



Shaqah

שפדאן

*“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 wrapped up our overview of the Book of Joshua. In doing this we have now come in our study through the Torah and the first book outside it which shows us Israel's history after God had truly formed them into a nation. When it comes to the nation's history, being on the other side of the Book of Joshua also moves us into a totally different phase of the nation's existence. As we talked about, Joshua was an extension of the work God intended Moses to accomplish but due to the nation wandering the wilderness for an extra 40 years he was not able to complete. Thus, we move from a part of the Bible where Israel is being formed as a people; established as a nation; and to their homeland; to a time of actually looking at history that concerns how the nation went forward with the full plan of God in place. Of course, this transition takes us into the Book of Judges, which is the book we will begin taking a look at in this segment.

To begin our look I want to go back to something I said when we started talking about the Book of Joshua. I brought up the fact that Joshua on many levels was in fact a prophet and in some ways may have been the most pure form of a prophet we get to see. This could be said of Moses as well, but while he was no doubt a prophet he was also very much a ruler. This is not because God ever designated him to be one but because Moses was called to a position of leadership, and when the children of Israel were at Mount Sinai they were afraid to hear God's voice directly. When this happened they asked Moses to go talk to God and whatever he said God had told him the nation would follow. This was as if the nation was asking Moses to be their king not just accepting him as the prophet God sent to them in order to lead them out of Egypt and to the promised land. While that still does not make Moses a ruler or king in an official way, I believe there can be little doubt that in the minds of the people he was as powerful as any king they could have had and even more so in some ways. They certainly looked at Moses as if he was their father or guardian of some

sort who had a responsibility to take care of them. This is why they murmured so easily against him when they felt they were not getting what they needed. In all these ways Moses stood in the place of a ruler, but God did not intend the nation to have a king.

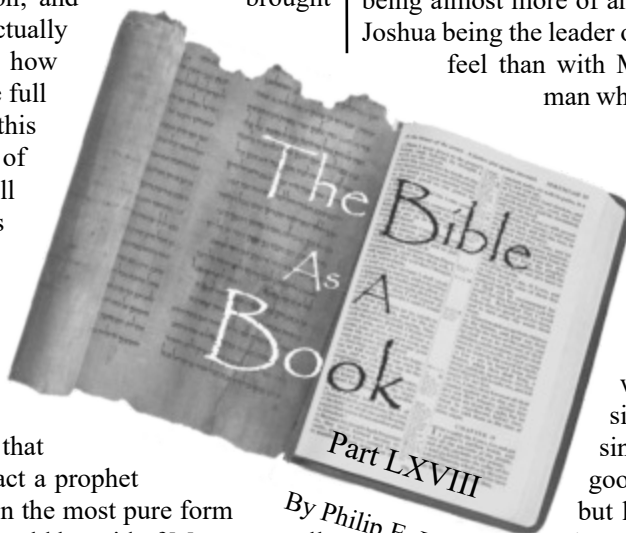
Thus, we see Joshua being given the leadership role Moses had held and continuing the work of taking the nation into the heart of the promised land. However, with the fact God had specifically taken Moses home to be with Him and ordained this change of leadership, we see this transition as being almost more of an extension of Moses' work. That said, Joshua being the leader of the nation did have a totally different

feel than with Moses. For one thing, Moses was the man who came back to Egypt with great power from God which the nation witnessed crush Pharaoh and free them.

Moses was the man who walked up the mountain and received the Law of God and did many other things instrumental and totally necessary to implementing that Law within the nation. In contrast Joshua was the man who had stood by Moses' side through most all of this, especially since the nation left Egypt. He was a good, shall we say, surrogate for Moses but he was not the man who had done all these things. God had said He would be with

Joshua just as He had been with Moses and that certainly proved to be true as Joshua led the nation in taking the land. However, the people did not look at it the same. Moses was the man who had started it all, and clearly Joshua was a man who simply carried on that work as human life span dictates must happen upon the death of someone considered great.

The interesting thing about human nature is this point of how Joshua was not Moses and thus in the eyes of the people a step down, so to speak. Most anyone who followed Moses in leading the nation was, and in truth to this day is, considered a step down from Moses, so that is not to say anything derogatory about Joshua in particular. All that said, Joshua did one of the



By Philip E. Busby



greatest things one can ever see in forming the nation and making sure it got established correctly. Years before his death Joshua stepped aside from a full leadership position. This is something I'm not sure was humanly possible for Moses to have ever done. I don't say that because Moses was arrogant in any way and wanted the power. No, he would like to have been relieved of the burden. At the same time Moses had a heart within him that did make him feel he was responsible for the nation. He had also pleaded with God not to destroy them at Mount Sinai and in that way had taken on responsibility for them. Like a parent who can't or never will stop feeling they need to step in and help even when their child doesn't ask for it or agree they need help, Moses showed concern for the nation's future right up to the last moments before God took him into the mount to end his life.

What we see in Joshua is totally different. Joshua was put in charge and he handled it very well. However, Joshua was in his mind only that, in charge, not responsible. We see even when it comes to God there is never any statements that encouraged or in any way lent itself to the idea Joshua was responsible for the nation. All this set the tone for Joshua to do what Moses might have wanted to do but never would have; Joshua stepped out of the in charge role to the greatest degree he could while still alive. This left the nation to begin living their lives the way God intended them to under the Law. Joshua even makes that pointed statement so many of us are familiar with but don't necessarily think of within the framework it was stated. Joshua told the nation they had to choose whom they would serve, but as for he and his house, they would serve the Lord! (Josh. 24:14-15) This was a very independent statement and so different from anything we really hear Moses say. Moses often warned the people they needed to serve God, but it came as more of a future warning to the people that they always must continue in the path he had insisted they follow during his lifetime or it was an immediate commandment to repent! Joshua was clearly saying I am me and you are all individuals and each of us must choose to live for God or serve the ideas of man if we are truly to be God's Nation.

This is where that strange thinking of humans comes in. The people might have seen Joshua as a step down from Moses, but at the same time he was the closest thing to a king they had, and people want that government position to exist. It was only the nations more intimate knowledge of the Law at this point in the history that allowed them to accept so easily the fact Joshua would not be their king or even continue full time as their leader until his death. If nothing else he certainly made it clear he was in no way passing on his leadership role to his sons or anyone else. It was now up to the people to do as God had commanded. Thus the people accepted Joshua would not be king and began their journey down the road of living as the Law had told them they should. These are all important thoughts as we move into the Book of Judges, and they directly relate to that discussion on how much Joshua was doing the job of a prophet. Judges is the book that covers the only time in the chosen nation's history that we see them living as the Law prescribed in the fact of not having a king or any real form of what we might call secular government. This is why I find the fact God told Israel they would not have a king so important to

look at. We easily look at the books that follow, two of which actually are named Kings and two more the Chronicles of the Kings, and find it common thinking that Israel's history shows they had a king!

