Priests) were of the tribe of Levi, the list of leaders naturally does not include someone from the tribe of Levi. Levi also belonged to God in a more specific way than any of the other tribes in the nation.

It would be on that very same day God told Moses all this that the men listed by God would be called and declared the heads of their particular tribe. They would group the people into their specific tribes, and the numbering of the males would be accomplished. Because he was the first-born son of Jacob, the tribe of Reuben would come first, but from there the order of tribes listed would not consistently follow the oldest to youngest son pattern. Reuben's number was 46,500. Simeon's number was 59,300. Gad's number was 45,650. Judah's number was 74,600. Issachar's number was 54,400. Zebulun's number was 57,400. Of the two half tribes of Joseph, Ephraim's number was 40,500 and Manasseh's number was 32,200. Next was Benjamin, which numbered 35,400. Dan's number was 62,700. Asher's number was 41,500. Naphtali's number was 53,400. In all, noting the exclusion of the tribe of Levi, the males twenty and older numbered 603,550.

Next, God would give instructions for how the nation of Israel was to set up their camp. Of course, the tabernacle, being the core of their lives, would be set up and taken down by the tribe of Levi, and no others were to have anything to do with this process. If they did, they were to be put to death. Even on a day by day basis, approaching the tabernacle was not to be done without great respect and recognition that one was drawing closer to the direct presence of God. Since only the tribe of Levi would be charged with the constant task of maintaining the tabernacle, they, and only they, would camp directly outside the tabernacle's courtyard! They were to camp on all four sides of the tabernacle, and this would create a reminder of the needed respect and a buffer - so to speak - between the tabernacle and the rest of the nation; just as the other tribes, whose men would compose the armies of Israel, would serve as a buffer between the tabernacle and the outside world.

Now, this buffer created by the other tribes of Israel was to be organized in a very specific way. First, there was to be a space between the tabernacle (with the Levites camping around it) and the camps of the other tribes, who would also be positioned on each of the four sides of the tabernacle. This would form an open space around the tabernacle which individuals or groups from any of the tribes could use to gather at times and get to the entrance of the tabernacle without having to go through the camp(s) of other

tribes. Each of the tribes was also to have a standard which designated their camp. We would likely use a flag of some kind for this in modern times, but whatever they used, these standards were to designate and thus, help each family that belonged to the tribe, recognize, follow, and organize their specific households with their tribe.

The first step in knowing where each tribe was to camp was to divide the twelve tribes into four groups of three tribes each. One of these groups would camp on each of the four sides of the tabernacle: east, south, west, and north. Building on the squared off symmetry of this, each tribe would camp in a block. Those tribes nearest the tabernacle would dictate the width of these blocks by forming a row wide enough to come near the corner of the tribe on their right and on their left which were positioned to be on the other sides of the tabernacle, and which would both meet up in the same way with the tribe at the other end. This would be done so as to create a symmetrical box area in the center of the camps where the tabernacle and Levites would set up, and which would leave the required open area. From there, the other two tribes belonging to each of the four groups would set up their specific camp in equal width blocks that formed a line of three tribe blocks going outward from the tabernacle. This formation would give the flexibility for each tribe to be deeper or shallower from front to back in order to accommodate whatever size they might

consist of at any given time, taking up the space they needed without getting in the way of another tribe's camp.

Now, the organization of these camps would not just dictate how the tribes would stop and set up, but almost more importantly, how they would pack up and move forward on their journey when the pillar of God lifted from the tabernacle to indicate it was time to move. Judah would be the head of their group of three tribes, and camp in the position closest to the rising sun. That would make them furthest to the east of the tabernacle. Judah, in an arrangement that was very prophetic, would also be the first, or lead, tribe to move forward in following the pillar of God when it was time to move out. To the west of Judah, the tribe of Issachar would set up camp, and be the second in line when the nation was on the move. To the west of Issachar would be Zebulun, who would be the third to move. They would also be the tribe closest to the tabernacle on the east side. In all, Judah's group consisted of 186,400 men.

On the south side of the tabernacle would be the group of three headed by Reuben. Reuben would set up camp furthest south of the tabernacle. They would also be the fourth tribe to move following behind Zebulun. Simeon would camp to the north of Reuben and be the fifth to move. To the north of them would be Gad, which would make them the closest to the tabernacle's south side and the sixth tribe to move. In all, Reuben's group of three would consist of 151,450

men. As the nation moved, the tabernacle, carried by the tribe of Levi, would be the group to follow the tribe of Gad. This would put the Levites and the tabernacle's elements not just in the center of the camp as the nation was stationary, but also in the middle of the line as Israel moved!

Ephraim was the tribe to set up on the west side of the tabernacle and be the head of that group of three. Ephraim would camp the furthest west of the tabernacle, and come behind the Levites as Israel moved, making Ephraim the eighth group in the line. Manasseh would camp to the east of Ephraim and be the ninth tribe to move. To the east of them would be the camp of Benjamin, who would be the closest to the tabernacle's west side and the tenth to move. In all, Ephraim's group of three would consist of 108,100 men. On the north side of the tabernacle would be the group headed by Dan. Dan would camp the furthest north of the tabernacle, and follow Benjamin, making them eleventh to move. Asher would camp to the south of Dan and be the twelfth to move. Naphtali would be to the south of Asher, making them the closest to the tabernacle's north side, and the thirteenth and last tribe in the line as the nation traveled. In all, Dan's group of three would consist of 157,600 men.

Next, we are given more specifics about the tribe of Levi, who was not numbered among the rest of the nation. However, of specific importance in this tribe was, of course, the breakdown of family groupings in order to assign their

# Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

We ended last time talking about God speaking to Abram at that time when God changed Abram's name to Abraham. In that we talked about how this name change was to truly signify Abraham would be the father of not just the chosen nation but of many nations, and God would be their God, using their lives for His purposes in this world. We ended by talking about the promise of God giving the land to Abraham's descendants, and how especially the southern end of the land of Canaan, where Abraham had lived extensively, would most solidly be held even by the specific chosen nation. This brought us through Genesis chapter 17 verse 8, and we will begin this segment with verse 9.

