



Shaqah

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

As we continue our overview of the Book of Deuteronomy, we ended last time with Moses reminding Israel how they had made an idol to worship while Moses was in the mount receiving the Laws they were too afraid to stand and hear God speak for themselves. Moses talks about how he had to plead with God in order to save the lives of the people because God was ready to start over again using just Moses as the start. He also speaks to his own anger being so great that as he came down from the mountain and saw for himself what it was they were doing, he broke the very stones upon which God had written the Law and given to him. This resulted in Moses having to carve two new stones and go back into the mountain to begin again to receive the Law. All this brought us to the beginning of Deuteronomy chapter 10, and we will go on with our overview from there.

As Moses moves forward reminding the nation of what they had come through to get to where they now stood, he begins to present the information in a way that should be very understandable to a nation now living the Laws of God. Moses does not go into the details of how the Ark of the Covenant was built, but the simple fact he was instructed to build such an item by God's direction for the express purpose of using it to carry the physical writings of the Law inside. From here Moses goes on to take some bigger leaps forward through the events in talking about how they would leave the mountain where God had given them the Law and travel the wilderness. Using a deliberate mix of the order for the places they visited, Moses was making a general statement to the fact the nation left the mountain where God gave them the Law all but prepared to go straight up into the promised land, but instead began wandering around in circles. This was due to the nation's inability to trust God for the easy journey this all should have been. He reminds them how they eventually witnessed the death of Aaron and his son taking over as High Priest. He also uses this opportunity to affirm to them that Levi would receive no inheritance among them because they were

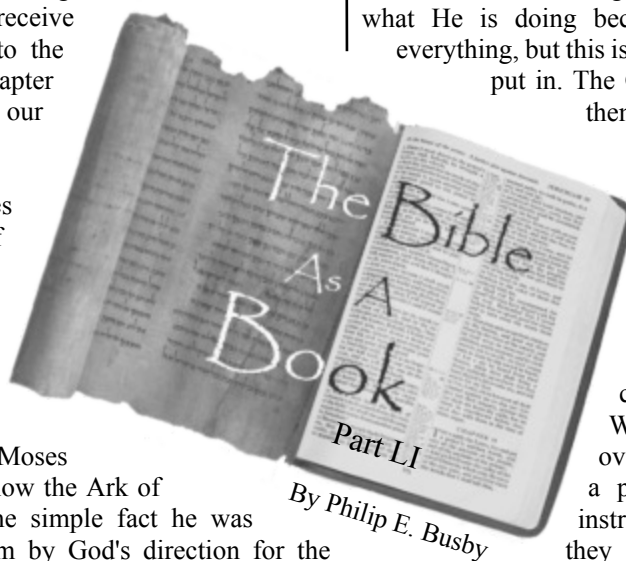
taken by God to focus on His service as the Law prescribe priest to do.

Moses again talks about having to go before God to plead for the people because they refused God's will in them going straight up into the land as He had planned. This leads Moses to challenge the nation to think about what it was God had asked of them, for it was not something difficult. God had only asked that they fear Him in the aspect they serve Him as God, being willing to live by the Laws He had clearly defined for them, showing they love him with everything they are. All this God asks for their good, not to cause hardship. God knows what He is doing because He is The One Who created everything, but this is what a special position Israel had been

put in. The God Who owns all things had chosen them out of all He had created to do something for them and through them He would not do through any other nation! Moses exhorts the nation to open up their hearts and join fully into what it was God was attempting to do through them. This because there is no other God greater than He. The God which had called them to this work is The God Who must judge and carry out justice over all the earth. God wanted Israel to be a part of that work, and so they are instructed to love the stranger remembering they were once strangers in the land of

Egypt. In Egypt the small group of Israel's family should have disappeared, but instead God preserved and grew them into a great nation in order to serve Him.

