



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*

As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, we ended last time by talking about how God used Israel to punish the Midianites for attempting to corrupt Israel. This included not just the fact Israel utterly destroyed the Midianites, but also how the spoils of that war were handled as the army returned to the camp. In all this we are seeing the ending events of Moses' life as God had told him he was to be taken and not be the one who would lead Israel into the promised land. Continuing to look at such events, we finished chapter 31 and are ready to begin chapter 32.

With the punishment of the Midianites behind them, the nation grew ever closer to that time they would cross the Jordan and begin to take the promised land. However, they had by this time already taken a significant portion of land on the east side of Jordan, and the tribes of Reuben and Gad saw this land as very good for grazing cattle, which both tribes had in abundance. This caused these tribes to desire not to take land on the other side of Jordan, but to take as their possession this land on the east side. Thus, they go to Moses and Eleazar with their request, and whether they had considered it or not, Moses is quick to point out to them that their desire to not enter the promised land is very much like the way the original spies had discouraged Israel from going into the land decades ago. He reminds them how those actions were the reason why Israel had wandered the wilderness for these many long years, and now these tribes were threatening to cause another such event or worse!

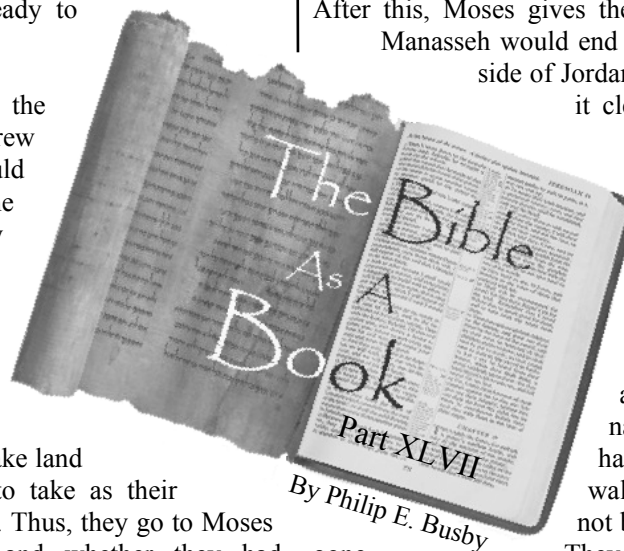
To this, these tribes respond that they would build the structures and houses needed for their animals and families, but the men of the tribe would still cross the Jordan and fight alongside their brothers until every tribe had gained a possession on the west side of Jordan, except for them. To this, Moses makes it clear that if they really do what they say they will do, then they may take the land they wanted as their possession without any problems. However, if they turned back

on their word and failed to go and/or stay with the armies of Israel until the promised land had been taken, there could be no doubt they would suffer punishment from The Lord, the details of which Moses did not even speculate on. Again, these tribes promised to uphold their words, and this was witnessed by the High Priest, Joshua (who would take the leadership after Moses was gone), and the other princes of Israel. This was important because the end result of whether they did what they said or not was something Moses himself would not be around to see. After this, Moses gives the land to them, and the tribe of

Manasseh would end up with a portion of land on this side of Jordan as well. However, Moses makes it clear no matter what God does to them if they turn back on their word, these tribes would be given possessions on the west side of Jordan and not keep the land they wanted here on the east side. The next verses give us a list of the cities the tribes of Reuben and Gad built and/or restored, even changing the names of many of the places that had been taken. Most of these were walled cities, so their families would not be left vulnerable while they were

gone. They also built the barns and infrastructure needed to take care of their cattle, as they had asked to do. Certain families of Manasseh would go further into some of the land to the north and easily drive out remaining Amorites of the area in order to take their cities and lands.

As the three tribes that would take possessions on this east side did their work and the rest of Israel was able to settle down a bit before they crossed the Jordan, Moses would make good use of his time. While I believe Moses had taken the time to keep good records of the events as Israel traveled, and this certainly was not the first time he had had a chance to write, Moses now knew how close he was to the end of his earthly life. It very well may have been during this time Moses organized those writings into more of what we see as these first books of the Bible. It would seem this was also the time to



write most of the record we read here in Numbers about Israel's actions as they transitioned from their wandering in the wilderness and began their travel and actions needed to get in a position to cross the Jordan. Refreshing himself on the overall events they had been through may be why in the next verses we have a fairly simple listing of Israel's journey. It starts with where they had begun by leaving Egypt and lists all the notable places they had camped while on their way to now being spread out across the plains of Moab, most of which Israel had taken back from Canaanites Moab had lost the land to. One of the most important things to remember is that this is certainly the lead up into the last book of the Torah, as Moses makes sure the generation which were just children, or not even yet born when Israel left Egypt, now understood who they were and where they had come from!

Next, God goes into instructions that, again, were to make it clear to Israel that the Laws He had given them to follow were not just about how to live as they journeyed from Egypt to the promised land, but words every generation was to follow. These instructions are also about making sure a good foundation for future generations was laid by those who would take the land to begin with, by cleansing the land of things Israel was not to have as part of their lives. First off, they were not to simply live among the people of Canaan. Israel was to drive these inhabitants out, and the success God gave Israel as they punished the Midianites was a clear example of what this meant, which was not to just drive them away but destroy them as a people. That might sound harsh, but this was God using Israel to exact the same kind of judgment on the entire land of Canaan that He had placed on Sodom and Gomorrah during their forefather Abraham's day. Along with destroying the people, Israel was not to adopt their culture(s) in any way, especially their religious beliefs. Israel should have known by having the Law that they were not to worship false gods. However, in the minds of pagans, false gods are often connected and somewhat specific to the land upon which they are worshiped. God wanted Israel to have no doubt in their minds that this land was God's and no false god need be preserved, respected, or remembered in order for the land to prosper.

Thus, Israel was to destroy all the carvings, drawings, and the like of these gods and whatever the Canaanites worshiped. They were also to destroy all the statues of these gods and their places of worship. This would include not just items and structures the Canaanites had built for such purposes, but one needs to understand the idea of temples being built using columns to support their roofs has its roots in an earlier idea. In early times it was common for people to create places of worship by planting and/or using trees to surround a specific opening of ground which would serve as the central point of worship. Israel was to cut these groves of trees down and leave no evidence to this kind of activity on the land. The history and culture of the Canaanites were to come to an end so they and future generations in Israel would not turn to these places or use these items as special, but look only to The One True God for their needs. The land was also to be divided up between the tribes and families in Israel. This is not just a repeat of an earlier commandment. While the words are all here about those

with greater populations getting more land and those with less getting smaller portions, the real point of saying this in this set of instructions was to make it clear Israel would possess all the land!