Verse 9 continues this conversation of God laying out His covenant with Abraham and his seed by emphasizing the fact this covenant was to be recognized generation after generation. It would be important for the covenant to be something every generation understood would be theirs in spite of the shifting of time and circumstances the activities of men would bring. This is quite profound in our time as we can look back through history and see that circumstances did change over and over as the generations passed. Not only did some of the first generations of the chosen nation spend time in Egypt, but even as the nation took possession of the promised land, it seemed there was a never ending array of events that brought new challenges

and changes to the chosen nation, as well as the other nations who clearly came from Abraham.

Even after surviving the string of the empires, the journey would be ever changing, and in time, what we call the modern era would begin. However, the generations of Abraham's seed would remain distinct and very actively involved in the world's affairs. In it all, there are those who would argue that the old ways of the covenant simply do not apply anymore, and/or that they in some way had dragged down those of Abraham's seed from progressing with the rest of the world; but no matter at what time this kind of argument was made, it always has been simply man's view of things and not the truth God knows and was explaining to Abraham in these verses. Man will continually change the look of his surroundings, but one of the things we seem to want to fight against, especially in our "modern" times more so than ever before, is the fact God created the world to run on certain principles and those never change!

What we must understand about the covenant God made with Abraham and the eventual written Laws God would entrust to the chosen nation is that they are based on these never changing principles. Men are still men and women are still women. One man and one woman together is still the only way to conceive a child in spite of the

fact science tells us they now know how to accomplish and “control” this process in a lab, and some tell us all physical relationships are natural and good as long as the people involved “love” each other. Man can say what he wants, but people are still people. No matter how much technology we have, what kind of governing systems we live under, we are all still just Adam. Each of us are individuals who live our lives according to the individual choices we make as we exist in the specific circumstances which are also molded by the actions of those around us. What God did with the covenant He made with Abraham is give us a chance to see the simple truth that no matter how much man, through his “accomplishments,” might seem to strengthen the argument that we can somehow, someday, and/or in some way outgrow God and the natural principles He created us and our environment to work on, we can't!

At the heart of it all is the truth we are God's children, created for a purpose; and that purpose is to live in a relationship with our Creator! What God has shown us through His Word is that even other men cannot take that away from us no matter what they do; for even if they kill us, to live is Christ and to die is gain! (Phili. 1:12-26) We and we alone can take hold of, or choose to let go of, our faith in God! This truth was something God wanted to represent to us through His chosen nation. No matter how archaic or out-of-date the Laws God gave to the chosen nation might seem to others or even those who were/are a part of the nation, the principles would persist in a way that proves to those paying attention, God's ways are still the best ways

to avoid all the calamities man faces, whether environmental, conflict (both personal, national, etc.), everyday living, and the list goes on.

Living these principles no matter what, is the sacrifice God was asking of Abraham and his seed. As I mentioned in our last segment, this does not mean God took away the free will of those in the chosen nation, but there is a certain part of their existence that is tied to this covenant which will always be a part of their lives. Just as God's basic created principles obviously contain all humans in a physical environment that has certain constants, the people of the chosen nation would continue on throughout the world's existence, because God said the generations following Abraham would be born to live in an environment that included this covenant of their lives being used of God in many ways they may or may not ever be specifically aware of. In order to recognize one was aware of this truth or, at least, recognize it would follow them throughout their entire lives, God would do more than change Abraham's name. God would give a physical symbol to Abraham which he and all the males of his house were to take on. This would be the symbol of circumcision!

Now, this is where it may be a little difficult to be quite as blunt as I might be if I knew I was speaking only to adults, but I believe we can talk about the why this was the symbol without going too far into things that would be inappropriate for our younger readers. Verse 11 tells us the basics of what this simple symbol is; but to be clear, God created both the male and female body to have extra covering or protection in areas

that need it. An obvious example is that we have what we call fingernails and toenails. We take these things as just the way it is; but when we stop to think about it, we know it is a great blessing to have this extra protection at the end of these extremities. Simple things like these make our bodies very functional. Another example of something much softer but yet very protective is the extra - shall we say - padding on our backside just below where the main trunk of our bodies are capable of bending significantly and just above where our two legs begin. This is not just a blessing in that it makes it comfortable for us to do more than just stand or lay flat in that we can sit on this padding, it also serves to protect one of the openings our body needs to have in order to dispose of waste.

While male and female anatomy is, for a very specific purpose, quite opposite one from the other when it comes to the front side of our bodies, the principles of using skin to protect these kinds of openings is part of our creation. What God was telling Abraham to do was to remove the loose skin that serves as the covering for the male's front opening. This skin is far less necessary for a man to have than the other protective/covering parts we have been talking about. However, that does not mean it wasn't originally put there for a purpose, and this is what brings us to the discussion of why this was chosen to be the symbol. In truth, one could write a book on this subject. However, here we will simply attempt to cover the basics of the why.

First, is that issue there is a purpose for that skin, and the most basic is what we have just been talking about. That skin provides some extra protection for a place where there is not only an opening, but a lot of nerve endings, and thus very sensitive. Once this skin is removed, the skin underneath must do what all skin by nature does when it becomes necessary, and that is to thicken in order to better protect the nerves and other internal structures. We see this most often, and on a far more drastic scale than circumcision causes in the skin it effects, on our hands and feet. When people don't work much with their bare hands or walk without the protection of shoes, one finds when they do so, their hands and feet can be rubbed raw, cut easily, and even blister. However, if you continue to do such work or walk without shoes, over time your body responds by thickening the skin and can even form callouses, which are also a way for particular parts of skin to become harder in nature.

Again, while this is the more drastic example of our body doing this, the skin circumcision exposes will have to become less sensitive than it was intended to be. On this point, we should point out that verse 12 tells us as children of the covenant are born, this is to be done when a male child is eight days old. A child growing up with this already done would adapt to this far more easily and to a greater extent than those having it done at an older age. It also would take away any comparison an individual would have in this matter between having the skin versus not having it. That being said, this part of the discussion about



circumcision's effect tells us the sensitivity issue was not really intended to be a considerable part of the reason this was used as a symbol. In fact, it tells us just the opposite would seem to be more of the truth. By doing it when a male child is far too young to have any idea what it was like before the procedure, as well as giving the individual the best ability the body has to adapt, the intent would clearly seem to be the lessening of this effect as much as possible.