Due to the fact God would bring this full circle back to His perfect will one day by sending Jesus to take the throne of David, we even have the emphasis of the nation having a king and their real King was/is Jesus! Yet there is this emphasis that I believe we tend to look at with far too little thought about what it means that Judges is the only time the nation really lived as the Law said they were to live. That is why we see the individuals in this book being called judges. In much the same way Joshua and Moses were prophets, so too were all of these judges. Maybe there are those characters that would really rub you the wrong way to consider a prophet because they seem more like rough, tough leaders and/or military types who totally don't fit the description of being a prophet of God. However, consider even men such as Samson only did what they did by the power of God. He was more than just a well built man who was a great fighter. We may see this best in the last act of his life as God gives him the strength to pull the roof down on the Philistine leaders, taking many of them along with him in death. Another factor as to why many would say these judges were not prophets would be due to their mostly freeing Israel or dampening Israel's oppression from/by an enemy. This seeming military and fighting type of action does not look like our definition of a prophet at all.

That said, we probably need a different understanding of what a prophet is. As we talked about before, a prophet is really someone sent with the specific job of setting things in order. If we go by the Bible's actual words as to who the greatest prophet ever was (and we really should go by that) we must say it was John the Baptist. We easily accept him as a prophet, even possibly use him as more of a model to define what we see as a prophet. However, in spite of how he was led of God to accomplish his mission, the real foundation of what he was to do was that he was sent to set all things in order; to prepare the hearts of the people to receive The Messiah. (Luke 3:3-6) Like so many prophets through history it was not about how many or how few really believed him, received him, etc. it was about God giving the opportunity for there to be a prophet heard and for that prophet to be doing and saying the things the nation needed to see and hear in order to follow the will of God in their personal lives and as a nation. In this fact there is little to no difference between what John did and what these individuals we call judges did.

Probably one of the greatest reasons the judges look so different than your average prophet, or what we think of as one, has to do with nothing more complex than the setting they had to accomplish their job in. Without a king the nation was to follow God directly. In the ways and in the times individuals, communities, etc. did not know what path to take they were to go to the priests at the tabernacle to seek and find the answer. This was the instruction of what the priests were/are which we are given in Ezekiel 44:23 "And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." This was helpful in all the ways individuals could not figure things out due to

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we continued our look at the time God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him. At this point in the study we are discussing the words God spoke to Abraham directly following God halting Abraham from sacrificing his son. In discussing those words we found an opportunity again to talk about God's nature and what He really is trying to accomplish by doing and allowing the things He does. We ended last time talking about the words where God tells Abraham He would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. In this we looked at how this was God making it clear to Abraham he needed to live without worry for those who hated or supported him because God would take care of both. This is the real meaning, not the thoughts many have about taking some advantage of this statement as if it's God's obligation to bless us if we do something positive toward Israel. We also discussed how all of this conversation God was in with Abraham was the real time of setting the covenant in spite of being so deep into Abraham's life. We see things through the eyes of time and it's hard for us to understand, but really all of what God had promised Abraham and the reason God would use him for this great task is due to the heart and mind Abraham, through this test, had shown he had all along. All that brought us to Genesis chapter 22 verse 17, and while we covered a lot of 17 we want to start in that verse again this time.

One aspect of God's words which we only covered in a bit of an overall aspect last time is the part about possessing the gates of their enemies. In light of all Israel has seen through the millennia this part might seem to be a bit of a reach or an all-out contradiction to what we see happened. On that issue let me say a couple of things. First, there is the truth God's promises are dependent on how much we do or do not live up to our part of the deal. That sounds like an excuse, or out, for God in some ways but I in no way am trying to say anything of the kind. The simple point is, God will only force us so much and He will only force others so much. If Israel had really followed the Law as God directed, there is no doubt we would see a much different nation today than the one we see. It would not only be far more powerful in the world but its history would be one of great miracles and success. For that to be true there would be a long history of enemies of the nation laying in ruin at their feet. This, at first glance, can look like God forced certain people but it's not. If Israel was allowing God to do all He wanted to do through and with them, those enemies who were crushed by God would simply be suffering the consequences of their own choices. That is not just to say, they chose to be an enemy and got what they deserved, but Israel being what they were fully intended to be would mean the world would have been quite clear from the start that they had the protection of God on their side. It would have also been known the nation had it in writing from God Himself that this was true in spite of what anyone believed about the "stories" or evidence which supported that idea. Thus, only a fool would go against the nation and in all ways justifiably be hurt or destroyed in the attempt.

The second point is in the eternal aspect of this statement. We far too often look at the here and now without enough thought for the long term of what God is saying. What is clear is that God led Jacob's family into Egypt and then allowed them to become slaves for a time in that land. These were the hard knocks of being molded into a nation. During that time Israel was in bondage it certainly did not look like a nation that would own its enemies' gates. However, with a mighty hand God brought the nation out of Egypt and in the process destroyed Egypt in ways it never has recovered from. It seems pretty obvious from historical facts which are in museums the world over that Egypt was once posed to be, not just a world power, but the world power! No one knows what that would have looked like if it had continued but suffice it to say Egypt was centuries ahead of other cultures and nations. No doubt many had little trouble believing Pharaoh was a god but The One True God showed the world he was not, and to speak to the first point, God did all He did to Egypt because Pharaoh was arrogant enough to keep defying God. In the end, Israel took from Egypt much of the wealth they had a big hand in building. Thus, their slavery was not as much slavery in the end as it appeared.

In so many ways we can look at how Israel undoubtedly owned the gates of the Canaanites as they took their land. However, what we see in that is the point even this should have been more thorough and happened sooner than it did. Israel wandered the wilderness for an extra 40 years before starting this process in earnest due to their unwillingness to trust God. Without forcing Israel God could do nothing more with such a generation. Again, in the long term Israel did own the gates of their enemies. That said, they never completed the job by driving out all the inhabitants as God had told them to. Instead Israel dwelt among the Canaanites and suffered from that fact too many times and in too many ways to even go into. This is all part of that needed cooperation from us if we are going to see God's plan and promises in their fullness. We see a lot of this through Israel's history and it's why we might not think God upheld His side of this promise to Abraham. However, all the while it appears God isn't doing anything to fulfill it, He actually is working toward exactly that. Throughout the centuries God continues to give the nation ability to gain the gates of their enemies. Every time and in every way they have failed to take advantage of it we see God has it set up so the nation might learn a lesson, some easy and some extremely hard learned! In the end this is leading to a nation that can be used in the ways God wants to use it and even now we see God using the nation, not just maintaining it.

Of course, the other thing we can say on this issue is that the nation and the promises God has made to it were always designed to be a foreshadowing/example of what God wants to accomplish with humanity in general. Ultimately the real truth is that the wicked shall perish but the righteous will live on for eternity totally freed from the wrong of those who oppose righteousness. This will be possessing, not just the gates of one's

enemy, but everything! All that said, I don't think many of us see the fact Jews are hated so much by so many because they already own the gates of their enemies on many levels. People build conspiracy theories about how the Jews are poised to take over the world on the basis of many factual things. There are Jews in so many parts of our world doing so many different things! They are inventors of some of the most important technological advancements man has/is making. They are innovators in medicine and industries of all kinds. They hold positions of power in companies, organizations, and governments. They are so everywhere it literally scares some people that they are all working toward some vast idea to take over. Thus, there has been efforts put into squelching Jews, discriminating against them, even trying to exterminate them! Yet in spite of these efforts the nation continues to be everywhere, and there isn't a thing any person or power in the world can do about it. Now, that's possessing the gates of one's enemies. They can hate you but they can't get rid of you!