This meant there should not be left pockets of land that were considered to be possessions which did not belong to Israel. Driving every last inhabitant of the land out was not a job that would be accomplished overnight. The fact the work was ongoing, or at least needed to be, even by the time of Joshua's death is why Joshua's final words were about how there was still work each tribe and the nation as a whole needed to continue forward with. This needed to be done in spite of the fact they would no longer have a central leader as Moses and Joshua had been. In dividing up what land belonged to what tribe and even what families in those tribes, there would be a clear picture as to whose job it primarily was to drive the Canaanites out of each specific location across the land, especially as Israel's population continued to expand. These instructions are capped off by making it clear that if Israel was to leave any of the Canaanite population, those people would not be allies of Israel but continue through time to cause Israel trouble. They needed to remember this was about more than just giving Israel the land they wanted. This was about doing the work of God in this land. If Israel failed to be willing to do that work, God would do it; but such a cleansing of the land would include God doing to Israel what He wanted done to the Canaanites.

To be clear of just what land should be initially divided among the tribes and their families, God lays out the general borders of the promised land. In our time it can be hard to pin down exactly what all is being specified here as God talks about various places being markers for where to draw the lines, but especially when it comes to the southern border, these instructions should have been very clear to Israel. You see what they are told is basically that the southern border would extend right down to the area they had traveled along on their way from Egypt. The southern border was actually defined quite well to Israel as they first sent in the spies from this south end. The Edomites claimed an extensive piece of the land going south from the south end of the Dead Sea. We clearly see this fact as Israel wanted to travel around that south end and asked the king of Edom for permission to do so by going through his land. Now, Israel was to extend their border south to meet up with the northern border of the Edomites right at the extreme south end of the Dead Sea. From there it would go on to the southwest and drop as far as Kadesh-barnea, which should have been a very familiar place to Israel. It was from this area Israel sent out the spies at the time God first intended them to start taking the land. (Num. 13:26-27, 32:7-8) It was also in this area where many other events took place during Israel's travels, including when they sent the message to the king of Edom requesting the ability to pass through and go around the end of the Dead Sea. (Num. 20:14-17)

Just below this place there was a river that ran northwest into the Mediterranean. This river was considered the dividing point of passing from the land of Canaan into the area the Pharaohs of Egypt claimed. Israel's travels show Egypt

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we began our look at chapter 19 of the book of Genesis and the story where the two angels came to Sodom in order to give Lot and his family a chance to escape the destruction of the cities. We talked about how the angels did not come to evangelize the cities because of the deep corruption that had already set in, which is shown that evening as the men of Sodom come to demand Lot hand over the two angels. All this led us into a conversation about the ways in which Lot had justified not just coming to live in this place, but continue even to this point knowing what a sin-filled place it was. In talking about the specific events of what the men of Sodom demanded and how Lot responded to them, we came through verse 8, and we are now ready to start verse 9 of Genesis chapter 19.

Verse 9, of course, puts us a bit in the middle of this story, but that's fine because we have already covered the fact Lot should have turned to the angels for help instead of trying to rely on his own ability to appease the men of the city. We talked about how Lot seemed to understand what a sinful place he was in along with how much that had corrupted his mind, which is shown in that he offers to give them his daughters if they would leave the angels alone. While I keep referring to them as angels in order to keep things straight in our minds, let us not forget that these angels appeared to be just men. Lot may have maintained the discernment to know from the start they were more than that, but the men of the city only cared that they were strangers who could possibly be taken advantage of. They show the depths of their depraved minds as in verse 9 they do not desire Lot's daughters, but continue their demand Lot hand over these strangers.

Verse 9 is also where the emphasis lays for what we touched on in our last segment about how much these men did not see Lot as one of them! Lot may have lived in this place for some time now, and if we remember how Abraham had once saved Sodom's and Gomorrah's people from invading kings, which their own kings could not do, we see how much even that incident did not cause Lot to be held in any high regard. These people also did not fear Abraham's wrath for anything they might do to Lot. In fact, they make it clear that just the delay in getting what they wanted, which Lot had caused in trying to talk them into leaving the angels alone, led to the men of the city informing Lot he had stepped over a line and they would do more to him than they desired to do to the two strangers in his house. After making this threat, they showed they were through talking and would enter the house by force to take the men for themselves.

Verse 10 is where we see the miraculous intervention of the angels to save Lot's life in this situation, and we should be careful not to miss the point Lot still does not cry out to them or God Himself for help. If it had not been for the angels taking action on their own, Lot himself would not have been saved.

This shows us how much God is there doing things for us, even when we don't have the wisdom to ask, which speaks to how much we literally push God out of our lives by refusing to follow His direction. This entire story stands in sharp contrast to the typical thinking of those who claim to believe in God because we tend to believe God only acts when we plea for His help. We often find ourselves even trying to appease God or satisfy some ritual we think will cause Him to act on our behalf. However, this is not the right thought. We should live our lives with the understanding God wants to act in our personal lives and even in our world as a whole. He has given us a free will that He will not violate, but the desire to help is always there. This is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:8 that God knows what we have need of before we ever ask.

We take such instructions with the thought God, of course, is all knowing; but what we do not stop to think about is the dynamics of how this works. James tells us we have not because we ask not, and at times we don't have because we ask amiss. (James 4:1-3) That "amiss" word is not about us not knowing how to ask, but about us not knowing what we need. You see, God knows what we have need of, but if we are not in tune with the ways of God we do not know what to ask for. This is the lack of faith the Bible tells us of. At other times it's as simple as the fact we do not concur and believe we need other things in spite of what we know or don't know. God will sometimes hinder us or in ways attempt to persuade us from what is a wrong choice, but if it is what we insist on, He will not ultimately stop us unless there are other people we stand to harm which He is protecting in some way. It's a complex thing only God can orchestrate properly, but that is why we must trust Him and be in tune with His will as much as we can. It only stands to reason God is not going to give us something or help us obtain the circumstances we desire when He knows we need something else. That would be foolish, and while thinking about how foolish such a thing would be for God to do, one should consider how much this means some ritual or the like, and/or us being in some position we feel entitles us to what we ask for is never going to get us anything.

What Jesus said over and over to people whom He healed was that their faith had made them whole. They may not have had the faith to know the ways to live everyday with God. They may not have had a very close relationship with God or one to speak of at all, but something about the fact we are God's children caused them to come to Jesus and know there was healing in His touch and words. One can argue, of course, someone who is sick will run to anyone they think might be able to help them; thus, this is fairly meaningless. However, Jesus said faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountains. (Matt. 17:20) If that is the case, how little faith do you think it takes in order to receive something God desires to do for us before we even ask? Now, I understand better than many people how much it hurts to live year after year of your

life in bad physical health and not see God heal, so it might seem a bit strange to others that I would say such a thing. I have no doubt for many who suffer such things this sounds very discouraging. It is easy to fall into the devil's lie of believing your faith is so small you can't even receive healing God wants to do, but there are some facts we must keep in mind when thinking about what I just said.