Moses goes on to point out that those who were now children had not seen what God did in Egypt to bring the nation out in great power. They had not seen how God drowned Pharaoh's army in the sea to finish their deliverance from that land. The children had not seen how, when there was those who had determined to rebel against God's instructions, thinking themselves wise enough to make decisions of their own and go in a wrong direction, God literally opened up the earth and consumed them. However, the adults Moses now spoke to had seen and could remember from their childhood the events of



By Philip E. Busby



Egypt and/or those of God cleansing the nation of those who refused to obey Him. This should serve as evidence that God is able to give them the promised land, but also that He will not tolerate sin, especially among His nation. Keeping God's Laws and judgments would be crucial not just to Israel taking the promised land, but being able to stay continually on it. Thus, Moses pleads with them to take the opportunity that lay before them and not waste it.

He tells them what a great and wonderful land God was about to give the nation. A land that unlike Egypt where the land had to be constantly groomed and watered by hard labor in order to see it produce, the land of Canaan had hills and valleys where water flowed from the rain that falls, for it is cared for by God Himself, and He does not forget to guide it throughout the entire year, year after year. Because this is true, all the nation needed to do was love and serve The Lord and He would make sure they always saw rain in the seasons it was needed. They would have plenty of grass for the cattle to graze on. However, if they were to turn to other gods, not only would God not be there to do these things for them, but He would specifically stop the rain and make the land unlivable. There simply was nothing to be gained and everything to be lost by going into this land only to turn from The God Who had given it to them. This is why they needed to work according to the words God had given them and allow those words to guide their thoughts. This was not just about worshiping a god in order to appease and receive what they wanted, it was about living a lifestyle in their everyday labor and actions that was guided by God's Law.

This is why it was so important they teach these Laws to their children, through their actions and through their words, from the time they got up in the morning to the moment they went to sleep at night. These words were to be written on more than just their minds, but woven into the very fabric of the society Israel was to build on this land. It would be to establish such a place, God would drive out from before Israel nations too strong for them to ever drive out on their own. This, God would do if they would only love God and serve this purpose. Moses tells them that God was willing to give them all the land they needed in order to live on no matter how big the nation might eventually get. Moses gives geographical borders for such an event that had to be difficult for Israel to ever imagine being big enough to fill, in order to emphasize the point. God would drive out all those living in land needed by the chosen nation in order to give it to them. All this was a blessing and a curse. They had an opportunity to be blessed beyond belief if they would just follow in God's ways, but it also put them in a position of being greatly hurt if they chose not to serve The God Who had called them to this work! This was even to be illustrated in the promised land by using two twin peaks divided by a green valley that lay on the other side of Jordan from where they now were. These two peaks would represent the equal, yet great divide between being on one side of serving God or the other, so the people would never forget what Moses said this day.

Moses emphasizes again the fact that as the nation grew into all the land in every part they held, their first job would be to destroy the culture that had lived there and wipe it clean of all false religion that the former inhabitants had served.

They were to destroy any places of worship, and not just take down the graven images of false gods but leave nothing recognizable about them. Any and all false gods served on land Israel took was to disappear from the record of human history. This to the extent Israel was able to make it so. At the same time, Moses warns this is exactly what is not to happen with God and the Laws He had given the nation. The nation would no longer live around the tabernacle in an orderly camp, but wherever God placed His name in the land of promise they were to come to regularly in spite of this. They were to bring the sacrifices and offerings to the altar of God just as they had been doing on their journey to this place. They were to bring their tithes, offerings, and anything they vowed unto God to that place. They were not to attempt to replace the tabernacle with places of their choosing and forget to come to God's temple. In truth, the Law would be in more action once they were settled on the land than it had been thus far.

Instead of being something they would slowly leave behind or which would become less important, the ordinances they were to follow would be in full effect. All the elements of the Law with all that it was to represent could be carried out to its full effect. This would grow from the time they settled on the land after the war to take the land subsided, all the way through a time when God would reveal a permanent place to set His name in the promised land. Once that happened there would never again be a tabernacle to be moved from one place to the next, but a permanent spot to which Israel would always go in order to fulfill the ordinances of the Law. The specific spot where they were to come would only get more permanent with time, and the nation needed to understand there would never be a reason or excuse to use other places to set up altars to sacrifice on. Then Moses takes the moment to point out this does not mean they could not kill animals to eat in the various places they lived in the land, but they were to be mindful not to eat the blood. In these cases they were to pour the blood out onto the ground.