Now, another part of this being used as the symbol has to do with the fact this particular body part is about the last part people will accept not being covered by clothing. Because of this, the symbol is also not intended to be a public symbol, and that says a lot about why God used it. This symbol was made in one of the most private parts of the male anatomy, and that made it a very deep and personal symbol. At the same time, since it was up to the parents to place this symbol on the child long before the child could have any part in choosing whether they want to have it or not, it is something that was/is intended to show, even a person who did not want to be a part of the covenant was bound by it in ways that were inescapable. Thus, learning about the covenant would be of value to such a person's life. Even if they did not desire to fully involve themselves in all it might mean to them, it gives one a perspective on their life they would be at a disadvantage in not having. Along with that point let's be clear, once God gave them the Law, this symbol was made an official ceremony to be accomplished at the tabernacle, and later temple, for those of the chosen nation; but Abraham was told all the males of his house

were to take on this symbol. This not only included Ishmael, but also Abraham's servants!

The verses here make it very clear that even a servant who was bought with money, meaning they were not even born in the household to a person (servant or otherwise) not already part of it, was to be circumcised. The representation of this speaks to something John the Baptist told the Jewish religious leaders one day when they came out to see what he was doing in baptizing people in the river Jordan. John told them they should seek to repent. In other words, change their ways to follow in the ways of God's will and not believe they were somehow immune to the need of true faith because they were descendants of Abraham. John adds to this the illustration that God could raise up stones to be children of Abraham. (Matt. 3:7-9) John was not diminishing the covenant in saying this, he was pointing out that in its very representation, the most basic accomplishment of the covenant was large and inclusive in that just as the verses here in Genesis show us, it was not only those of the chosen nation's lineage that were to be circumcised. All of Abraham's sons and servants were to have this symbol.

Keeping that point in mind, let's look at verse 14, which tells us that a male who refuses to take this symbol has broken the covenant with God, and even before the Law of Moses was given we see that stipulation which is repeated in the Law concerning many things, which is that such a one is to be cut off from his people. This, of course, specifically had to do with a person being able to make a choice. It could



# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part XIII

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 spent last time talking mostly about how Greek culture was becoming a driving force in the world, especially in the areas directly affected by the string of empires that started with the Assyrians. We also talked about the root of the word "Hellenization," which refers to the fact so many were taking up the Greek culture, and it helped us cover some high points about why Greek culture was so attractive to many across the world. In this, was the fact this transformation was bringing man back to the ideas hoped for at the Tower of Babel with more efficiency than any of the previous empires had accomplished. That being said, we ended by getting to the seeming contradiction of this all, which is that while Greek culture was very popular and unifying in some ways, we see one of the most splintered of all the empires when it comes to the Greek rule!

On this point, I made the simple statement that it doesn't matter how much man thinks he has accomplished in building philosophies that give us a way to live without God, it still is not possible. This is a very big factor in why there was such division at a time when culture was doing so well at unifying, and it is interesting to think about how the confounding of language God

did at the tower still continued to affect man's ability to move away from a position of being able to clearly see the fact we still need God, which was the exact intent. With all this in mind, our next job is to look at the divisions that happened among the chosen nation itself. Of course, this will intermix some with the story of the Greek rulers' fight for power after Alexander's death. However, on that issue, there is a simple point. God had shown the Babylonian king was a head of gold, meaning they held the most successful central rule. While the Medes and Persians did not hold the power over people the Babylonians had, they also did not try to dismantle culture as the Assyrians. Instead, they tried to respect it while at the same time still attempting to hold central rulership. This did not work, and that's what brought the Greeks to power.

If you look back to the king's dream about the statue that represented all this, and which Daniel interpreted, the Medes and Persians were the silver arms and chest, while the Greeks were the brass midsection of the statue! (Dan. 2:26-35) This changing of metal in the statue represented the fact there was a shift happening from empire to empire that was bringing the glory, those in power wanted and hoped to have, down; but at the same time there was developing a more functional workability of including all people in a cooperation without the use of force. What we begin to see clearly at the time of the Greeks is that old adage of what

is old becomes new again. As the Bible puts it, there truly is nothing new under the sun! (Eccl. 1:9) We just keep going round and round. You see, the Tower of Babel was about everyone working together toward a common goal which the common language they spoke made possible to obligate people to, and force was not needed because simple peer pressure could do the job. Because people never really got the chance to find their own interests while working on the premise everyone together could mean more than having the freedom to pursue individual interests (which easily could still be working alongside others who shared those interests or connected interests), diversity never had a chance to blossom. In many ways it could be said that the confounding of language opened the door for diversity to be discovered, and because it had taken a firm grip after the confounding, in spite of the fact many were still obligated to originally separate in groups that split along family lines, unifying cultural ideas seemed to be the key to getting everyone back on board with a common goal.

The problem (which just to be clear, in God's eyes is not a problem) was, and still is, that man needs guidance. Under God's perfect plan this guidance problem was not even an issue. God was always going to be there to provide it, and this is what we will regain in heaven. Among a sin-filled world that wants to reject God, guidance is something not only does the vast majority of people want to look only to themselves or other individuals for, but this fact causes many to desire the position of power this can create, especially on a larger scale such as governing power. One of the simplest

reasons for why man will always fail at self-government is not just that people are not perfect to begin with, but also the truth we just covered draws all the wrong people to desire the positions of power! Rare is the occasion that good people with good ideas or, at the very least, good intentions are even drawn to hold the positions of leadership because they understand the tremendous amount of responsibility it comes with. This is why God did not intend Israel to have a king. Among the chosen nation the point was always that God would be their king. While they would have the organizational structure of the Law, each person needed to look to God for their individual guidance, and that's what the Law was intended to point them each to.

The sad truth is that just like the rest of the world, the chosen nation wanted an earthly king, or rulers of some kind, and all this is why God told Samuel at the time the nation was pressuring him to give them a king that it was not Samuel they were rejecting but God Himself. (I Sam. 8:7) Thus, whether we are talking about inside the chosen nation or outside the chosen nation, such as the empires and the people who brought down the last one to install the next one, no matter how much people might, once again, find common ground through a popular culture, and/or the embracing of diversity, there was/is still going to be the desire for human leadership as well as people desiring the positions of power this creates! This is why we still see in the Greeks a very unifying culture, yet great infighting about who would hold these positions of power. The seesaw we find ourselves on is that using power to lord over people causes people to rebel, but

embracing concepts which tell us what the Bible told us was true from the very beginning, which is that all men are created equal, does not answer the question of who should be in charge of providing guidance if people don't turn to God. This, in turn, causes people to continually create positions of power which end up lording over people!