First is the fact that when Jesus walked this earth, it was an opportunity like no other for those willing to go to Him. Jesus was here to fulfill prophecy that showed Him to be The Messiah. In doing this, there almost was not a time healing would not flow through Him for those who came; because in convincing us God can do all things, Jesus was here to show He lacked nothing in His ability to do something so simple as to provide healing or even raise the dead. On the other hand, God not choosing to heal some of us in the state we are in now is no different than the fact Jesus did not heal everyone on earth while He was here. Jesus was walking as a man but showing Himself to be God in the flesh. This is why some of the people He healed were even said to have been in need of it so as to be used to glorify God. (John 9:1-7) Lazarus was even allowed to die so Jesus could raise him from the grave in sight of those making their final choice as to Who Jesus was. (John 11:1-11) God really can work with us to bring us through in the way that is best for our lives and the Kingdom of Heaven. This can be very hard to accept at times. Believe me, I know! However, I have to admit there are ways I can see how much my own personal desire to do things would have easily gotten in the way of me doing what God really wanted me to do if health issues had not held me back. Those many years ago, when I started into the ministry, I certainly would never have seen my ministry work as being the writing I do now. However, it would seem obvious at this point that is what God wanted.

I will also admit people like me are very blessed, in that we can at least see some logic behind why God may have allowed us to suffer many things in order to keep us in what had always been God's plan. Speaking for myself alone, I know it has always been my deeper desire to serve God in my life than have other things, and in that way God has answered my prayers. The fact I had conflicting desires is the only reason it's harder to see. Thus, do not become discouraged if you have not had the opportunity to see through the dark glass to some degree, but if you can in any way, thank The Lord for the opportunity to suffer if that is what it took to keep you in the right circumstances to do the work of The Lord, or even just to save your own soul. (I Cor. 13:9-13) Could it have been easier if I had been willing to listen and follow without the sickness? Yes, but keep in mind that doing things such as fasting, which is the depriving of one's most basic physical desire, even need, in order to spend time in prayer and/or the work of The Lord is something we do because the spirit is often willing but the flesh is weak. (Matt. 26:41) That is to say the flesh is weak in wanting to put forth the effort to do the work of God, while it is very forceful in getting the things it desires. When we dampen the flesh's ability, we can more easily see what the spirit has often known all along!

While I can see ways in which God turned my life in

better directions than I would have followed by allowing me to be in poor health, I also see how the mistakes in my desires have put me in a less advantaged state than I could have been in. In all this, we see how sinful we are and how much sin makes faith a very complex relationship. That is why we must work every day, not to find ways to doubt God, but to understand how much He is the far better partner in the relationship. The more we can keep our fleshly desires under control in order to allow His will to be what works through our lives to change our lives as well as reach to those around us, the more we can accomplish for the Kingdom of God. In growing our own lives to be what God created us to be as individuals, we are doing the very thing God wanted to have humans around to do. The fact certain people are sick and others are not does not necessarily mean they have done better in this area of faith, but it can just as easily mean they have rejected God's true direction for their lives even to the point God allowing them to be ill would still not have changed their direction.

The fact all things can cut both ways emphasizes how much we must not look at others but focus on being what God wants us to be, and try to do what God wants us to do by correcting our course as God shows us what is right and what is wrong. Satan will try to convince us of the ways to see everything in a bad light as much as he can, but we must ignore him and thank God that He is longsuffering with us. We should thank God that as long as we do not reject His moving in our lives, He is willing to help us even when we don't have the wisdom to ask for the help or take the right actions. This one simple example in Lot's life shows us that fact. He had continued to try on his own to protect angels who did not need his protection, and when it came to the moment where Lot was in too deep to do anything more, the angels literally pulled him out of danger and back into the house. What is interesting is that we are told the men of the city wanted to break down the door, which would indicate it was closed behind Lot. However, after we are told the angels pulled Lot back into the house, the wording seems to make clear they then shut the door. This is one of those things I believe loses a little in our weak English language and simply needs further consideration.

I for one believe it is true the door was shut behind Lot, and that is why they were willing to push past him and/or through him to break it down. At the same time, I do not think the angels opened the door to pull Lot inside. Now, I get the fact they could have easily held the men back while they did such a thing; but when you consider the order of what is done here, I believe God is giving these people every chance to turn back on their own. Lot had done what a man, even a man giving things he should never have been willing to give, could possibly do to turn the men of Sodom back from their wicked intent. When that did not work, the angels showed themselves to be more than just two strangers passing through town! The men of the city were going to do worse to Lot than they intended to do with the angels, and what happened is that one moment they virtually had Lot by the throat, and in the next moment Lot had been pulled out of their reach and back into the house. This should have left the men of Sodom with something to be stunned about and maybe given a second

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXI

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 previous segment, we started down the line of those who ruled after the last son of the original Maccabees had died. In doing this, we begin to see just how political power corrupts and the reason why God never put secular leadership in the Law to begin with. In focusing on the things of God, the nation never really had the time to deal with the struggles secular leadership causes, and it was only after the nation demanded an earthly king God allowed them to have one. At the point in history we have made it to in our study, the Jews were under a leadership that consisted of those the nation had once approved of but whom were not of the line God had established through David to hold the position. In noting this, we've come to the more general question of how much better off the nation really was having this setup versus simply being under the rule of another power such as the Greeks or other empires.

Now, we did talk about some of the pros that still existed in this setup over having non-Jews rule the nation, but even with a Jewish ruler we still see the focus on expanding territory and a desire for power causing the Laws of God to take a back seat, at best, when it came to what the nation was able to accomplish as a whole. During the segment of this study where we discussed the events which give us Hanukkah and culminated in the establishment of what would become known as the Hasmonean Dynasty, I made the statement that the Pharisees and Sadducees did not yet officially exist as a group but the predecessors of such groups did. Going back to that note, I should point out that some would argue it was at the time of Hanukkah these groups were established and even set the year of such groups' founding as pretty solid. However, I believe it is better to understand that religion does not develop overnight!

In most cases of official organizations of men there can be a date to which one will point to as the official establishment of the organization. In our modern world of official laws that make organizations file paperwork with the governing authorities, the date such paperwork was filed and/or accepted can be said to be the solid date. However, even if this is true, most groups, at least those of any size, do not start from that date, but out of conversations, discussions, and events of all kinds which often lead to the desire to form a specific entity that becomes the vehicle to go forward with the ideology, beliefs, and teachings which evolved out of the earlier events. This is what makes denominations and the like such a dangerous thing. No matter how good they may start out, more often than not they become the guardians of specific beliefs. In the cases where certain beliefs are not correct there can be

damage done for obvious reasons. However, to change beliefs opens the door to the other side of the danger such organizations face, which is that leaders at certain levels gain the right to change whatever they want as they choose. This then leads to organizations following paths that make them most popular; and today more than ever, it brings in many compromises with worldly ideas in order to appease a broader base of people.