Now, if any of that seems to reflect negatively on the Jews I assure you that was not my intent. However, if it scares, worries, etc. you, good. I say good because we should always be aware God will fulfill His promises. If God said it, it will come to pass and probably on more levels and in more ways than you appreciate, it already has. Because it is God Who is responsible for these facts about the chosen nation, if this scares you then open your eyes and see a great fallacy in your thinking. You are in some ways and/or parts of your mind resisting God's will and that is never a good thing. This is especially bad if you claim to be a Christian. Any anti-Semitic feelings of any kind you might have in your life comes from a source that is not good, to say the least. Anti-Semitism can only spring from a source in your life/thinking that does not want God's will. This relates directly to the story we are studying here. Abraham was given the ultimate test and he passed because he wanted God's will to be done so fully he'd have given anything, including his son Isaac, to see it happen. We will likely never be asked to do something ever so obvious and hard to say yes to, but no matter from where in our lives our resistance to God comes from, it needs to be found out and removed.

As we look at verse 18 we see words that are clearly what we were just talking about in the aspect of if Israel would have gone on to be everything God wanted it to be. In Israel all the world would have been blessed through the things Israel would have shown the world about the right way to live and govern. As it did not turn out the way God would have perfectly wanted it to, we see Israel still blessed the world in doing the very things we just talked about which cause so many to fear them. In the achievements of many Jews there has been contributions to the world far more than can be counted. We should also remember that even in bad there can be good. We can see Jews have at least in part been responsible for some bad governmental ideas, but that said, you can see in most of these the good that was intended. While it's true the road to hell can often be paved with good intentions, getting a chance to see how good intentions did not work out can be a good thing in the long term. Man insists (and that's an understatement) on governing himself. Finding the right way to make that come out in any kind of good way is difficult, to say the least. When very good ideas once implemented are shown to cause great suffering we find an

opportunity to see how things don't work in spite of how much we would want them to or see how much good they could have done.

For example, share and share alike type government systems can be a great idea for how to see no one goes hungry, needs housing, clothing, etc. but it's a very poor motivator for each individual to do the work necessary to have enough for everyone to get what they need. When we look at a government which focuses much more on maintaining the freedom of people, we can see what looks like a system that leaves far too many out in the cold. That might in fact be true, but when you see the share and share alike system leave just about everyone out in the cold it's a far better thing to have freedom which allows those who work the opportunity to have what they need than to have to give it up to those too lazy to do their part. In the end of it all we can see man is simply no good at governing other men. We have a hard enough time in a world of sin functioning in the God made human structure of family where the husband leads, the wife is the helpmate, and the children obey. Simply describing the proper structure of the family that way is often offensive in and of itself to a growing number of people, and that shows how much we have no clue how to govern properly. Man having authority over others is only properly learned and implemented by expanding the idea of family structure. When we don't know how to live in a family properly to the point the idea actually comes to be despised, we can't possibly expand the idea to bring good through government over large groups of diverse people. Man may want to push for more and more centralized government with the excuse it's for the good of many, but the proof shows man doesn't have enough good in him as a standard nature to execute it correctly.

God showed this to us in its best way through the chosen nation itself. As I have covered so many times, Israel was not originally given a king. This was not just a way of saying God will be your king but that a good government system depends on people doing righteously. If man can be that good there is no need for a king. This fact is actually spoken to by one of the founders of the United States of America. James Madison once said, "If men were angels, no government should be necessary." This is another way of saying, if all men were good there would be no need for an enforcer of law or a distributor of wealth because we would all take care of each other. As Paul instructed the church to do, the strong would simply uphold the weak. (Rom. 15:1-6) This would not be a full-time job for the strong but a temporary task for the weak to get back on their feet. Once recovered those who were weak would be strong and able to uphold others who were weak, and at times that might include the very people who were strong enough to help them when they were down. If all men could think and live in this way we could build a great world, even taking care of those not physically/mentally able to help themselves. What we see instead is that even a chosen nation, given a Law by God Himself, failed to build such a nation. If that's true how much hope do you believe there is for some government to force it on the world using ideas of men?

The answer to that is, there is no hope. Why? That is answered by simply looking at why Israel failed to build and maintain a utopia. Israel failed to listen to God, not just as a

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XLII

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

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

In our last segment, we talked about how greatly the Jews were affected by the lose of the Bar Kokhba Revolt especially having already lost the temple prior to that. We discussed how this lose of the second temple was different than the first temple's destruction in that after the first temple the Jews were in exile from Israel and had hope of coming home one day to see the temple rebuilt. This hope was in fact fulfilled in that the Jews from Babylon were sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple as well as the city of Jerusalem itself. This happened in the course of about 70 years, and that meant there were a lot of older people who had actually seen the first temple. At the time we are studying now Israel was not removed from their land. It was not an invading force that came and took them off their land. What they fought against now was an empire that had swallowed up much of the world and Israel was one of those places taken over. However, Israel was still on their land and the temple still stood until wars between the nation and the empire led to the destruction of the temple. Eventually continual war with the empire took away the Jewish right to even be in Jerusalem and to enjoy many other freedoms they had in their land, especially religious freedoms! This is the time when the Jews really had to figure out how to be Jewish without the temple in place and under great persecution from many sides.

One correction to what we talked about last time is that while it was true Jews were banned from living in or going to Jerusalem, the emperor did make one exception. Jews were allowed to go to Jerusalem on Tisha B'Av. This is simply to say, "The ninth of Av." Av is a month on the Jewish calendar, and it was on this date the temple was destroyed during the Jews' war with Rome. It is also believed this date was the day of other occurrences, but the most important one is that of the first temple's destruction by the Babylonians. Thus, it's looked at as a day of great disasters for the Jews; a day that is mourned. This is likely why the emperor allowed the Jews access to Jerusalem on this day and this day alone. He didn't feel sorry for them. No, he wanted them to remember all they had lost, especially to other powers such as Rome itself! Rome wanted the Jews to give up and let it go. Perhaps by allowing them to mourn and remember all they had lost they would come to accept they would never get it back. In truth, it is widely believed that by about the third or fourth generation following the lose of the temple, hope had pretty much dried up on the idea it would be rebuilt. This was mostly based on how long it took for the temple to be rebuilt after its destruction the first time. When it didn't happen the second time in that same type of time frame, it seemed all was lost and God would never bring it about again.

This brings us to a great debate. There was, and still is, a great debate about whether the temple will ever be rebuilt or

not. Of course, I believe the Bible makes it clear that Jesus will see that the temple is rebuilt when He returns. However, there are plenty of people among the Christian religion who believe it will not be and that it is not necessary. I always find that "necessary" idea interesting, and it relates to what the Jews debated as well. Just as many Christians falsely believe, the Jews also believed their redemption came from the following of the Law. In the time the temple stood this was very much so about getting to the temple and the nation doing all the things the Law required them to do at and with the temple. Thus, it was "necessary" to have the temple in order to be redeemed from one's sin. For Christians there was the original understanding that the temple was not necessary because Jesus was/is our true redemption or as we like to say, salvation. This was understood to be what Jesus was saying when He talked about tearing down the temple and rebuilding it in three days. (John 2:18-22) Of course, speaking of His own death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus was telling us He was the real thing and not just the representative thing that the temple had always been. Jesus gave us a reason to correct the thinking that something such as a Law or animal sacrifices could ever cover our sin. As time passed and the truth of Jesus' words began to be lost in a sea of religious thought which eventually became the religion of Christianity, the thought became more and more one that said, we no longer need the temple because Jesus has now come and replaced the sacrifices "needed" for the redemption of sin.