While the Greeks were struggling over this very issue, the chosen nation had already found themselves in this struggle for a very long time. Centuries earlier, after the original establishment of the kingship in Israel, it soon became clear who the earthly king was to be. Until Solomon's son chose power over leadership in not listening to the people, causing the nation to split into North and South, David's house ruled the land. After that, the North would see many changes in dynasty all the way up to its complete collapse at the hands of the Assyrians, but the South would continue to recognize the God established dynasty of David as their kings. This continued right up to the Babylonian captivity, and even upon the return there was certain aspects of this which held true, but Judah never really had a king with full sovereignty again. In many ways, the king's position in Judah became little more than a simple leadership role of an administrator who ultimately answered to the empire. Depending on how pleased or displeased with these administrators the empire was, and this at times had to do with if the empire of the day was even paying any attention to the Jews, this leadership role could be in great flux, as the empires ultimately wanted someone

who would carry out their orders even above God's Law.

It is not to suggest the Jews ever lost track of who was of the house of David, for this was something clear in Joseph's lineage, and as such he would serve as the earthly father of Jesus. (Luke 1:26-27) However, to make a long story short, centuries before Joseph's time the throne of David became something many of the Jewish people longed and prayed for more than it ever was a reality in who was ruling over them day by day. This is exactly why The Messiah should have been received very differently than He was when He came riding into Jerusalem that day being declared by the people as the son of David. Whatever else Jesus may or may not have been accepted as being, there was no doubt that a true leader with great wisdom and of the line and lineage of David had entered the capital city in order to provide exactly what the people needed, and that was guidance!

Even the ruling empire at the time, which was the Romans by then, might have been inclined to ignore such an acceptance by the Jewish people as long as it did not lead to all-out rebellion from the Roman empire. Since Jesus showed no interest in fostering such a rebellion, which Rome was in constant stress about among the Jews, they may have even readily welcomed the idea. Now, in this, I'm not trying to villainize the Jews, because we don't know what the Romans would have ultimately done, but God had answered prayer in that there was room for Jesus to take the leadership role among the Jews without

initially disrupting the Roman secular rule over the area. It was the fact “leadership” among the chosen nation had lost sight of the fact they needed God's guidance, not just humanistic ideas of power and authority, that caused the rejection of Jesus instead of at least giving Him a chance.

Because the throne of David was not really in place as it had been in the past, the Jewish people, from the time of the return from Babylon, had what was actually an opportunity, and that was the chance to fall back to more of the original system God intended them to have. Again, I'm not suggesting these were great times. However, without a king ruling directly over them they had an empire that was, at times, very distant yet still responsible for the governing role. This made room for the chosen nation to focus on seeking God directly. Instead of an earthly king and the affairs of organizing and defending a nation state, the focus of organizing the nation could, once again, be centered around the temple, which had finally been rebuilt. As we discussed earlier in this study while talking about the events of rebuilding the temple, God even emphasized these points to the nation, and with many of the same aspects to what God had told the kings of Judah before the Babylonian captivity. Simply seeking God and not worrying about who the secular rulers of the land were was what was best at that time. However, because of the power issues people continually desire, the chosen nation, or, at the very least, a segment of them, continually struggled with the desire to be the rulers of the land.

Due to the situation the chosen nation

lived in during these days, the main people who stood in the positions to gain power among the chosen nation were mostly religious leaders, or those in positions based on religious practices, and between them there began to be a divide! It is not entirely clear just when the fragmentation and divisions began in earnest, but it's safe to say it directly followed the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. In truth, some of the reforms that needed the steady work to be accomplished during their time shows us the root of the problem was already in the ground. Now, we've talk about how much the Babylonian captivity brought the beginnings of the religion of Judaism, and as I must keep emphasizing, this will be disputed by many in its technicality. However, the point I have always wished to make is that it was the start of practices concerning how to follow God's Law without the temple. Without the temple, there, of course, are many things of the Law which simply cannot be accomplished, and due to this there was a significant growth of traditions. While some of the thoughts behind these traditions were good, some were bad. One way or another, the point is that these traditions about how to be Jewish without the temple continued even after the temple was rebuilt.

This is where even the good can often just become bad. For all the help these traditions might have been in a time there was no temple, they should have been dropped in all the aspects and ways they hindered the return to more pure practices of the Law once the temple was rebuilt. This speaks to why God gave them men such as Ezra and Nehemiah to lead the nation in being able to see this whether they accepted it or not! The base problem is that people

don't like to give up their traditions, and as we have covered before, not all the Jews who even had an open door to return to Judah during the Medes and Persians empire's time did so. Many of these Jews would certainly remain loyal to the religious practices they had begun to observe, if for no other reason than the fact they were not geographically in close proximity to the new temple.

Another item in all this is the importance synagogues had taken on. These made good sense in the time of the temple laying in ruins, and even after the rebuilding of the temple, they certainly could serve a role in giving Jews a more local, and thus regular, place to gather in order to worship and share the Word of God. We certainly see Jesus using this system during His time of walking this earth, as He often taught in the synagogues as at least a starting point in reaching different communities. However, one of the most interesting points is that there were synagogues built right in and around Jerusalem, and for all the good even these synagogues might have served, they, in many ways, speak loudly to the point there was not as much a focus, understanding, determination, etc., to once again make the temple the total center of Jewish worship. With that, we can talk about where we want to get to here, and that is the fact there were fractures among the Jews. While they could be cut into many different segments, the religious thought really split into two distinct camps!

Before we go into it, we need to be clear that just like the synagogue system itself there is good and bad on both sides. However, the basics of the divide was

simply in that there were those who believed the temple should be the complete center of the Jews' religious life, and the written Law should be the true guide for how to go about serving God, or at least practicing the religion of the Jews. On the other side were those who felt the traditions, many of which had been solidified and/or established during the Babylonian captivity, should be the basis of serving God, or at least the religion. The fact I repeat with each of those the idea of serving God or the religion is the base of what makes the good, good; the bad, bad; and the ugly, very ugly! Both sides of the issue consisted of those who stood for serving God by teaching what they taught, and those who were only looking to practice a religion that defined them as a people. As with many groups, there were also people at all points in-between these two extremes.