Setting a deeper discussion on such matters aside for now, the point I wish to make about the date of when the Pharisees and Sadducees began is one we can not pin down. While latter iterations of these groups may have pointed back to the events of Hanukkah as their starting point, that's casting a broad net over all the history of why such groups started in the first place and not really when they coalesced. Of course, all organizations that can, would like to say they came out of some major revival, restoration, etc. that is looked at as positive. They may even claim to be the "original" group responsible for the event and/or those who most faithfully represent the positive changes it brought about. In any case, it was not really until the time of Simon's son Hyrcanus, who took the leadership role and began to act more like a king, that these religious groups solidified into more of what we see them as by the time of The Messiah. This was, in no small part, due to the unpopular way Hyrcanus had handled the leadership role, and that in spite of the success his leadership had in gaining and maintaining Israel's independence.

Why? Mostly because of the fact religious affairs were being neglected. As we went on in our last segment to look at those who directly followed Hyrcanus as "kings" of the Hasmonean Dynasty, we talked about how much anger there was at these leaders so freely taking the title of High Priest. As was mentioned, this might have seemed odd, but not when you consider again how clear it was becoming that getting back on the right track was not something really being looked at by these rulers, and which was the original intent for their appointment to the position. As the actions of the Hasmonean Dynasty started making the people feel more like they were no longer in this as a group but just, once again, Jews living under the rulership of a specific secular power, the people began to turn away from the dynasty and even the temple that once had been so hard fought for to get back. This is where the pieces which we have covered previously in this series start to come together and show their importance.

You see we talked about how popular the synagogue system had become, and remained even after and during times the temple, once again, was more available to all the Jews. We talked about the rise of understanding the need for copies of the Law to be more widely available, and the synagogue system facilitated this by each one having a copy of the Law and

prophets. This need also gave rise to those known as scribes, who no longer worked for the king as they had in times gone by; but a scribe in Israel had become a religious authority group in their own right, as they were the ones who produced these copies. In being focused on copying the Law and prophets, they were, as a group, arguably the most familiar with the actual words God had given the nation. The synagogue system also gave rise to others whose focus was on teaching the words of God, and we should keep in mind we are far past the time it was more exclusively looked at as the job of the Levites to do the work of the ministry. This is why the term "Rabbi" is used so much by the time of The Messiah. This word/title basically means teacher and specifically refers to being a teacher of God's Word.

Thus, the stage was set for the chosen nation to take on a whole different look than the Law had originally prescribed. This, again, was in spite of the fact the temple stood and was even being administered by those whom the Jews had chosen to take on the job until God sent the faithful prophet to set things straight. The fact the nation was religiously going about things in such a different way than was originally prescribed in the Law gave plenty of room for not just the two major groups of the Pharisees and Sadducees to rise, but others as well. Such groups became more powerful and a far more respected authority on religious matters than the original Maccabees had ever been! In turn, this brought about the obvious issue of them being more respected than the Hasmonean Dynasty among the common people of the nation, and this meant the dynasty could not ignore them. This is why I pointed out last time that Hyrcanus, on a religious level, had been ideologically with the Pharisees and late in his life sided with the Sadducees.

One of the biggest reasons for this was likely because the dynasty was suppose to be caretakers of the High Priesthood; and the Sadducees were considered to be closer to the right bloodline, if not ideology, tasked with this job. The Pharisees, on the other hand, promoted more of the traditions of how people had come to religiously observe things without the temple. In a way, this made the Sadducees the main caretakers of the temple, which was still important to the people; while at the same time the Pharisees became the keepers of the religious ideology that was more widely accepted and daily followed among the people. This gave great power to both groups, and this is also the foundation of why they were seen as such rivals between each other, along with the amazing fact they became united against Jesus when He came on the scene!

In truth, it should not be so amazing they, along with other groups who were even more ideologically hostile toward those with differing religious thoughts, came together against Jesus. Jesus came offering Himself first and foremost as the restorer of religious purity. This was a greater threat to the religious groups, which felt they held the real power among the Jewish people, than it seemed to be to the more secular ruling dynasty. The power of the religious groups needed to yield to The Messiah long before any necessity to change the secular power might arise, and they clearly saw this truth in Jesus' work! What they basically observed was the Biblical purity of what Jesus was focused on, that being to restore the true Laws of God, not just in ceremonial actions but first and foremost as

they related to the truths of righteous living. If we continue down our historical look at the Hasmonean Dynasty, you can see how by the time of Jesus there was layers of secular power over the Jews; but more so than ever, groups like the Pharisees and Sadducees held the real sway over the people of the chosen nation, and that's what Jesus was eroding very quickly!

Picking up where we left off our historical study, we had come to the rule of Alexander Jannaeus who was the second son of Hyrcanus to hold the position due to the same kind of infighting for power among the Hasmoneans as there was among the Greeks. We should also not forget he married the wife of his late ruling half brother, and this gave both the Pharisees and Sadducees an ally among the ruling family. Alexander continued the favor his father, later in his life, had come to give the Sadducees. On the other hand, his wife Salome literally came from a family of Pharisees, her brother even being one of the groups most prominent leaders. If it had not been for this connection, the Pharisees might have had a hard time surviving this time period. Alexander would make no apologies in insisting on holding both the kingship as well as the position of High Priest. This combination of power continued to be very unpopular - as it should have been - in that it politicized the religious office in ways that made it all but meaningless. This point is why it was particularly something the Rabbis across the nation condemned.

However, the Sadducees supported it because Alexander supported them, and if this is not a political marriage, I don't know what is. This left the Pharisees as the major group to lead the condemnation of the handling of the priesthood; and thus, Alexander persecuted them all during his reign. If it had not been for Salome, the Pharisees surely would have faced an even harder time than they did. On top of that, this further alienated the people from the temple or, at least, its true predominance. This was bad because for all the bad we talk about in speaking of Sadducees and their humanistic thinking, one must keep in mind that, at least on an ideological level, they saw the Words of God alone as the correct foundation for being Jewish. For the Pharisees, and all the credit we can give them in various ways, their big sticking point was that they did not see the traditions their fathers had established as a way to continue being Jewish in the absence of the temple being just for that purpose alone. They saw those traditions as being much on the same level of importance as the pure words of the Law. From this, one can easily see why The Messiah was not going to agree with either of these groups; but for the time being, we are seeing a period where the people were being pushed further and further from the importance of looking to the temple as the center of the Law's administration.

What really made it obvious that Alexander only cared to hold the High Priesthood for the sake of power was that his true ambition was to continue expanding the territory of Judea, and he would spend many of his years at war. In a furtherance of what Daniel had seen in his vision concerning the king of the South and the king of the North, the power in Egypt would, once again, get involved in Judean affairs. If you try to thoroughly cover the wars Alexander got himself into, you understand why all this Greek time period's history was only shown to Daniel in very broad strokes. One of the first pushes

Alexander would make was to continue north into territory which by now had fallen into more local hands, as the Seleucids were fading away. In doing this, a lot of treachery would come into play on all sides with various rulers seeing various opportunities. One of the most interesting would be the son of Cleopatra III, the Queen of Egypt. He had been exiled from Egypt by his mother and set up his own kingdom in Cyprus. He was persuaded to fight against Alexander in hopes of gaining control along the Judean coast for the purpose of having a better point from which to strike his mother in Egypt.