That being said, he emphasizes this did not include any of the offerings that had portions which could be eaten. Anything that was offered to God was to be taken to the temple and offered there, its blood had to be poured out there. When the place God chose to set His name was a long way away, it would only be acceptable to kill animals one intended for eating, much in the same way one might hunt for wild animals in the field, and only if the blood was poured out on the ground and not consumed. This was not just true for the everyday Israelite, but even Levites should not assume that because they are priest of God it was acceptable for them to do any different. This was to make the place where God chose to set His name a special place of continual worship. Many things in the Law belonged to the priests which were to be distributed to only them and from that place. Nevertheless, there was never to be a Levite that went without, but the people were to make sure any of the priestly tribe that lived among them lived as well as anyone else in the community, no matter what. This would demonstrate the truth that taking care of thy neighbor as thyself is very related to loving God with all we are and have.

The Laws of God were not just unlike the way pagans worship false gods, but completely different in that God hates

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we talked about how Abraham continued to travel the promised land but did not settle on it or claim possessions in it. We also talked about how this would be true of Isaac, as well as Jacob and his family. All this because the chosen nation gaining control of the promised land would be done in God's timing and by His command without consultation with men about what humans thought might be right. The main story we focused on last time was that of Abraham moving to the far south end of the promised land and settling in the same place God originally brought the children of Israel to as they came out of Egypt and God was ready to give them the land. In settling so far south Abraham put himself very close to the Philistines, and he, along with Sarah, would go directly into their land to see it and the people. In doing this, Abraham would, once again, tell people Sarah was his sister, and King Abimelech would end up taking her much the way Pharaoh did in Egypt. However, God would be there to turn back these circumstances, and the king would return Sarah to Abraham. The information we covered last time took us through Genesis chapter 20 verse 16, and we are ready to continue this story as we start with verse 17.

As we talked about last time, God had informed Abimelech that Abraham would have to pray for him. This was not just because God wanted there to be a formality to show Abraham was a great servant of The One True God whom Abimelech had wronged in taking anything from without it being given. There was a literal reality to this need because God had closed the wombs of the house of the king, and there would be no more children born to his house if Abraham did not pray for him. Some find this odd because they want to focus on Abraham not telling the king she was his wife. It's my belief people like to get caught up on every slight flaw or item any of the great men in the Bible ever did, because we all have faults and it makes one feel better to know even great servants of God were not perfect. This can have its good side if we allow it to ward off Satan's attacks that we'll never be good enough. However, it can come with its bad side if we allow it to make us feel as though we do not have to be aware of the mistakes we make, or feel we are free to make mistakes without thought because - even Abraham made mistakes!

There is another aspect to how these kinds of stories affect our walk with The Lord, in that we can get to thinking we are so much in a position of being a servant of God that no matter what we do, others will feel the wrath of God if they oppose us. This can come in large ways, but it's the little foxes that spoil the vine! (Song. 2:15) Big examples of this thinking are seen in the nation of Israel as God tells them to live under the king of Babylon but follow God's Law. God was telling the nation not to worry about who the secular governing power over them was, and instead worry about doing and being what God had told them to be and do. (Jer. 27) In spite of these words from God, the nation chose to rebel against Babylon in the

belief that no power should be over them. They believed the simple fact they were the chosen nation would give them the victory no matter what God's prophet had told them was the right thing to do. Very often Christians do these same kinds of things, albeit on a smaller scale. We believe what makes us a Christian is more about something we've chosen to accept or become than it is about how we choose to act, but in the end of it all, we will find this is never true!