This was a mistake in theology as the sacrifices never were able to redeem anyone from sin. They only represented what Abraham told Isaac as they walked up Mount Moriah. Abraham told his son, God would provide Himself a Lamb! (Gen. 22:8) In this, Abraham was telling us the sacrifices could only represent our belief in the fact only God and God alone could redeem us from our sins. It's a sad truth most people don't understand that fact and instead believe the sacrifices were necessary at some point in history. This is true of many Jews and non-Jews alike. For non-Jews the belief the temple never "needs" to be rebuilt is also strengthened by the rise of replacement theology, which is the idea the church replaced the chosen nation. From that view it's easy to believe not just the sacrifices are no longer necessary but the temple and even the chosen nation itself! It even goes so far as to say Jerusalem is not important, and this fact is why it was easy for the center of the universal church, or Catholicism as it's better known, to put its headquarters in Rome instead of Jerusalem. No one thought that odd when it happened in spite of the fact if you look at Jewish history and the Word of God itself, it seems truly odd that a church which is suppose to represent The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came to be centered outside of Jerusalem.

All that aside, the real point of our study here is that Jews could not bring themselves to accept a center outside of Jerusalem, and that was a good thing. There are even those Jews who do not care or see it as that big of a deal, but ultimately the

Jewish heart is always drawn to the undeniable place where God said He would put His name on the earth! (Deut. 12:11-12, I Kin. 8:16-21) This means it was not so easy for Jews to accept the idea they could pick a place other than Jerusalem for more than a temporary hold over until Jerusalem can be regained. However, the idea of whether the temple will ever stand once again was in big debate one way or the other. As time passed and the hope faded it would happen in the lifetime of anyone who had seen the second temple, or in the life of those born in the first generation of those who never knew what it was to have the temple, it became an even more perplexing issue than it had ever been during the Babylonian captivity! You see, the idea of the sacrifices being necessary was looked at as being an issue of, "When God allows us to rebuild the temple we will sacrifice to cover the sins of the past and the present." When older people who knew the first temple returned to see the second one built it was a great thing to know that the sacrifices would soon begin again, even in their lifetime. Those who had not known the temple would also go on to live a life with the temple in place and what had been missed at the first of their life would no longer matter.

This concern of things coming about within a generation or a person's lifetime is why Paul ended up fielding a question that had arisen within the churches, and specifically he writes to Thessalonica concerning it. What Paul says in I Thessalonians 4:13-18, about the living not preventing or hindering the dead in Christ when it comes to the resurrection, is directly related to what we're talking about. Especially since the Jews had this thought embedded in their minds long before the second temple was destroyed the question for many Christians became, how are those who are dying among us going to be saved if they die before Jesus returns? This seems like kind of a silly question to us today, but it was great for Paul to answer it and for that answer to be recorded for us. If it had not been, a far worse theology about the resurrection would surely have come about than has in our later centuries. Today the question of Christ's return and the resurrection has been caught up in the false teaching of a rapture being the Second Coming of Jesus, and then after a tribulation period Jesus will come for what can only be properly termed as his "third coming." The fact it boils down to that idea in and of itself should be reason enough to toss aside the false doctrine of a rapture separate from the real Second Coming of Christ to the earth, and so I won't get diverted off into that argument right now. My point is this, if Paul had not straightened out the question about people dying before Jesus returned, Christian theology might have skewed into the same territory the Sadducees had settled into. That was the idea there was no real resurrection of the dead or that it was only for those who would be alive at the time it happened. This would leave us with the idea that if we are not one of the lucky few, our life in the here and now is all we have and what we can have for a relationship with God in the here and now is all there is to be gained. In looking at all the ideas Christians believe about how living for God should result in prosperity, or at least some kind of consistent smooth sailing in life, we can see there is far too much of this thought in the church already! It would have been a horrible thing for it to have been a cornerstone of doctrine that the only thing gained by living for God is what He gives in this life because by far God is not about this life. God is about redeeming us in order to take us to a place He has prepared for all those who trust in Him. This will be the place God is, and we

shall dwell with Him! (John 14:1-4)

The Jews, not having accepted Jesus as The Messiah and the work He actually came to do, had a worse problem now that the temple was gone. This is an example of how false doctrine can build on false doctrine. After Herod's temple was destroyed and so much time passed it became a question as to what to do, not just to be Jewish, but in order to be redeemed. Generations were passing and no sacrifices were being performed; no rituals of the Law were being accomplished. Many people who want to promote the religion of Christianity would easily say, the fact they didn't accept Jesus as The Christ is the real problem. While I agree there is a problem in Jews not recognizing Jesus for Who He really was/is, that is not the foundational problem. Instead of seeing this through "Christian" eyes, step back and think about it as if Jesus had not already come. If you believe what many Christians teach, you too think the sacrifices were necessary up to the time of Jesus and only His blood made them "unnecessary." So looking at it as if Jesus had not come already you can see the Jewish dilemma and should see the foundational problem is the false doctrine sacrifices were ever anything more powerful than a representative tool. Speaking of representative tools, for the Jews the fact remained whether you believe the temple and its sacrifices were/are necessary for salvation or not, Jews were commanded to perform these things throughout their generations. This is literally in black and white over and over in the Law of Moses because it's a commandment of God not some later doctrine derived from the Law.

For the Jew this means you can accept Jesus as The Messiah but you are still failing to follow the Law without the temple. If one sees this purely through hard legalistic eyes this is nothing short of a paradox! You don't have the temple and you don't have the power to rebuild it. At the same time, without it you can't do what God commanded. This leaves you with the question of, what kind of God do we serve? If He is an unforgiving harsh God, He is holding this to your account. It is man's fault we lost the temple and so there is no excuse, right? Since this is an extremely hard line of thinking, anyone who truly believes this would no doubt turn their back on God, believing life is hopeless other than the pleasures of this world for a season. (Heb. 11:24-25) Thanks be to God this hard-line thinking was not widely accepted. Thus, the question for the Jews was not based on that but on the thoughts God is a forgiving God. On that basis they had to find what it is God would accept or want them to do in the absence of the temple. This basic thought is what would drive the Jews forward in their religious theology like never before, and it's another piece in the puzzle of why Jews today look so different from those we see in the Bible!