Alexander attempted to get what he wanted through deceit, and this set off a war that might have cost Judea its independence but for the plea of Jews in Egypt that it was in Cleopatra III's best interest to help Alexander. After doing so, she felt it only right she then be the one to control Judea, but, once again, the Jews upon whom she depended for support in Egypt talked her down. This left Alexander free to continue his quest for more territory, and in doing so further risk Judean independence. In the end, he eventually expanded further south and even took most of the area that was once held by the Philistines, a significant portion of which we call Gaza today. This gave Judea control over important trade routes; and while in many ways this was returning Israel to its past glory, it was only in the ways of worldly affairs, not the true service of God!

That brings us to about 100 B.C., and talking about the service of God brings us to the real trouble Alexander brought to Judea. You see, the trade routes Alexander took control over during his conquests were traditionally held by descendants of Ishmael, known as the Nabateans. In the past, these were a people who had supported the Jews, but now were not so happy. Not only that, Alexander continued to push for territory and began attacking areas to the east of the Jordan River. This gave those he had already angered the opportunity to attack Alexander, a man whose reach had really exceeded his grasp at that point, and he was blessed to escape with his own life. Thus, he turned back to Jerusalem. However, the Jews at home had had just about enough of Alexander's ambition, and Judea was on the brink of civil war. Due to this, Alexander had to make peace with outside powers he had angered, and to keep them from joining the side of those who now openly opposed him at home, Alexander was forced to give back some of the territory he had gained.

Whether you want to call it an all out civil war right off or more of a civil conflict is up to you, but in many ways the lines got drawn between those on the side of the Sadducees and those on the side of the Pharisees. Much of the details of what happened comes from an historian named Josephus who was born in Jerusalem not long after the lifetime of Jesus, which, just for the sake of perspective, means he was not an eye witness to these events. However, one account we are told is that during a temple ceremony for the Feast of Tabernacles, Alexander, acting as High Priest, chose not to correctly perform a specific ritual and was pelted with the traditional fruit the Jews in attendance had in their hands. This angered Alexander, and he ordered them all killed. It is said 6,000 people died there in the courtyard of the temple that day. After this, Alexander literally built a fence around the altar(s) so the people could no

longer bring their offerings. Alexander would only allow the priests to do so, and this further alienated the common Jew from the temple and its service.

Ultimately this started the all-out fighting. Alexander would see success early on, and this would lead the opposition to call for the help of those they believed would be most eager for revenge against the Hasmoneans. They would call on what was left of the Seleucids! These combined forces were something Alexander did not have the manpower to hold out against, and he would flee to the mountains for refuge. However, the distaste of going back to being in any way under the thumb of the Seleucids was too much for some of the Jews, and this caused some 6,000 Jews to rejoin Alexander in order to counter attack and drive the Seleucids back home. This effort did just that but also gave power over Judea back to Alexander. This overall conflict lasted about six years, and the cost of Jewish lives reached into the 50,000 range. Sadly for Alexander, regaining control was not where it ended, as Alexander desired to take revenge on those who had defied him; and whether you believe Josephus' record of how he did it or not, a very brutal part of that revenge was accomplished by killing many Pharisees.

In the end of it all, Alexander became even more disliked than ever by both neighboring kings as well as many of the people in his own nation. Due to this, he would rely on an army of purchased foreign troops. However, initially they would not be enough to withstand an assault by neighboring Arab kings who would take back vital routes in Judea, and specifically a road leading to Jerusalem. Determined to put this behind him once and for all, Alexander would again cross the Jordan and spend three years defeating what he saw as petty kings and finally add more of that eastern territory to his realm. While this was a big risk and did nothing to make the Jews popular with their neighbors, he had, once again, taken steps toward returning the landmass of Judea back to what Israel was before it separated into two kingdoms. It also did more to define what would be considered Judea, as Rome later came more fully into the picture.

In the last three years of his life, Alexander was not well due to his incessant fighting of wars and his abuse of alcohol. However, this did not stop him from continuing to go after even more territory. His life would end during a siege of a heavily fortified city, and it is said his wife Salome was there for his death. We are also told Alexander entrusted his power to her, but one should not discount Salome's earlier actions in assuring her political survival. One way or the other, as Alexander's 27 year reign came to an end in 76 B.C., Salome would become the next ruler in the Hasmonean Dynasty; but it is also said she hid the fact her husband had passed away until the siege was successful so as not to allow Alexander's death to be the reason it might fail. Alexander's body, for all he had done to be disliked by the people, and in particular the Pharisees, was brought to Jerusalem and buried with all the regular honors one would expect for a ruler of his day.

Salome would become the ruler in Judea, but not without the support and really the consent of the Pharisees. The

power struggle between the Pharisees and Sadducees had finally turned in favor of the Pharisees, and they practically took charge at this point. In spite of this fact, Salome was responsible for bringing some healing to the land after her husband's death. She was able to bring a quiet that had been missing for many years and even kept the peace with Judea's neighbors, which is a considerable feat when one thinks about how much Alexander had constantly angered so many of them. She would not attempt to take on the High Priesthood, and it is doubtful the Pharisees, or Sadducees for that matter, would have allowed such a thing. Instead, she appointed her son Hyrcanus II as High Priest, and he was a man who followed the ideology of the Pharisees completely. This total shift of power from the Sadducees to the Pharisees brings us to a conversation about another body familiar to students of the New Testament, but of which many have no idea as to why it existed.

In truth, it is not entirely clear as to exactly when this body, known as the Sanhedrin, might have been started; but just as with the Pharisees and Sadducees themselves, it likely was not founded as any specific idea at a specific point. Rather it grew out of actions taken along the way of the history we've been covering and became more important due to the change in the nature of what the Hasmonean Dynasty turned out to be, as well as the more solidified establishment of groups such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. As with the two religious groups, some say the Sanhedrin dates back to the events of Hanukkah, but, again, this is just a way of speaking broadly about why it came to be. What would appear to be the more logical truth is the issue we talked about earlier, which is that the rulers of the Hasmonean Dynasty could not hold the sway of the people without the support of the religious leaders. As they became more unpopular in their actions, it became downright necessary to have the support of at least one of these religious groups and/or give credit to the legitimacy of a variety of such groups in some form.

These facts, combined with the fact there very well may have been a council of some sort set up at the same time the Maccabees were named rulers of the land and administrators of the High Priesthood until God set things right, give us a view on the bodies' formation. Such a body may have, at its beginnings, been nothing more than a way for the newly minted rulers to get advise from and/or get a handle on continuing public opinion. What seems clear is that it's not likely any such body would have held any real political power until around the time of Hyrcanus, who was the first in the line to really need the support of some segment of the religious rulers. This would have made the body a real mixture, at times, of those with varying ideology in an attempt to show no favoritism, but at other times it would have been filled mostly with those whom the ruler favored. In this, one can see how the Sanhedrin we know by the time of the New Testament, was both political and religious. It also speaks to the fact there is a very thin line between what we call the two, for so many reasons I will avoid getting into them here.