Now, to be as straightforward as we can be about it, the good on the side of those who believed the temple should be the center and the written Law strictly adhered to, came by way of them being right in the fact God did not intend for the traditions of men to usurp the Laws He had given. This was to be true no matter how much time and circumstances might change in and around the nation. The bad on this side came into play in a way that is so often the case among men, and was shown clearly just before the time of the first kings of Israel in the days of Samuel. (I Sam. 2:12-17) It is very important those who are responsible for administering the Law (and under God's Law this is mainly those who serve as priests) be truly serving God and not their own interest. When priests serve their own interests and/or are influenced by others to serve interests not in line with God's Word,

the temple does not necessarily get neglected as it had at times, but it certainly is not the pure place of serving God it is suppose to be.

The other aspect of the bad on this side of the divide is that in believing the written Law is all there is in teaching people the way to live their lives, there becomes a misunderstanding of the point the Law was meant to be a guide for all of life and not just apply to those things directly and specifically addressed in it! An example of this kind of problem showed up when the founders of the United States of America were debating about how to establish a government over the land. They struggled greatly with the fear government would become too powerful for the people to be free, but also how to make it powerful enough to enforce the law and be able to defend the nation. One of the specific ideas that developed as a way to limit the government was to write a bill of rights that would give guidance as to the basic rights all humans deserved, and to which the nation's government should adhere in order to protect and not oppress the people.

Of course, there was no way they were going to be able to make a full list of every specific right that belonged to the people! Thus, it should go without saying for anyone who thinks about it to understand the Bill of Rights would serve as a basic guide. However, on that issue, the point was made that the problem with having a bill of rights was that someday there would be those, who without thought and/or with bad intent, would use the document as a way to

say if a right was not specifically defined in the bill, it did not have to be respected by the government. No offense intended to those who wanted and did write this bill, for it is a tremendous and honorable work; but sadly, history had already shown this kind of thinking was not just possible but probable. Certainly, U.S. history has shown no shortage of that very argument being used against the people by the government, while at the same time often ignoring and/or wanting to eliminate specific rights which are defined in the bill!

If we move to the other side of the chosen nation's divide in thinking, we find those who believed the traditions were, in fact, something that should be followed in spite of the truth many of them may have come from times when the Jews were not following the Laws of God as they should, and/or from a time when the temple did not allow many specific practices to be followed. The bad in this is more obvious and up front in that anytime one puts the traditions of men above the direct instructions of God, that's a problem! We see Jesus pointed to this on more than one occasion as men took the opportunity to downright oppress people with created rules and regulations that were just crushing for anyone to follow, because one could not move without being in violation of something! This kind of thinking also leads to a doctrine which says absolute righteousness is what brings salvation; and while righteousness is what all true believers should be striving for, it is not what will save us. It was and is wrong to teach that when an individual fails to follow

every one of the rules set down by traditions that the person is condemned!

The good, of course, is in the fact of what the other side was missing. The Laws of God were intended to be a guide. Thus, every aspect of life needed to be looked at from the perspective the Law gave, and practices should have been shaped by this over time. If such a thing is done, it can literally change a society; and indeed right now there are great arguments going on among the Jews about how the Law is not shaping their practices, especially in a modern world of big industry. For instance, the Law should determine the way and for what purpose people slaughter and use animal parts. Thus, there is an increasing number of Jews who are resorting to vegan practices if for no other reason than to boycott the commercial slaughtering of animals. This is because it's next to impossible to do it in a truly kosher way, even if you only look at kosher as being defined by the strict letter of the Law without all the "kosher laws" defined by traditions. Following God's Law in earnest will also greatly change things, such as how we practice medicine. Not just in that we should respect all life, but in such things like the handling of bodily fluids and tissue which affects many things such as research and sanitary conditions, both of which can and have led to the outbreak of disease. Simply put, using God's Law as a guide would truly revolutionize the world if looked at correctly!

Of course, we could go on and on with examples of things good and bad on both sides of the major divisions that developed among the chosen nation, but we

want to get to our main point of where this all went. By the time of the Greeks these divisions had become fairly defined, but just when and to what degree the organization of the "leadership" of both sides solidified, we don't know. What we do know is that by the time of The Messiah, there were two main groups. These were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Again, I want to emphasize that just as arguing over when exactly the religion of Judaism began, the thought patterns which developed these religious groups came in a wide range which developed more than just these two specific groups, and they also came about over a course of time that stretched back to the rebuilding of the temple. However, these two groups are a good focus, nonetheless. The Sadducees are the ones which represent those who believed the temple was the center and believed the letter of the Law was all that mattered. It is even possible their name comes from the idea they claimed to be the true descendants of the High Priest that served at the time of Solomon when the first temple was built.

It might seem strange to some that this group gets so much criticism when they had what many could argue was more of the right to be in charge at the temple, but one must keep in mind, again, this came with great responsibility. If you've been paying attention, you might also find it odd that even in my teaching I have and will say a lot about this being the group who wanted to abandon the Laws of God, when they are the ones who supposedly represent those who wanted to adhere to the written Law only. There are many points on this that, Lord willing, we'll address, but the simple ones are these. First, history is written by the



victors. The Sadducees are not the group that really survived the destruction of the last temple which was standing at the time of Jesus. The Pharisees are, and their thoughts went on to guide what we know as Judaism. This point should not be a surprise, but what it means is that the Sadducees are not going to get much of a defense from anyone in our time. The second point is really the one I already made, and that is the simple fact they were in so many ways a corrupt group. In spite of how true it may have been that they descended from the correct lineage to be rightful heirs to the priesthood, they are very much what Jesus was talking about when speaking of those who corrupted God's teaching in doing things for the love of money and power. This is not to say many Pharisees can't be accused of this same thing, but if the Sadducees are the true line of Aaron, they, more than anyone, stood in the position of accountability.