This fact brings us back to something we have talked about before but maybe not extensively, and that is the fact the Jews, prior to the coming of Christ, had split into different sects. The most familiar of these to many people are the Pharisees and the Sadducees. This is true because they are the two groups we see in the New Testament which were a large part of why Jesus was crucified and His followers persecuted through those early days of Christianity. However, there were many other sects, some large and some small. The big distinction as to why some are well known and others never heard of is in the acceptance or

political prominence of each sect during the time this system was the dominant schools of religious thought. One sect many might be somewhat familiar with is the Essenes community. This group came to be known more widely in modern times due to their believed connection to the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, in order to see Jesus taken to Pilot the Pharisees and Sadducees teamed up with a sect known as the Herodians. The Herodians were a major sect but not as well liked or politically powerful. Notwithstanding, they added weight to the argument against Jesus which was needed to do away with a Man so popular among the common people. That's why the most interesting note in talking about these sects all teaming up to get Jesus to the cross is the fact the Herodians were very much hated and despised by other sects. If nothing else, to the Pharisees and Sadducees they represented a threat, and in many ways they represented the same threat they were accusing Jesus of representing. This shows us how much all of what happened and how it happened was driven by the simple saying that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

All those points are surrounding issues to the simple fact the two main sects where the main ones because in much the same way as a political system where there can be several parties but only two really stand out, it's rare to have more than two major schools of thought fighting for and getting most of the power. This happens because while there are many differences within all the parties, people tend to care mostly about only a handful of issues. If some smaller party can represent an issue or issues you find most important you might belong to them in spite of their minor status. However, in an overall way many people are not really as educated on the issues as they should be and media and/or popular discussion can easily drive the "knowledge" most have of any given issue. On top of that there is the fact many feel they have little choice but to go for one of the major parties or all their issues will be left out in the political cold. This fact about most people's "knowledge" is really what drove the popularity of the religious sects of their day. Those who really had specific political and/or religious thoughts made up the more minor sects of the Jews, but the majority of Jews listened to, or at least accepted, the teaching of two main powerful sects that represented two sides of what was considered important overall thought.

When it came to the Sadducees we see they had claim to the house of Aaron and with it the priestly line. This sect was what we might call aristocratic. They were popular with some people and held a lot of power in spite of lack of popularity due to the fact they could claim the lineage of the priesthood. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were more, shall we say, spiritual. This group, in spite of all its flaws, really did concern itself with more true spiritual matters and teachings of the Law. While the Sadducees took pride in their heritage, and with it the power it gave them over the temple, they did not care so much about the spiritual matters. They saw things as literal only on a physical level. This is why the Sadducees were so easily more Hellenistic. The idea of leaving behind the real spirit of the Law and what it was trying to show the world in favor of the physical humanistic ideas based on man's abilities was easy for them. The Sadducees' physical and legalistic approach to the Law is why they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead but the Pharisees did.

If we look at what happened in the time of Jesus

physically walking this earth we hear of the Sadducees, but Jesus seemed to go after the Pharisees more. This due to a simple truth told to us in I Peter 4:17, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God:..." The Sadducees may have had the right lineage for the priesthood but that was a minor point if they did not care for the truth of God's Word. Their lineage might have won over a lot of people and gave a reason for people to allow them power, but once the temple was gone this fact by itself made their work all but useless. You can't do much in the area of spiritual matters if you're so secular and humanistic in your thinking. In a time of such great hardship the idea of living for just this life was not so appealing. This is not to say the Sadducees were without hope, it is only that they, as a sect, didn't represent anything really useful to the Kingdom of God other than rigid representation of the Law at the temple. Even that they did not do well, but that's an argument for another time. On the other hand, the Pharisees had hope of opening their eyes to see the truth of The Messiah. They had hope to be won over to the real truth because it was so close by in their thoughts. The real foundation of the point here is that the Pharisees at least cared about seeking the right things no matter how right or wrong they were on the issues overall at any given time. That is something God has always looked for in people and it's important to our everyday lives. It is a simple truth that one who is totally wrong on most of their thoughts is much easier to lead to the truth if they care about finding it than someone who is far more correct on many points of doctrine, but is so comfortable in that doctrine they do not care to seek the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

As it relates to where we are going here one only needs to think about what the Sadducees were and represented, to see how their power and prominence would easily fade once the temple was lost. The entire point of listening to them or even, dare I say, putting up with them, was their power over the temple. Once that was gone this sect served almost no point but to be set on a shelf to maybe be used when, Lord willing, the temple was rebuilt. As the hope of that happening got colder and colder even the Sadducees' shelf life began to expire! However, the sad fact is that as we see them fade away into obscurity we also see a lot of Torah Law go untaught or believed to be something replaced by some new ritual that can be accomplished without the temple. This is a problem, and it is a huge one among Christians as a vast majority doesn't believe there is any relevance in learning those parts of the Word of God!

Now, it should be pointed out many of the common Jewish people did not consider themselves a member of one of the sects. The sects only represented theological thought and one might subscribe more so or fully to one or the other, but that was still a distance from claiming yourself to be a member of one sect or another. This made the situation a lot like product sales. There was a large consumer group looking at products, but in the end there was only need to buy one. Many of the sects would slowly disappear and/or fade into obscurity as no one but those die-hard believers in their theology or existence cared to maintain them. As we just covered the Sadducees offered a big idea but one that no longer seemed relevant to many of the common Jews on the street who were now wondering how to live for God or follow the Law without the temple. Other sects simply were not well enough known to gain popularity or prominence no matter how much their theology might have offered a good thing for answering the hard questions. This made the big seller and

ultimate winner of the theological thought war, the Pharisees.

It would be the thoughts held mainly by the Pharisees which would not only drive theological thought about how to be Jewish without the temple, but the way the Pharisees went about their practice of teaching lent itself to the ongoing debate of what to do at this point. The Sadducees were simply too rigid about things that could no longer be done, but the Pharisees whole philosophy was based on debate, discussion, and the sharing of thoughts whether right or wrong in the majorities' mind. This is another big reason we see Jesus seem to key in on them as opposed to the Sadducees. The Pharisees offered a forum to which Jesus could inject His truth and it could be heard and judged by many. This no doubt angered the Sadducees in and of itself, but the fact the leading Pharisees of the day were being trampled and out done so greatly by the wisdom of what Jesus taught did not set well with them either!

By this time following the major wars with Rome and seemingly no hope of rebuilding the temple Jesus was a distant memory for many religious Jews. Jesus had given the Jewish nation the chance to avoid ending up where they now stood. In spite of not taking that opportunity as a nation, those who accepted Jesus as The Messiah had no real religious problem with being without the temple. It was as sad a day for them as any other Jew to see the destruction, as well as the state the nation had come to, but on a theological level they were already prepared for living without many of the things the loss of the temple brought. For Jews who believed in Jesus they already understood the representative things in the Law were only that, representative. What they had in accepting Jesus was the real item; The Messiah Whom they followed directly. They understood they were never really without the temple or its sacrifices because they had Jesus and understood His sacrifice for us all. This is why we see those, preparing us for later times, words in the New Testament where we are told things such as, our body is the temple of The Holy Ghost. (I Cor. 6:19) References over and over to things such as the sacrifices and other elements the Law makes us familiar with are used to help us understand, not the representation but the literal which we now have direct knowledge of thanks to Jesus' first coming.