No matter when it started or how uninterrupted its

existence may have been, by the time of Alexander Jannaus there would seem to have been a version of the Sanhedrin in existence. As he began his reign, it might very well have still consisted of a mixture of ideology; but if it continued to exist, it must have come to be packed with only members of the Sadducees. The fact there was one religious wing so greatly favored during Alexander's rule is why there is a good possibility that no such group was maintained during at least parts of his reign. Alexander knew what he was going to do and who he might listen to, if anyone at all. However, after his death, it is hard to believe Salome operated, even for any short time in power, without such a body standing behind her! That being said, her success in bringing back some peace to Judea and its people may very well have had a great deal to do with making this body a more balanced one, rather than it just being filled with Pharisees. Some will go so far as to say she reestablished the Sanhedrin, but Salome ruled from 76 to 67 B.C., and the earliest record of what would seem to be a more official convening of the Sanhedrin given to us by the historian Josephus is not until the year 57 B.C.

In the end of it all, we could debate dates and terms all day, but as I said before there's no reason to doubt at least the idea of having a Sanhedrin grew out of earlier times where a similar body was a good idea. The reason to credit Salome with the reestablishment, or establishment, of the Sanhedrin in any way, lays in the fact the body of religious leaders that stood behind her was a good idea to have in order to settle many issues and arguments about how to handle the mess the nation was in when it came to who should hold what power and why at this point. We should also keep in mind, when Josephus speaks of the convening of the Sanhedrin, he is doing so at a time when it served the Romans' purpose. The Romans wanted to find a way to bridge the gap between what had by that time became a despised (at least by the Jewish people) local secular power but whom the Romans would support to enforce their laws, and a Jewish population that held onto strict religious rights the Romans really never understood!

This speaks to the difference we discussed some in our last segment. The Greeks were more heavy handed about changing the Jews, where as the Romans were more about trying to find a way to make things work together. This is in no way to praise the Romans for their conduct, but it should be kept in mind by all true students of the Bible as we see yet another piece of why The Messiah came when He did. The time for the Jews was growing desperate, as the history leading up to The Messiah shows us, but there was also an open door for the Jews to be given the first shot at recognizing and being willing to accept The Messiah as their true leader!

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

thought about what they did next!

It would seem it did not because they had already determined to break down the door, and I believe they went forward in their blind rage to attempt to do just that. What the words here mean when we are told the angels shut the door is not just that the door was open and they shut it, but they made the door unbreakable. Now the men of the city had two things to think about. One, Lot had somehow been taken back into the house without the door being left vulnerable for even a second; and two, a door that should have been fairly easy to break through was suddenly like a brick wall as they tried to break in. This shows how insistent they were on their evil ways, and illustrates again that fact of why God did not send His angels into the city to attempt to evangelize or warn them. These people were truly of a reprobate mind, and not even physical proof they were dealing with no ordinary men inside that house fazed them, or gave them a moment of pause in their determination to do evil!

Because these men were still not deterred in any way, verse 11 tells us the angels took yet another step and struck each of them on a very personal level. The men would become blind, and this would leave the men of Sodom in confusion as to where the door they were attempting to break down even was. Here again, let's not miss the words, for we are told they "...wearied themselves to find the door." What does that tell us? Well, one can interpret it as you like, but I believe the wording is clear on the fact, even this blindness, which very well may have been just as much a disorientation as it was lack of sight, did not totally stop them. They still attempted to find the door, but in spite of the fact that at this point it just wasn't possible for them to do so, they still wore themselves out trying. If this was not a sequence to give them a step by step chance to walk away, why did the angels not just blind them in the first place? That would have stopped them from abusing Lot, and their inability to find him or the door would have allowed Lot to simply go back inside. At that point there would have been no real urgency to secure the door, and thus no need to point out the angels specifically did so. Because God already knew the people were too far gone to save, and He gave us the chance to see this by allowing Abraham to ask what any incredibly merciful person might have asked if given the chance. This now leaves us with the truth, there should be no doubt that this sequence of stopping the evil at Lot's house was also not done for the men of Sodom's sake as much as it was for the sake of Lot and his family to see the same thing firsthand, as well as make the point to us, once again.

There was no logical reason after this incident for Lot or his wife - and one would certainly think his daughters - to ask the same kind of thing Abraham asked. Did the cities really need to be destroyed? Were they really that beyond hope? Yes! Should there be any desire to stay here any longer? Could there be any excuse for thinking God was being unjust in taking this action? No! This is where we are when we come to verse 11, and that is why the angels ask Lot if there is any other family members he would like to attempt to get out of the cities before God destroyed them. Lot should have had the clearest of mind

at this point as to why this question was asked; why the angels explained in verse 13 the sin of the cities had caused God to send the angels to destroy them; and why he should act upon getting things in order with urgency. Verse 14 tells us that is exactly what Lot did. Obviously, trusting the angels had taken care of any fear he need have about going out and finding them, Lot goes to his sons-in-law to tell them they needed to leave because of what God was about to do. We don't know how many daughters Lot had, but he obviously had more than one that had already married men of this place. Now Lot and those daughters would pay for the mistake of intermixing with sinful people.

We are told his sons-in-law took Lot's warning as if he had lost his mind. We don't know for sure where in the cities they lived, but if they were not part of the mob that came to Lot's house that evening, one would think the word of such an incident would have spread quickly. Maybe they had not had time to hear of it, but they were married to Lot's daughters, and one would think someone would have been eager to tell them, of all people in the cities. In any case, they had what was left of that night to think about Lot's words and make a decision. When morning came, the angels told Lot to get up and take his wife and two daughters who were in the house with him and get out of the cities without concern to whether the others had reconsidered or not. This speaks to how much this is true in our lives on this earth. We will likely not be faced with such a direct physical event from which we need to warn those we care about to flee from, but we do find ourselves caring deeply about those we believe still are not living for God. We obviously hope they might change their minds before it's too late. However, we can only do what we can do, and sacrificing our own lives because they choose not to heed the word is only a way for all lives involved to be lost!

The end of verse 15 leaves no doubt as to the fact that Lot staying in the city would not have saved it. He was told if he stayed he too would simply be destroyed along with it. You can't save this world by becoming part of its iniquity. You can't walk, talk, and act like those of this world as a way to lead others to the saving knowledge of Christ. You must do as God instructs, and those who refuse to listen will have to pay for their own choices. This was something Lot and his family had trouble with in this situation in spite of what had happened the night before. Verse 16 tells us they lingered and, once again, God would show His mercy toward them in doing something they did not ask Him to do but which they needed. The angels would take them all by the hand and whether through miraculous means of transport or physically leading and protecting them on foot, the angels made sure the family made it outside the cities. Would they continue to walk on or would they turn back? God had given them every chance to take the right path. The choice was simply up to them now!