These issues can seem complex, yet they are important. The Sadducees supposedly believing the temple should be the center of all things Jewish, should have been a good thing. However, they really only cared about this because it consolidated their power to dictate what Jews did, were, and became. The biggest contradiction would seem to be in the issue of believing so strictly in the Law yet appearing to be the first and most willing to abandon it. However, this too we have touched on. In interpreting the Law as being nothing but the letter, there was great freedom to ignore it in virtually all aspects of life outside the strict representational practices, which they believed they at least

should control because most of it centered around the temple. It is the convenience that if the Law did not specifically address something then there was no law other than what made sense to the human mind. This is why it was so easy for this group to admire and even go along with what the Greek culture taught. God's Law might give many religious practices and observances, but Greek culture had a rich humanistic composition. Sadducees' type thinking did not see how taking on this "richness" could do anything but enhance the ritual practices of the Law, possibly even arguing the same could be said in the reverse!

Now, there is obviously much more we want to talk about in all this; but keep in mind, anytime men stand in a position of responsibility, they almost always look for ways to make it a position of power and authority. They are also very keen on what may or may not threaten their ability to hold onto those positions, and these facts have a lot to do with why the Pharisees and Sadducees, as polar opposite as they were in their thinking, and thus, always threatening each other's positions, were easily willing to join together to dispose of The Messiah. Nothing threatened their positions more than a man who spoke with the obvious authority of God, and if accepted as The Messiah, He would have swept them all out of power!

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

certainly apply to a servant brought into the house who refused to be circumcised, but it might also apply to someone whose parents had failed or refused to perform the procedure on them. Not having the symbol for this reason, but knowing you were of the lineage that should, did not automatically disqualify you from your heritage. However, refusing to go through with it once one found out they should have this symbol had consequences. Such a one was to be separated as not part of the covenant people.

This has interesting representation all its own, because the truth is that in such a case a blood born individual of the family was still of the line of Abraham, and as such, inescapably part of the covenant. By choosing not to take on the symbol of the covenant you were rejecting a truth that still existed. This is perfectly representative of what all humans do when they do not choose to have a relationship with God! As I have repeated time and again, a person does not have to be part of the chosen nation to be saved. That was never the point of God creating a specific nation. Why? Because we need to not lose sight of the fact God is our Creator and there is nothing that is going to change that! As I talked about earlier, there are truths to our creation, and one of them is that we must be instructed by God if we are going to be what He created us to be or our life means nothing! Now, we can reject this truth on all kinds of levels. Some people flat out reject God in their life, even going to such a degree that God speaks of turning them over to a reprobate mind. (Rom. 1:24-32) Others try to reject this truth by claiming

they understand God created them for a purpose, but they still do not seek a relationship with God. The most often used excuse for why many find this acceptable is that they believe a loving God would not send a good person to hell!

The truth is, it's not just about the simplicity of being "a good person" versus what you may determine is a "bad person." Faith is about an individual choosing to invite God into their life and taking time to listen to His instructions for it. Rejecting faith is as simple as not choosing to make this a priority in your life! People want to believe a God of love has no choice in the matter but to accept them if they don't really do anything "bad." However, just the opposite is true! Not only does God have a choice, He has an obligation to not accept such a person into the place He made for people to eternally be with Him. This is what having a free will is all about. We can use our free will for many things, but the foundational point in giving us a free will has to do with getting to make the choice between having God directly in our lives or not. As John informed the Jewish religious leaders God could raise up stones to be children of Abraham, it is not enough to just claim I'm a creation of God. The stones were created by God along with everything else that exists, but this universe and all it consists of will perish one day nonetheless. (Isa. 65:17, Rev. 21:1) The only things that will survive are those individuals who choose faith in God!

Getting directly back to the symbol of circumcision, the next fact about this symbol takes us back to the truth that if it's done properly to one born into the

covenant, it is accomplished by one's parents before a personal choice can be made. This emphasizes that fact this was to be passed from generation to generation without fail! Again, one can still choose to reject their heritage, but it does not change the unshakable truth. In representing a life of faith it was what you were created for. There is no reason for parents to approach their children with the idea that maybe my child does not want to know God. Does that mean we should try to force God on our children? Absolutely not! In fact, the one great weakness in being raised in a home with parents who serve God is spoken to again by what John said to the Jewish religious leaders. It can be easy for our parents to simply take it as a fact that we are going to choose to serve God because they do. It is even easier for those raised in a Godly home to believe they will be saved simply because they have been raised in this environment. It is very important for all of us to realize we must take up our own personal relationship with God, for it will only be on the merits of that faith we each will be judged!

So, what does it mean to expect our children to serve God? First, it means because it is a truth all people should be living for God, there is no reason to raise our children in any environment that does portray that truth as just something we should receive as a fact of life in the same way we accept physical facts - such as that gravity pulls us back to the ground when we jump into the air! The second point may or may not seem to some to be contradictory to that, which is we can not

assume that our children will simply find God without our guidance even if it's something the child might readily accept. Just as we should not try to shove God upon them, we should not attempt to exercise our faith in a way that does not assume they will accept and exercise their own faith. To some that might sound ridiculous, but believe me there are those who believe this is not a correct thing to do. More and more there is an attitude that should apply to a great deal of things in this life, such as what career path your child will take, etc., but should not apply to knowing God, and that attitude is that I should let my child simply develop whatever comes naturally and/or they choose completely based on the thoughts they come up with all on their own.

I believe the best illustration I've ever heard to counter this thought pattern in the simplest way possible is the story about the person who one year decided they were not going to plant anything in their garden. The reason? They believed the ground was created by God and whatever it brought forth was obviously meant to be! However, every year they tried this they were disappointed as the ground they had hoped would bring forth vegetables or, at the very least, beautiful flowers, was dominated by thorns and weeds of little to no value in any way. Even the few desirable things that did come up on their own were more times than not choked out by the undesirable plants that came up.

This illustration is so appropriate because it is exactly what God put in place to show humans the truth after Adam and

Eve took of the fruit God told them not to take of and sin entered the world. (Gen. 3:9-19) God not only covered consequences in having children at the same time He told Adam and Eve about the thorns and weeds being what the ground would yield, the point was also made that these weeds would result because we would not desire to simply eat the herbs of the field, such as grass. We would desire to eat bread, and this speaks to the fact we would make changes to the natural environment in order to grow what we desired. In truth, there is no greater change any person will make to this world than bringing another individual into it!