When we look at a situation such as this one where Abraham for the second time chooses to tell other people Sarah is his sister, leaving out the detail she is in fact his wife no matter what relationship she may be to him in other ways, and Abraham not only seems to get away with it but has to pray for the king in order to heal him, we find ourselves thinking we do stand in a special place. What we get mixed up about in all this is that there is a personal, as well as a ministry, aspect to all we do! Man is not perfect, not a one of us has been, except Jesus Christ. However, God uses those who serve Him to work among other men. The further man has fallen into sin, which drives the presence of God further from this world all the time, the more God uses others instead of coming down and speaking to us more directly. Now, the fact God still wants and demands He be able to teach us directly is why He has prepared a place where those who are chosen by Him can live for eternity under the right circumstances, for God walking directly among us is what heaven is all about. However, for now we must live with this situation man's sin has caused.

My point is that there are those who are seen as being followers of God and those who are not. In the days before the flood of Noah's time this was very prominent. There were people known to be of God right down to the point the few that were eventually left were known as giants for God, but the decline continued until one day there were no more who really stood out. Anyone can claim to be a follower of God, but Jesus instructs us that we will know those who truly strive to follow God, by their fruits. (Matt. 17:15-20) This is not just a one time thing but a continuous evaluation. If at anytime an individual starts constantly producing bad fruit, it does not mean you were necessarily wrong in believing they were a follower of God before. Many trees may produce perfectly good fruit until certain factors affect them, and in any given year they can start producing fruit that is not worth having them around for. When this happens, the owner of the tree must evaluate how long they want to wait and see if the tree will recover before they cut it down. Thanks be to God He is longsuffering with us, and just as the parable about such things tells us, Jesus gives us far more of a chance to recover than we deserve! (Luke 13:6-10, I Pet. 3:8-9)

God will use individuals to serve, and the more exposure your particular calling gives you among men the larger the separation very well may be between your personal

walk and the ministry you serve in. This is the point of misunderstanding people don't get, and which causes them to think themselves in a special place of being able to start making the decisions based on their "position." What God wants is for all of us to strive for greater righteousness, but striving and achieving can be very independent things in that accomplishment will often at least seem lower than our desire. We all have the things we face in life, and those things include not just the personality we are born with and the circumstances we were raised in, but also the circumstances that surround us at any given time. Things that seem to make it hard to obtain righteousness can actually be the fire that brings it in a way we did not see coming. In other cases it is just what it is, a situation that makes even maintaining the righteousness we have difficult, and gaining even harder. The end result is that we must keep striving and not give up no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

As someone who has been in ministry from a very young age, I can tell you one of the hardest places to maintain and grow righteousness can be in the ministry. This might seem difficult to understand, but it is just the more reason when we are given a work to do for God we should not believe it gives us the right to start making the decisions for God's plan. The responsibility of just serving can be crushing, and the factor many people come to the ministry unprepared to face is that there is a great separation between your personal walk and what has been put on you. Many are so unprepared for this they do not understand it is the reason they ultimately failed to continue in the ministry. To put it as simple as I know how to, when you are not in the ministry you can focus just on your faith. You can focus on building and growing in righteousness. When you are in the ministry you must do all that and the ministry! Plus, as a minister you have already been asked to do something greater than we as humans were intended to take on. This goes back to God wanting to directly walk among us and teach us but having to depend on working through other humans. Those in the ministry are being given just an ever so small piece of the work God, under ideal circumstances, would be doing. In spite of the fact it is just a micro piece of the work, it is something no man can do in one's own strength!

This is why it is crucial that one's attempt to accomplish ministry flows from God Himself. Focusing on the ministry is not about figuring out how to do the job or get the work done, but about how to allow God to reach through you and use you as a conduit to do the work and get it done. This God can do with greater ease the greater one's faith is. However, the work God needs to do in this world exceeds the faith of the individuals through whom He works. This is why it is foolish for Christians to make statements about their accomplishments, especially in ministry. To God goes all the glory and praise and honor, for only He could do the work in spite of us. When we do a work for God it is more often than not about us finding those times when we yield to Him and allow Him to flow through us in a way even our faith does not allow on an every hour of every day basis. Doing this is what Moses did not understand when God was calling him to go and face Pharaoh. We often look at the story and take away the idea that Moses was wrong in thinking he couldn't do the work, but it's more complex than that. Before he ever began, Moses knew,

maybe better than any other man, how inadequate his faith was to do this task.