This point is emphasized again in verse 17, as it is at this time the angels give them the specific instructions they were still to flee for their lives. This means they were not far enough away to escape but far enough away no one but themselves could stop them from escaping. This is important, as a later verse tells us it was very much for the mercy of God

upon Abraham that Lot was saved. In spite of that, we see in this an example of how God will only go so far. God had done a great deal to bring this family safely out of the destruction, but they would have to go into the mountains for themselves if they wanted to be safe. This verse is also where we are told they were given the instruction not to even look back, and this is where we see God showing us another important detail. I like to talk a lot about how ritual and ceremony will not save one's soul in the end. I do this because people think when you teach so much about the ceremonial Laws and observances God gave to Israel in the Law that you believe these are somehow necessary for salvation, and they are not. I also emphasize this over and over, because in spite of how much people of our day seem to reject the notion that following God's ceremonial Laws are necessary, even something Jews should totally abandon, so many are blind to the fact they are following some kind of formula they believe will save them, which they came up with on their own.

Now, I'll be the first to admit we each must work out our own salvation and not simply follow others. This makes the fact we came up with these formulas for ourselves a good thing. However, we need to be aware of how much our formula is likely based on the fact those groups of people you would like to be a part of believe such things, and/or you think your formula puts you in the majority. Call it a formula or simply what you believe, the point is there is no merit in believing something if it is not the truth. This is made clear in the story of Lot's family being spared. Four people certainly does not constitute a majority in any way! That aside, the cities would be destroyed, and only those who followed God's actual instructions for their lives at that moment were going to be saved. If that doesn't emphasize how much we should pray without ceasing, I don't know what does! (I Thes. 5:17) God had warned them; given them a chance to see how hopeless the situation of the people in the cities was; allowed them to warn others; and taken them the first steps they might not have been able to take in order to escape on their own. Now, they stood with a simple ritual to follow. I know many would say it's a stretch to call it a ritual, but keep in mind it can be as hard as being expected to crawl up some stony path to a temple of some kind on your hands and knees until they are bloody, or it can be as simple as fleeing into the mountains. Both can be formulated things people believe will save them, but only what God actually instructs us has value.

In this case, fleeing to the mountains should have seemed a small price to pay for their lives and one a person would easily follow if for no other reason than to be safe rather than sorry. Thus, what God asks of them is one more specific thing that would reveal the truth in their hearts, and that instruction was not a ritual of something they were to do, it truly was a simple instruction about what not to do. This is one of those perfect examples of how much if we put our focus on the things we should be doing, we will not find ourselves with the opportunity to do the things we should not! We often think God is so hard on us, telling us not to do this and not to do that, but none of it is to take something from us, at least not

something which shouldn't be in our lives to begin with. Such instructions are given so we will turn our eyes to the tasks that are edifying to our growth in the ways of God, which is the true path that leads to salvation. Lot and his family were simply told not to look back but to go on in the direction that would save their lives from the destruction the sinful people of Sodom and Gomorrah had brought upon themselves. Looking back was only a way to impede that progress. We can be concerned about others, and we should be, but if we are instructed to come out of this world and not look back lest we be consumed by the same destruction they would not begin to listen to God enough to keep from bringing upon themselves in the first place, then we can only afford to do so to a certain point!

We pass stages in this life, and Lot's experience shows us some of those stages. I go again to the idea so many who claim to be Christians have about intentionally mingling with the world for the sake of reaching others, but there are points of no return we need to understand. There may be a point in our beginning walk with God when we do not understand how damaging to our walk it is to involve ourselves in one activity or another, but as we grow to learn about the danger, we need to get those things out of our lives. Lot had the chance to warn the rest of his family before the angels took them out of the cities, and I'm sure his emphatic way of conveying this news, along with the urgency of the need to heed it, added to why his sons-in-law believed him to be mad. Nonetheless, when the time came to leave, they could wait no longer for them to change their minds. Once they stood there on the outskirts of the cities, there was nothing but damage to themselves to be had by attempting to run back one last time and try to reason with them. Lot, his wife, and their daughters could go on with their lives, but not if they clung to what they had been freed from no matter the excuse for doing so.

The time had come to make hast and flee into the mountains. They are even specifically told not to stay anywhere in the lower lands where Lot had originally desired to be when he parted from Abraham. The family was to head for higher ground. There was not even a reason to look back because that could cause them to stumble by not keeping an eye on where they were going. That one stumble could not be afforded; and when I think about this, I think about how much we become accustomed to stumbling. God loves us and He will reach for us when we fall, but more and more those who claim to believe in God take too much comfort in that fact. We can't do anything about the times we have stumbled in the past, but we cannot say that about the future. Avoiding all the falls we can is something we should be focused on, not the excuse that if we do it's no big deal because God is there to pick us up. The time for Lot and his family to be convinced of this and move on from the cities had come, and that is why they were told not to even look back!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

held little interest and/or real governing power over this area; but it is a very general reference and is likely why this river is called the river of Egypt, which should not be confused in this portion of Scripture as referencing to the Nile. Israel's south border would follow this river, and its most western point would be at the rivers outlet into the Mediterranean. This makes the western border very easy to see as one heads north, for it simply was to be the coastline of the Mediterranean going up from there. One should note this clearly takes in the land which in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was held by the Philistines. The truth of the matter is that those Philistines are likely the reason the river we just talked about was considered the cut off for how far north along the coast there was any long-term consensus as to where one crossed from Egyptian territory into Canaan.

Following the coast north, you eventually get to the mountain range traditionally known as the mountains of Lebanon. The reference to Mt. Hor here would seem to indicate a tall mountain not far from the coastal town of Tyre. This would put the north border starting point at the coastline of the Mediterranean before entering the region held by what we later know best as the land ruled by the kings of Tyre and Sidon. From there it would follow a path northeast that would likely be defined most of the way by adjoining the territory claimed by these kings until it got to a northern extreme one could find by drawing a line almost straight east from Sidon. The border would then head more directly east until it was just past being a direct line back down to the Sea of Chinnereth, which is better known as the Sea of Galilee in later times. This would basically bring the border to adjoin the territory the tribe of Manasseh had pushed the Amorites out of, and which was considered part of the land to the east that three of the tribes took possession of before Israel crossed over Jordan. In spite of this, God gives a line for the east border that did not include these tribes' territory, but which followed their western side back down to the east shores of the Sea of Chinnereth. From there the east border would continue to be defined as the Jordan River all the way down to the Dead Sea and its eastern coast, until it met up with that southern corner at the south end of the sea where we started to define the southern border.

Now, if it seems a bit odd that these borders did not include the territory already being possessed by those tribes that would live east of the Jordan, keep two things in mind. One is that God is defining what He intended to be the initial borders of the promised land even if those tribes had not possessed land to the east right from the start. Along with that is the fact these borders would be the land those tribes would have to move into if they failed to hold up their end of the agreement for staying east of the Jordan. The second point is that the very next verses tell us these borders were the land now intended to be divided between the rest of the tribes which had not taken land to the east. This included the remaining half of the tribe of Manasseh that had not yet possessed land on the east side. After this, God tells Moses it would mainly be the job of Joshua and the High Priest Eleazar to lead this effort of surveying and parceling out the land each tribe would receive. However, we are also given a list of names that include one

prince, from each of the tribes that would be given this land, who was to help with the details, likely the more fine points of dividing each portion between the families within their respective tribes.