None of these things were in the mind of Jews who had not accepted Jesus, and due to that the time for Jews to hear the Gospel message was actually better than ever! That said, there were still plenty in the nation who would not listen and instead found themselves looking for other means to satisfy their obligation under the Law and a means for redemption. That word obligation is another important fact and one we could do a whole other study on. While Jews believed and held throughout many times the idea the sacrifices once resumed would cover their sins, there was still a nagging feeling there were things in the meantime they needed to do to even be worthy of receiving that, should it come to pass. This is what a religious mind struggles with and sadly there is a lot of this in what calls itself Christianity today. On the other side there is growing liberalness in the church over the idea there is nothing we are obligated to do; leading people to simply live like the world and take comfort in a magical ticket of salvation idea. For some who can't buy totally, or at least

as much, into those thoughts we see Christians who seek what, if anything, in the Law of Moses non-Jewish believers should do in order to make it to heaven. So one can see how it all becomes a garbled mess when we don't simply understand the seeking of a personal walk with The Lord which includes listening and responding to His guidance. It becomes a tangled web of power-hungry men making doctrine that is popular instead of truthful. It is fraught with those who simply want salvation the easiest way possible. People with itchy ears heap to themselves teachers desiring even to turn from the truth in order to believe a more comfortable lie. (II Tim. 4:1-4)

These facts all relate directly back to how the Jews developed the religion we know as Judaism today. I have taken a long and arduous path to this point, but the fundamentals are really summed up in one story contained in Jewish history. In the Midrash, which in shorthand description is a commentary ancient Jewish teachers did on the Law, we find this, "The Temple is destroyed. We never witnessed its glory. But Rabbi Joshua did. And when he looked at the Temple ruins one day, he burst into tears. 'Alas for us! The place which atoned for the sins of all the people Israel lies in ruins!' Then Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakkai spoke to him these words of comfort: 'Be not grieved, my son. There is another way of gaining ritual atonement, even though the Temple is destroyed. We must now gain ritual atonement through deeds of loving-kindness.'" This seems too simplistic and in truth it is. The good deeds can make you a good person but it can atone no one from all our missteps and sins. This point becoming a problem one day for both Jews and non-Jewish believers is why we are told in Hebrews 9:22 "...and without shedding of blood is no remission."

This was not to say whether sacrifices of animals or Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we must have the shedding of blood to atone for sin. No, this is to point out something much deeper, and that's the fact we all must die to be freed from our sin. Jesus showed us the path of salvation and that path includes death! That sounds strange to many Christians, but it's a fundamental point and why the Sadducees held no value after the loss of the physical temple. This life must be lost. Jesus told us this clearly in Matthew 10:39 "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Jesus shed His blood to show us it's alright for us to lose our lives if we do it trusting, not in the blood of sacrifices or our good deeds, but in God for our salvation. Not accepting Jesus as The Messiah allowed the Jews to easily miss this point, and sadly many who call themselves Christians do as well. As a Christian it's easy to criticize the Jews for not accepting Jesus. It's easy to believe they are walking in a false religion, but consider that with the Law still being their responsibility, their focus on good deeds in order to please God and serve His Words did/does bring them much closer to the truth of salvation than many who claim to believe on Jesus but actually fail to listen to God! (Heb. 10:30-39)

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

**Questions submitted to the Institute, answered by
Philip E. Busby.**

FBS continued from pg. 4

nation but as individuals and not just in one time period but more importantly through time. Time is as great a factor as anything with man. For a time, and at times, we can see how Israel did pretty good and gained a lot of prosperity or, at the very least, peace. They did this by following God or having leaders who did and helped the nation. However, this always shifted to a time when the people and/or the leaders failed to look to God for the answers. Even with the written Law of God already in hand, it was not enough to maintain a utopia. In this way the nation served as an example of the truth; truth we can again see in looking at the family unit. In a family where all the members truly seek God there can be harmony even in a world plagued by sin and discontent. In a family where the parents seek God there can be a lot of peace if only the children will obey God's commandment to obey their parents. (Ex. 20:12) We see things get far more difficult if only one parent truly seeks and listens to God's instructions, but how much workability there is in such a family will also be greatly affected by how much the one(s) who do not seek God will follow the lead of the one(s) who do.

This point is where we see value in God saying the man is the head. (I Cor. 11:3-12) If the man will take the role of being the one who seeks God there is better clarity for the woman to follow his lead and the children to obey in spite of how much or how little each of them may seek God personally. That clarity is greatly dampened if the man is not the one who seeks God, but there is still something to be gained if the woman will seek God. You never know how much the man might follow her lead/example in choosing how to run the family. I could go on and on with these scenarios but it all comes down to how selfish each individual will be. I think we all can see, and far too many of us personally know, how hard family life can be if even just one member chooses not only to forget about seeking God, but certainly if they choose to reject the structure of the way God created things to be. No matter how well it might work or not work in each family we should never forget that the closer we come to God's way of doing things the better off we'll be, and the more we turn to our own thoughts for the answers the more we will destroy what we have or could have had. When it comes to looking at government, it was never God's intent to have man governing man beyond the family, but if humans choose to structure their societies in this way, and they do, we need to look to the Laws God gave Israel as a template for how that should operate.

In the chosen nation we see both hope and hopelessness. In being the holders of the oracles of God we see them as extremely useful. In the ways they demonstrate the ways of God they are the giver of a physical example even those who have not learned to really hear God's voice can see and learn from. In their history there is more to learn from than most anyone knows and on levels of human advancement we owe the nation a debt of gratitude which is what makes so many evil people hate them so much. The chosen nation shows us just how much we should give up our ways in order to follow the ways of God. Where man more often than not goes wrong is in even thinking they understand what I just talked about and still not understand that doing right cannot be dictated from one central power unless that power is God Himself. This is why, through

the nation of Israel we received the opportunity to have The Messiah as our King and to the chosen nation The Messiah will return to rule this world. This will be the greatest blessing of all and the best time man will ever see in government leading people into a world of peace. Even then God will enforce righteous laws but not force us to only live in a certain way. If anything should show us how much humans deserve freedom to choose their own path it's that fact!

One more interesting and important note we see in verse 18 is that God specifically says to Abraham all this blessing to the world would come due to the fact he, Abraham, as an individual obeyed the voice of God. In this we see clearly what a difference even one person who follows The Lord with their whole heart can make. If Abraham was able to effect the world this greatly, even far into the future past his lifetime, just think what a world could be like if it was filled with people who were truly sold out to every word God spoke. This is why I have emphasized so greatly through this story how much all of this is not just something Abraham didn't want to do but something he surely saw as going against the righteousness as he knew it, yet the overriding thing in Abraham's mind was that God is righteous, and so if God said it he would do it. That's the kind of dedication to God He needs in order to really accomplish something with an individual's life, and it's the kind of dedication we see governments the world over attempting to squelch if not totally outlaw. What Abraham was asked to do is something he could not have accomplished if he was under some rigid law unless he disobeyed that law. I believe he would have obeyed God over men in a world with tight, human government control, but his testimony might not have been this story as much as a story of being put into prison or persecuted in many ways by the governing, religious establishment and other powers of men.

Verse 19 brings us to the true end of this particular story of Abraham's life as we are told he returns to those servants whom he had left with the animals and supplies they had brought with them. We are told they would return to Beersheba and there Abraham would live. This is the part of the story we need to be careful not to miss. After this great incident of trial, stress, and anguish which was followed by relief, promise, and the great blessings of hearing from God, Abraham would simply return to his everyday life. Why? Because life is not primarily made up of those times of spectacular events. No, those events happen due to the day by day life we live before God. Far too often people find themselves looking for the glitz and the glamour of serving God. We want it to be dynamic and powerful yet the real struggle in life is this day by day we live. Each day we live with that choice of do we follow God, do we live for Him and with Him in this day or do we turn another way? Do we give up on God due to how things look on the surface of our lives or how the circumstances that surround us appear or do we press on no matter the cost? Answering this question in the correct way over and over is what caused Abraham to receive the promise and blessings of his life, and it leads to the ultimate reward. I say ultimate because many of us will never be promised something so "spectacular" as Abraham was, but where God wants to take us all is ultimately the same!