Moses was spot on in his understanding, because his faith was indeed not up to the task. Thus, when we talk about Moses doubting God, we are not really talking about him doubting God's ability to do the task; Moses simply understood his faith was not up to it and thought God had chosen the wrong man for the job! This is an important distinction. It is one thing to doubt God and another to doubt ones self. If we truly doubt God, then we are not ready to serve. One can argue that even doubting God choosing us as the person to work through is a form of doubting God, but let us not forget what I've been driving at all along here, we are just the humans in this situation, and we are not perfect. When we directly doubt God the consequences are usually very bad for us and possibly many around us. We see this when ten out of the twelve spies Moses eventually sent to spy out the land of Canaan doubted God, and that doubt spread like wildfire. In the end, it became the reason an entire generation never got to set foot in the promised land. (Num. 13:26-14:39) However, when we doubt ourselves, this can be a good starting point.

I'm not saying it should take a long conversation with God before He convinces us He is able to use us, because there have been many individuals who have never entered the ministry due to the fact they could not see how God could use them. However, this is what we mean when we talk about letting go and letting God. It is not about saying, being good is just a fable I just can't because I'm not able. Being good has to do with your personal walk, and you'd better not think it's just a fable or you won't see heaven. It is in our service to God it is true we just can't because we are not able, but humility is how things get done at those times God needs to use us for something bigger than our faith will allow. We need to learn how to let go of everything we are and just let God work through us. This is what accomplishes the true work of the ministry, and it is what others often see far more than they see the individual's faith when one is in the ministry. This is why we should not find it odd that family and close friends know things about ministers others would be surprised are true. We are just humans, struggling along with all the rest of those who desire to live for God. The only real difference is that we have been given a job that requires us to get out of the way more than it does anything else!

This is what happened in the situation with Abraham telling the Philistines Sarah was just his sister after knowing it had been the wrong thing to do when he tried the same thing in Egypt. Yes, Abraham was a man of great faith. The Bible makes that clear, and stories such as these should not cause us to doubt that fact. However, just as any servant of God, Abraham had to go about his personal life as just the man he was with the level of faith he had. Not being perfect, there were those times when even his faith was not able to overcome his flesh's instinct to do what in his mind was the best way to protect his household. The problem was, just as many ministers find themselves facing today, Abraham was living in the full-time work of The Lord. He had failed on a personal level, and whatever that might mean to his personal walk with God would be between him and God just as it would be for any one of us.

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXV

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 the Herodian Dynasty and attempted to go down the main rulers of this dynasty along with how they affected the life of Christ. In that segment, we covered a lot of time and information without going over what was specifically going on with the Jews as a people so much. However, before we get directly back to more of the Jewish part of this historical look, I want to take some space to match up a couple points we covered over the last two segments which some may be questioning. Earlier I made the point about how much it might have been a good thing for the Jews to really embrace the fact the Romans had named what was left of the Hasmonean Dynasty to the position of Ethnarch, and how Rome appointing this position had some to do with Pilate's reaction to Jesus during His trial. Then, last time we covered the information about how it was during Jesus' very early years on this earth that the Romans basically grouped the Idumaeans and the Jews together by naming the Herodian ruler Ethnarch as well as a governing power in the region.

This would seem to indicate there was no reason for the circumstances of Rome naming Hyrcanus II Ethnarch long before Jesus' birth, to have any bearing on what happened many decades later at Jesus' trial. However, the ruler we covered last time who was named Ethnarch was the Herodian Dynasty's Herod Archelaus, and an important fact about him is something we also covered which was, he did not rule for very long. It was in 6 A.D. that he was removed from office by the Romans in favor of the Romans making Judea an official province of the Empire. Now, this is a technicality in many ways, considering the fact the Herodian Dynasty was nothing more than another layer of secular government over the Jews, and certainly not like the Hasmonean Dynasty which came to power by determination of the Jewish people. Thus, in 6 A.D. we simply come to that moment in time where the southern part of the promised land is under direct rule of the Romans, as apposed to being ruled through a governor who was not "Roman."