Next, God would tell Moses where the Levites would live since they were not to inherit a specific parcel of land such as the other tribes. Instead, the Levites would be given cities and land surrounding those cities inside each of the other tribes' possessions. In order to keep their livestock and have vineyards and the like, these cities were to include land on all sides of the city measured from the wall of the city out to a thousand cubits. This would be land different families of the tribe might personally own and sell among themselves as they desired. Going on out from that land on all sides, there was to be measured another two thousand cubits. This land, most likely, was for open pasture the entire community of Levites could manage and use. It would also leave room for expansion of any kind they might need, even if they did not initially make use of it at all. Of these cities given to the Levites, there were to be forty-eight in all, but six of them would be designated as cities of refuge. Of course, the bigger tribes that had greater amounts of land would be expected to give more cities, in order to fulfill what was to be given to the Levites, than the smaller tribes with smaller amounts of land would be expected to give.

By making six of the Levite cities those of refuge, God was continuing to show how the priestly tribe was to be the administrators of the justice system in Israel. Three of these cities of refuge would be on the east side of Jordan, and three of them were to be on the west. This set up an interesting way to handle the crime of murder. If a person felt they had caused a death by accident or that in some way they were justified in killing who they had, such as self-defense, they could run to one of these cities where their right to a trial was to be protected. This was true for both those citizens of Israel and those just in the land for other purposes. What this meant was if you killed someone and simply tried to hide it, if/when you were found out, you would likely end up being punished by those who wanted revenge, and your guilt could be assumed without trial. According to the Law of Moses the punishment for murder was death, so that should be the outcome. However, if you felt you had a case for being innocent of murder, you needed to admit what had happened by at least attempting to reach one of these cities where you would be protected until your case could be heard. If you made it to one, this act alone didn't absolve you of a crime, but it was a chance to plead innocence as opposed to basically admitting guilt by not even giving yourself this opportunity to stand trial!

Here God also clarifies what constitutes a murder for which the death penalty should be used as punishment. This would also give guidance for the person (most likely a family member who wanted to punish the killer for taking the other's life) as to if they thought they would be justified in pursuing the person in an attempt to get them before they had a chance to reach one of these cities. Thus, if the person used an object of metal to kill another, that would be murder because it proves your intent was to kill no matter your motive at that moment, or, at the very least, you knew death was very possible. There

are other actions that show this same kind of intent or lack of concern, and examples are used to define such actions. If you killed a person by throwing a stone at them, that would be murder. Using a wooden object would not necessarily be a way to attempt to or not care if you killed a person, but that would change if the wooden item you used was a weapon. Obvious intentional acts would be things such as approaching a person in anger or waiting to catch the person off guard. In these cases it would not matter what you used, even if it was just your bare hands, it would be murder. Now, unintentional acts could include stabbing or hitting a person in a way that caused death, but the circumstances would need to show your lack of intent. This would include the dropping or throwing of an object, such as a stone; but hitting a person you were not angry with, had not been trying to catch at a vulnerable moment, and not a person others knew was an enemy you might take the opportunity to kill if you could make it seem like an accident, would be looked at.

Now, a determination of guilt was not to be made just on the word of the one who wanted revenge, but there was to be other witnesses who could testify as to what they saw happen. This would mean the revenger's time was better spent building their case against the killer than just trying to overtake them before they could get to the city. In the end of looking at the facts, it was the congregation's job to decide if a person who had fled to one of these cities was guilty of murder or not. If they were guilty, the person was to be turned over to the individual (again most likely a close male family member) who looked for vengeance for the crime, and it would be by their hand the sentence of death was to be carried out. This means the "state" - to use a modern term - would not often be the executioner of someone found guilty of death. That would only happen in cases God had specified in the Law that the congregation was to dispose of the individual(s), and that usually was done by stoning.

If the killer was found to have killed by accident without intent or reason to do so, it still did not mean they were free to just go home. This was partly a punishment for the seriousness of one person killing another for any reason, and partly because a not guilty verdict does not always appease family and friends of the one who lost their life. It was the congregation's job to protect both the person who had killed and the one who might still desire to kill them; for if the person wanting revenge was to kill them after being found not guilty, that person would be found guilty of murder. The answer to handling all this was for the person who had been tried to live in the city of refuge until the death of the current High Priest. This would specifically give the Levites the primary job of protecting such a person. However, it is made clear that at any time if the person ventured outside the limits of that city of refuge to which they had fled, the responsibility to protect them vanished. What also vanished was the person who sought revenge needing to abide by the outcome of the trial.

If the revenger was still convinced or just angry enough they desired to kill the other, and they found that person

outside the limits of the city of refuge, they could take the opportunity to kill them. In doing so, they would not be held guilty of the crime of murder, nor would they have to flee to a city of refuge to live. The responsibility to stay inside the city for protection was upon the one who had been found not guilty. However, after the death of the High Priest they were free to return home, and anyone taking revenge upon them after that would be guilty of murder. Again, taking the life of another human was not to be done lightly. God even tells Israel that while it is necessary to carry out capital punishment when a person is found guilty, for only the blood of the killer can cleanse the blood of the one killed, it is still not something anyone should take joy in. This is why the one seeking revenge should do it. There was not to be people who were executioners for a living. God would not have the nation encouraging people to have no trouble taking a life, and certainly not those who generally might enjoy it. This way of handling murder cases was to be the law throughout all Israel's habitations and throughout all their generations.

One more issue that is brought to Moses was a question that arose concerning the earlier information about families of only daughters being able to inherit possessions of land. This comes up because it had become clear each possession belonging to a family would reside in the borders of the land given to the tribe that family was part of. If the daughter or daughters were to marry a man not of that tribe, this would mean the tribe would lose a piece of its overall land to another tribe. This could also become very confusing as small parcels of land here and there within a tribe's region would have to be tracked as then being part of another tribe's possessions. Even the stipulations about returning possessions during a year of Jubilee would not fix such an issue. Moses told the people this was a very good question to settle, and the answer from God was that the woman or women have to choose whether to marry or not. However, if they chose to marry, they could only marry a man who was of their tribe. This way the possession they had inherited would stay with the tribe to which it had always been a part of. This would leave the choice up to the women as to what was more important to them, for if they couldn't find a man of their tribe they really wanted to marry, it did not free them to marry someone outside the tribe if they wanted to hold their inheritance in order to preserve their father's name. We are told the daughters who first brought up this issue of women getting to inherit their father's land for that very reason followed this stipulation, and each married a man from their tribe of Manasseh.

With these instructions we finish the words God gave to Moses for the children of Israel as they camped on the east of Jordan in preparation to crossing over to the promised land.

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