Until next time, Shalom!

Still Trusting!

By Ruth Busby

I wrote an article titled “Do You Trust Me,” which was published in *Shaqah*, July/August 2008 issue. This is a follow-up of that article for everyone wondering my outcome. Just to give you a little background: As you know, I have had heart problems for many years. My heart is strong, but blockages keep forming in my arteries. Only by the hand of The Lord am I still here because even the doctors are amazed by now. I have been at death's door more than once, but God has miraculously brought me through.

Obviously, I am still on this earth, but only by the hand of God! He is still guiding and directing my steps daily. It hasn't been an easy road, but it's been a peaceful road. I have been through several bumps, well, you might say deep dips, in the road as I travel, but that peace has never left me!

I would like to say, or maybe I wouldn't, that the Lord healed me and I have lived a healthy, carefree life since 2008, but no—that wouldn't take much trust on my part would it? The Lord had more testing of faith and trust in store for me! But as I have learned, there's a purpose for it, and if it's the Lord's will, I know it's also in His hands, and therewith a peace!

My previous cardiologist was a doom and gloom guy, with no encouragement of hope. So needless to say, with every visit I would leave his office with tear-filled eyes. It was clear he had given up on me—but God hadn't! What happened next was a miracle within itself. I ask my primary care doctor if he could recommend another cardiologist, and told him why. He did, and I set up an appointment, thinking I would talk to him about my situation. My husband and I walked in ready to just talk, having been told there was nothing any doctor could do, so I just needed monitoring until the Lord took me home, but by someone who didn't remind me of that every time I walked in. We introduced ourselves, and before we could say another word, he started telling us about a new procedure that had been developed a year before for difficult cases such as mine, and he was the only doctor in our area who had performed it so far. He had studied my case and thought that's why we were there, and was ready to take it on; confident he could help me.

It wasn't quite that simple! After all, I only had a 15% blood flow in my left artery keeping me alive; everything else was blocked. After meeting and conferring with several other doctors, yes—we were back to talking bypass surgery again! The stint doctors were saying it was too risky, even using the new procedure, and the bypass surgeons were saying they had nothing to connect to, so it couldn't be done. Needless to say, it was a roller coaster of emotions for me that night; wanting to make sure I was ready to meet The Lord if that was His will. Lots of prayer was going up; thank God for a praying family and friends!

Finally, a doctor came in and said he had a plan; explained it to the family; and scheduled it for early the next morning. He and my new cardiologist would be doing the procedure together. As they came to take me to surgery, it was quite emotional, especially for my family. After all, there was no guarantee they would talk to me again, at least not on this earth. As they were taking me, that wonderful peace was there, and I knew everything was going to be okay regardless of the outcome.

They were able to open another blockage for more blood flow, which was encouraging, but still concerning with such a small percentage compared to the overall heart capacity. Since that time I have had another stint placement to help a little more. At last check what they had done was still open, which amazed my doctor. I still have total occlusion on the right side of my heart. Still trusting The Lord, not to heal me, but to keep me in His will and use me as long as He sees fit to leave me on this earth. You see, The Lord doesn't always heal us physically, but as long as we are willing to obey Him (and trust Him), He heals us spiritually!

I also talked about the scare of breast cancer in 2008. Well in 2017, I noticed a lump on my left breast, which was really surprising because I was sure nothing would come of the 2008 findings. Went to my doctor, and after examining it, he set me up to get an ultrasound. Yes, they were sure it was cancer. Here we go again! I had that wonderful peace that I have had so many times before, so I am well acquainted with it and knew The Lord was going to take care of it. They sent me to a surgeon to talk to me, even though I told them I didn't want to have surgery. But I've learned to step it out until The Lord says stop. He said he could remove it with little trouble since it hadn't spread too far yet. But assured me it would spread, as had the ultrasound nurse also, and if too far, it would be too late. I wanted to think about it and PRAY about it; in other words, just stand still for awhile. I talked to the family, and again talked to my youngest son (also my minister), and as with the heart situation, he gave me guidance and advice on my options, but left it up to me as to what to do. I had a total peace, and therefore, felt The Lord was going to take care of it. So, you guessed it! I opted not to have it removed.

As time passed I kept checking to see if it had changed, one way or the other. After a time, it seemed it was a bit smaller, so my next appointment with my doctor he measured it and, again, you guessed it! It had shrunk a little. To make a long story short, a year later it had dried up. God is Good! Praise His name! Satan still tries to scare me once in awhile with—what if? But I know God is at the helm. So no matter how rough the seas get, I rest assured He will guide me safely through until I reach the other side where my true home awaits! Only He knows how much further the journey. Until then, I will keep “Trusting Him”!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

lacking a relationship with God to receive it for themselves. It was also God's way of saying, I know everyday life in this world of sin gets distracting from the things of Me so I have given you a group who's only job is to serve Me full time and seek My face! Prophets, on the other hand, are true people called to set that which is wrong right. It's why we see them so often after Israel had a king, being the one(s) to go to the king and rebuke him for something he had done or wanted to do. At times they instructed the king in specific matters, and it became common for kings of Israel to keep prophets at their beckoning call for when they needed advise or even false prophets so they could be told they were doing what was right in spite of the truth.

In these stories we see prophets clearly, but in the ways these judges did their work we don't really think about them doing the same kind of work. The fact they actually led armies of Israel into battle is no different than the times Moses was in charge during battles the nation initially had. We might see a difference in command style between Moses and these judges but that matters not, it's all the same. The point of their leadership was to get Israel on track, or at least more on track than they had been; to bring Israel back from a brink or edge God did not want the nation to go over. This was their job and it came about because the people were not following God in the ways they needed to be following. They were not getting the answers they needed to be getting from God. On top of that they were not going to the priests of God to find the answers and/or the priests were not in tune with God to the point even they could find them. This point is clearly seen in the fact Samuel is considered the last judge of Israel. Samuel was not the son of the High Priest, nor part of that direct family lineage who would take the role one day. No, Samuel was a boy born to a mother who had told God if He would open her womb and allow her to have a child she'd give that child to God's service. It was out of these circumstances Samuel was born and ended up serving at the tabernacle. As the priest would soon find out God would specifically talk to Samuel in spite of the fact there having been a drought of hearing from God due to the lack of anyone who really sought God's face. (I Sam. 3:1)

From there Samuel would grow more and more into the man through whom God spoke to the nation and that is why he was/is considered a judge. His role was far less military action than many others we call judges, yet he fit into that time period after Joshua but before Israel had a king. This shows us how titles are often not so much about what God really has called a person to do but for how we like to categorize them in/for what time or way they did their work. This is the real reason these individuals were called judges. What we see at the time of Joshua's death is a nation who wanted a leader; a man who they could turn to when they felt they needed something as a nation. They may have understood all too well it was not in God's will, but there was that continual feeling within them. This is what created the issue and it's an issue that existed even before Joshua died. The people would go about their lives without seeking God in all things. In doing this they would get in trouble or have some problem as a nation or large group within the nation. As an extension of what caused the problem in the first place they would not cumulatively seek God as to what to do about it and see it resolved. In many cases the

problem would even sneak up on them because they were just living their lives without putting God first and not notice things were going downhill. This would continue until it became obvious there was a problem, but by that time it was not a minor correction, it was a big issue!