Every parent has the responsibility to do the job of nurturing their children in the base morality of treating others with respect. When parents fail to do this, children by nature follow the flesh's instinct to put its own survival and even comfort first. In a world without sin God would be right there to correct a parent's error and teach the child what they needed to know. In a world of sin this becomes a responsibility fully on the shoulders of the parents or whoever is raising the child. Thus, along with all the base responsibilities of a parent (of which there are many we take as obvious, like the need to feed children), there is a responsibility to make sure children understand there is a God Who created them. Sin may keep God from being able to walk with them as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden, but that does not mean God does not desire a close relationship with each of us. Parents should understand this with clarity and teach it to their children, then let the children choose for themselves!

Now, especially in today's world, I would be remiss if I did not speak on this subject about the fact the symbol was given only to the males of Abraham's family. First, it goes without saying that a different kind of symbol would have to be used in order to give one to the females. However, there is something to be said about the symbol being something only males could receive. It's not possible to simply say, God only spoke about males having this mark but we believe females should have it as well. Second, it is also no accident that the symbol has to do with the specific part of the male anatomy which is used in the reproduction process. Anyone familiar with the basics of human reproduction knows that the female will carry the child from the time it is conceived until the time it is born; and in doing so, mothers are often looked at as having the bigger responsibility for children. This is more pronounced when one stops to consider that even after a child is born it is the mother who by nature must produce the sustenance the child needs in the beginning of their life, so there is no doubt God gave a great responsibility to the female. By the very nature of the way God created the procreation process to occur, mothers are going to have a great influence on what is passed on to their children, and an influence that is undeniable!

With that in mind, it is important we understand this symbol is about the passing on of things to the next generation. However, because this is all true about mothers, it is much easier to have clear symbolism (which is what we are talking about here) by placing it in the father's half of the process. The base fact is something I already mentioned, which is that we are all

Adam. Why is this true? Because Adam was the only human God made in the beginning. God said it was not good for Adam to be alone so He created Eve. However, Eve was not created in the same way as Adam. After God formed his body, Adam became a living soul because God breathed life into him; but Eve was brought to life by the fact God took a part of what He had already given Adam and passed it on to Eve. This is clearly symbolized to us in that we are told God took a rib from Adam to form Eve. (Gen. 2:7-25) The rib cage is not only a solid part of the body's structure but specifically a part of what protects the internal organs vital to our survival, not the least of these is our lungs!

Paul also speaks to this point while talking to the church in I Corinthians 11:8-9 "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." At issue here is the fact that Adam would have been the only human unless God created more. God did specifically create Eve; but the reason Eve was created was not just so there would then be two humans, but so there would be a female along with a male. From there forward humans held within their power the ability to produce more humans by doing much of what God had done in creating Eve, which was to use a piece of Adam.

God gave males the ability to share specific cells with a female. During each cycle of the female's body, females hold a specific single cell in a place were the

male's cells have the opportunity to reach it. One of the cells the man shares with the female can combine with that single cell, and together these two cells contain all the elements, not just to become a human, but to be a newly formed individual human being at that moment they combine! The fact this new human needs a specific environment for the first nine months of its life, which the female's body was created with the ability to provide, is no more an argument to this not being a new human than the fact we all still need oxygen to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, and both grow as well as become older all throughout our lives.

One more very interesting fact about how this all works is that each of the male's cells produced for this process are formed to bring about a male or a female. Thus, which one of these cells meets with the female's cell determines if the new human will physically be a male or a female. The overall point in this is that giving the symbol of the covenant to the male all lines up with the way God created humans in the very beginning. Just as God created Adam and from his life we all exist, so too, God gave this symbol to Abraham as the father of his house, and every male of the house as the progenitor of all their descendants generation after generation!

Until next time, Shalom!

camping positions and the responsibilities in maintaining, carrying, and setting up the tabernacle. Of even more specific importance was the family of Aaron who was to serve as the priests, and specifically hold the position of the High Priesthood. Thus, we are told Aaron had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Nadab and Abihu are the two who violated God's commandments about how to offer before the tabernacle, and were killed by God right at the start of the tabernacle being put into service. These two sons had no sons of their own, and this left only Eleazar and Ithamar as the two sons who would carry on the service of the priesthood along with their father Aaron.

The rest of the tribe of Levi was brought under the direct leadership of Aaron and his family so as to always be directed by the High Priest in maintaining the tabernacle. This was because the tribe of Levi was dedicated to God's service in place of the fact all the first-born in Israel were to belong to God. The first-born were to belong to God because during the Passover plague, which led to Pharaoh finally releasing Israel from Egypt, the life of the first-born in each household was specifically who was saved by having the blood of the Passover lamb on the door frame of the home. God would have Moses number the tribe of Levi in a separate count, and this tribe's number would be done by counting all the males from only a month old and older. The divisions of the tribe of Levi would be defined by the fact the tribe's progenitor had three sons, and their names would be

used to designate three groups, none of which was to include Aaron's family. These groups were the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and Merari.

Each of these three groups would be further designated into sub groups using the names of the three sons' sons. Gershon had two sons who became the Libnites and the Shimites. In all, the males of the Gershonites numbered 7,500. Kohath had four sons who became the Amramites, the Izeharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites. In all, the males of the Kohathites numbered 8,600 (due to a possible mistranslation this number may have been only 8,300). Merari had two sons who became the Mahlites, and the Mushites. In all, the males of Merari numbered 6,200.

As for their camps, the Gershonites were to camp on the west side, which is the side opposite the entrance of the tabernacle, and they had a family leader to organize their specific group. When it was time to take down the tabernacle, this family was responsible for all the textiles and skins which were used to make up the tabernacle, including those that made up the courtyard, as well as all the cords, rope, and rings directly associated with these coverings.

The Kohathites were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle, and they too had a family leader to organize their group. This group's responsibility was for the main objects and items of the tabernacle and courtyard, such as the laver, both altars, table of shewbread,

menorah, the Ark of the Covenant, and all the elements which went along with each of these. Though the Gershonites were responsible for the textiles that made up the tabernacle, the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was used to cover the ark when it was moved; and thus, became part of what the Kohathites carried. Because this dealt so directly with the items most holy unto God, this group's responsibilities would be specifically supervised by the son of Aaron who was next in line for the High Priesthood.

The family group of Merari would camp on the north side of the tabernacle, and have a family leader to organize their group. This group's responsibility was for all the more solid structural parts of the tabernacle and its courtyard. This would consist mostly of those things made of wood and metal, such as the pillars, bars, the boards that made the tabernacle's sides, etc. Along with this, they were responsible for all the other vessels that were used to carry out the function of the tabernacle's daily work. This, of course, did not include those things belonging to the specific elements of the tabernacle which the Kohathites were responsible for. However, it would still be a great number of sanctified items they would have to keep track of and transport.

As the overall leaders of everything that was to happen at and concerning the tabernacle, Moses, Aaron, and their families would be the only ones to camp on

the side of the tabernacle where the courtyard entrance was. It would be by them, or under their watchful eyes, that everything would be taken down, set up, and the day by day administration of the tabernacle's activities would be conducted. Anyone who attempted to come near the tabernacle who was not suppose to, or in an inappropriate way, would be put to death! In all, the Levites on all sides of the tabernacle, which created the buffer between it and the rest of Israel, numbered 22,000 males.

Again, the Levites were to take the place of those first-born among all the tribes of Israel. The cattle of the Levites were also to be accepted in place of initially attempting to sort out all the first-born among the cattle of all the tribes, which would likely have been (without God's direct intervention in showing them each animal) a next to impossible task. However, knowing who was first-born among the people was not difficult, and God tells Moses to go and take a count of the first-born males out of all the other tribes, starting at the same age as what he had used to count the males among the Levites, which was one month old and older. This count showed there were - 22,273. This meant there were 273 more first-born males among the other tribes of Israel than the males the tribe of Levi consisted of. To rectify this offset, God instructs Moses to collect five shekels of the weight designated at the tabernacle, in place of each of these 273 first-born. The money collected was then to be given to



Aaron and his sons. In doing this, Moses collected 1,365 shekels and gave it as God had instructed.

The next instructions would be about exactly how and by who each part of the tabernacle was to be taken down when it was time to move the camp. First, Moses and Aaron were to number the males out of the Kohathites that were thirty to fifty years old. It was the males of this age category that would specifically do the work of handling the items their family group was responsible for in moving the tabernacle. However, the first step in the process would be for Aaron and his sons to go into the tabernacle and take loose the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Walking it forward toward the ark, they used it to cover the ark without seeing it. After using the veil to cover the ark, they were to put a badger skin covering over that which would provide protection from the elements for both the ark and the veil as it journeyed. All this was to be covered with a cloth of pure blue. With the staves (or what we might call bars, and by which the ark was to be carried) put in place, the ark would then be prepared to move.

Next, the priests would prepare the table of shewbread by covering the table itself with a blue cloth in order to protect it. Then all the regular elements which belonged on the table, including the shewbread itself, were to be placed back on it. This then would be covered with a cloth of scarlet in color. All this would be overlaid with a badger skin cover for protection, and with the staves for carrying

put into place, it would be ready. A cloth of blue was to be used to cover the menorah, and all the elements used to administer it were to be covered with blue cloth as well. All this was to be put together, covered with a badger skin covering for protection, and placed on a board (or what was a kind of special rack) in order for it all to be carried without touching the items. The altar of incense was also to be covered with blue cloth, a badger skin covering put over that for protection, and its staves were to be put in for carrying it. All other unspecified elements used directly in the ceremonies of the tabernacle, such as the priestly garments, were also to be covered with blue cloth and then a badger skin covering. These were also to be put on a board so they could be carried without directly touching them.

The ashes of the altar of burnt offering were to be removed and a purple cloth was to be used to cover the altar. Then all the elements used in connection with this altar were to be placed upon it, and all this would be covered with badger skin. The staves for carrying the altar were also put into place. Once everything was covered, by Aaron and his sons, the Kohathites could carry these items, but they were only to do so using the boards and staves so as to never touch the actual items. In spite of them all being covered, any contact with these items would result in death. God even specifies that it was important to make sure this family group survived in these tasks by being well instructed and supervised at all times! They were not to be present as the priests

were preparing all the items they would carry. They were to wait until they were called in and each one told by the supervising priest specifically which item to take and when. The Kohathites' lives were literally at stake here, so it was supervised by the son of the High Priest next in line for the High Priesthood, who was Eleazar. Eleazar, and not the Kohathites, would also take direct responsibility for the menorah oil, the incense, the grain offering, and the anointing oil!

Moses and Aaron were also to count the males of the Gershonites that were thirty to fifty years old so they could do the work their families were assigned. After the elements of the tabernacle were all taken care of, the men of this family were to come in and take the curtains down that made the door of the tabernacle and the coverings of its tent structure. They were also to take down the curtains that made the courtyard and doors into the courtyard. They would prepare all these textiles and skins to be carried. They were to organize and carry the cords, rings, and all the items used to attach and tie down these coverings of the tabernacle and its courtyard as well. This group was to be supervised by Aaron's son Ithamar.

Lastly, the males thirty to fifty out of the families of Merari were to be numbered for their service. They would come in after the tabernacle's coverings were removed, to dismantle and be in charge of the boards and bars that made up

the tabernacle. They would take down all the pillars that made up the tabernacle door and separation wall the veil was part of. After the courtyard curtains were removed, they would take down the pillars used to make the courtyard. All the pillars had elements that went with them, such as the bars the curtains hung on and the stabilizing ropes used to keep the pillars in place. The pillars also had metal sockets that set on the ground, and the pins for tying down the ropes were obviously drove into the ground. These would no doubt need to be cleaned in preparation for transport. This particular part of the process required a lot of organization as each of these pillars, boards, bars, etc. (many of which looked very much the same as each other) were not to be randomly used in setting up the tabernacle once again. Each was to be specifically set up in the same arrangement they had been in from the beginning. When Israel was to stop and set up camp, this family would need to be ready, as their job was necessary to even start the process of setting up the tabernacle. It was also crucial their items were set up precisely so the tabernacle and courtyard would face the right direction, be squared up as it should, and everything be the right distance from each other. Until they had it just right, the curtains could not be brought in and hung, and the other items of the tabernacle put back in their appropriate places. Like the Gershonites, their work would also be supervised by Ithamar.

Let's stay in God's Word!