This is when the people would cry out to God to save them, or because they were God's nation God would need to send someone to change the circumstances in order to give the people a chance at getting back on the right path. When people cry out to God we often do it with the thought somehow God is just going to make it all better. In some cases this will happen, but what we so often forget is the fact God works with us. This means he chooses to work within our time structure and perceptions in many ways. If God did simply make everything better He would not wait until it was obvious we were in crisis before He made the adjustment we needed. In doing this we would truly be controlled beings, which is not how we were created. Thus, God waits for us to step in whatever direction we're going to step in and if/when we cry out to Him, He comes and does what is best according to His will. The steps He takes may often be miraculous in our eyes or supernatural in nature, but even that is evidence God is working within our perception. If He was not we would not be aware of the change in many cases. In turn we would become complacent all the more than what led us into trouble in the first place. In this we see there are all kinds of aspects to how God goes about His work which only God fully understands and appreciates.

This is why we must trust God which includes calling upon Him. The more we call upon Him on a regular basis the more we will not see how many things He moves out of our way before we face it. This is the wonder and grace of God. What He allows those who truly seek Him with the whole heart to go through is more often than not an exercise to strengthen not just our faith (walk with Him) but our actual ability to grow as an individual. When we look at a nation as a group we see how easy trouble can come because many are called but few are chosen. (Matt. 22:14) Israel needed all the people in the nation to do right in order to fully implement what God wanted to do for and in the nation. Israel needed a significant number of the people to do right to even stay on the right course at all. As big a leap as that is one from the other, there is the fact so many times so few actually seek to do right it's only the mercy of God for those few specifically, and humanity overall, that God steps in to do something even when there is finally more of a group supplication made for Him to intervene. What this all means is that when God stepped in with these people we know as judges, He was stepping in to save a nation or group that had certainly gotten off course due to not following God's will.

This is really where we get the name judges for these individuals and in turn the book itself. These are the stories of the times Israel got off course in ways that were so bad God was truly judging the nation as having done wrong by sending these individuals who were often doing the job of a prophet. We may be tempted to think, and we may have in the past been taught, these were called judges because they brought God's judgment on those who oppressed Israel. While that is not totally wrong it's not the right way to see it. God was in many occasions bringing judgment against those who came against His nation,

but more so than that God was saying to Israel, you have failed to follow me so badly I will need to step in to clean up the mess you made. This shows us the judgment of God is far more often than we think, what we call His grace. This is the main reason we need to understand we are saved, not by faith, but by grace through faith. We currently lack the perfection and purity even a walk with God over many years could bring, but we also can do nothing to make up for past wrongs. The damage is done in the time(s) and moment(s) it is done. There is no way to give back what you took from someone in your wrong. There is no way to make right what you have already done wrong. All we can do is determine to do better and stay on a course of improvement. This means we need forgiveness above all else. We need God's forgiveness and must remember we will not receive it if we are not forgiving of others! (Matt. 18:32-35)

We all need God's grace, and when God sent individuals as judgment for the wrong Israel had done we see those individuals often doing things we would categorize as being heroes! So we see these judges doing great works in Israel, but what we need to also see is the way they more often than not only scratched the surface on what needed to be corrected. This is another way in which they were God's judgment on the nation. During this time, over and over, Israel got to see they had slipped in following the right path. When that brought them to a critical state, God would send someone to back them away from the immediate crisis. It was the simple fact the nation just would not as a whole learn their lesson and keep that lesson throughout the generations that judges had to be sent so many times and for so many reasons. The Book of Judges is no less than the story of God attempting over and over to move and keep the nation in the right path. If they would have and maybe I should say at the times they were walking the right path it was not so necessary to see prophets acting as what we might call judges, but instead they did the work we think of as being prophets of God.

This is why in looking at this book we truly are seeing a book that is history. It is the story of the years Israel lived their lives as a nation on its land with God's Law in their midst. This story would begin before Joshua died and end just as we are ready to start the story of Samuel who would be the judge to preside over God allowing Israel to change the dynamic and have the king God always knew they would insist on having. (Deut. 17:14-20) This helps us talk about a couple of the things we commonly like to cover about each book as we step our way through the Bible in this study. One of those items we like to look at is the question of, how much time is in between each book? Since the Book of Joshua technically does not end until we have recorded for us Joshua's final words and death we see there is an overlap of the Book of Joshua and the beginning of Judges. Now this overlap is really more about the narrative in the book than it is about any of the works of Judges. As one begins to read the Book of Judges directly after reading Joshua it should become clear Judges was written as a work to stand all by itself if need be. Today we have the privilege of looking at this book as simply continuing history we have been following in reading from Genesis to here. However, the book begins with

some factual information that is almost a word for word repeat of some verses in Joshua.

This is really to make the point that the trouble we are about to see God send judges to deal with did not begin with one misstep on the part of the next generation(s). No, most of the trouble can be traced back to one fact and one fact alone. That is the fact Israel failed to finish the work of driving out and/or destroying completely the inhabitants of Canaan. The fact this trouble began before Joshua died is part of why he spoke those words about how the nation would have to make up its mind as to whether it would serve God or the religions of men but he and his house would serve the Lord. Joshua knew the nation was already showing an unwillingness to go out and finish this work they had begun under his leadership. That fact would be the foundational problem for most all of Israel's trouble we see in the Book of Judges. In this we see how much this was about God judging Israel for not doing all that was right while attempting to lead them into the path they should be walking. In that way, the Book of Judges overlaps Joshua, but to be clear, the first major story we see in the book is on the other side of Joshua's death. To be equally clear, it was not long after that. In truth there is no more time between these books than there was between the end of Deuteronomy and the beginning of Joshua. We see Joshua pass away at a time the trouble had already begun to brew, which means it's likely there is not even a full decade between Joshua's death and the first major story of Judges.

Of course, all this brings us to the discussion of how many years does the Book of Judges cover? For that we can ignore in large part the opening narrative of Judges and talk in terms of when the real meat of the stories about judges begins. For that we find ourselves somewhere around the year 1367 B.C. Even that year is dependent not just on one's belief as to the time line, but on whether to count from when the real trouble that brought about the first judge started or when the first judge actually appeared on the scene. These facts and more cause great difficulty in saying how much time Judges covers. We go from that fact to the fact the last judge of Israel is actually Samuel. However, we do not see his story in earnest until we get to I Samuel. In spite of that the last judge chronologically which Judges tells us about did his work around the time Israel demands of Samuel that he give them a king. This was around the year 1065 to 1067 B.C. Due to all this, it is generally agreed that the time the Book of Judges itself covers is right at 300 years. Because there is such overlap in the history that leads out of Joshua to Judges and then into I Samuel, this is definitely what we call a ballpark figure, but maybe more importantly there is the fact it does not really matter to be technical on this point. The reality is, Israel's first 300 years of living on the promised land with the Law in full ability to be performed is filled with historical events such as we see in Judges. Once Samuel, who truly acted as a priest of God, is told by God to allow Israel a king, the story changes to look at most everything the nation faced through the eyes of how its leadership handled the nation.

Let's stay in God's Word!