This not only tells us what a short time Herod Archelaus was Ethnarch, but also how after this point the Romans really needed some person or group to serve as the one(s) to deal with the everyday ethnic affairs of the Jews, especially when it came to religious matters. The Romans had no interest in dealing with such things unless it caused some disturbance, like a rebellion against the Empire. You see, in naming the Herodian ruler Ethnarch, the Romans were just consolidating the power in the region so the governor could also take care of the ethnic affairs. They did not care that the governor was not really Jewish, only that after the fall of the Hasmoneans, Rome would not have to deal with such things. In a way, it became the burden of Herod Archelaus to keep the peace, even when it came to satisfying the

Jews' ethnic issues. If he had to use the force the governorship gave him power to use in order to "keep the Jews in line," Rome did not care. If he understood the Jews well enough to appease them in ways that would keep the peace without using force in any harsh way, that would be a bonus as far as Rome was concerned. In either case, what was important to Rome was that someone other than them dealt with the odd laws and customs of these people.

With a Herod serving in this role, Rome had created a cushion between themselves and the Jews. If we go back in this study and remember that very early on the Jews had appealed to Rome for help against the Greeks, you'll recall that Rome was almost always happy to make some gesture in the Jews' favor. However, this was far more often than not all talk and no action. Still Rome had rode into the region with an air of friendship with the Jews. This facade the Romans wanted to hold onto as long as they could in any way they could. By having the Herodian Dynasty in between them and the Jews, this was easier to do. However, once the decision was made to move in and make the heart of the Jewish culture a direct Roman province, that advantage was mostly lost.

Make no mistake about it, when it came to those who wanted power among the Jews, this fact was not one they were ignorant of. The Jews knew the Romans wanted to remain "friends," while at the same time keep the Jews under their thumb. The thumb part angered many of the common Jews so much it became the main reason we see multiple attempts at rebellion against the Roman Empire by the Jews. However, those who craved power among the Jews saw all this as an opportunity to be played against each other. With unrest among the common Jewish citizen who desired to return to the days of the great Maccabees, and Rome wanting to avoid just crushing the Jews as they did other people, it was easy for what I often refer to as the Jewish religious establishment to stand in between and use all this to their advantage. They were far more acceptable than the Romans to the common Jew, and if they could stay in the common man's graces, they could continually convince the Romans of the need for their existence.

Now, in this study we have talked about the fact there was a fight among the Jews that really caught fire during the time of the Greeks when the Greeks chose to Hellenize their entire realm. This is what gave rise to what would become the Pharisees and Sadducees, among other more minor groups of thought. Those Jews who really never thought it a bad idea, if not a downright good one, to join in with the secular world, certainly took advantage of Rome's desire to stay out of the Jew's more Jewish affairs as long as it maintained their positions of power. As deviant as this sounds, those who believed more in the line that Jews should not be joining in with the rest of the world, and instead maintain their identity as Jews, joined into this same kind of thinking because they saw the situation as a way to keep the

Romans off their back while they got to mold and shape what they thought it was to be Jewish. In this, we clearly see how much religious groups on both sides had a lot to gain and a lot to lose if the situation was to change in one direction or the other.

If Jews involved in a rebellion were successful in freeing Jews from the Romans, these groups risked losing their positions of power in whatever happened next. Rome knew this kept them on Rome's side to some degree. Only if they thought there was a good chance they could be the ones to end up with most all the power, would the religious leaders have been for it. However, this scenario could only happen if those leading the fight against the Romans looked to them as the ones to take charge after Rome was driven out. However, unlike the Maccabees, these "leaders" were not going to head the fight. If we really understand these points, we can see how and why it's so easy for us as humans to find ourselves not praying for God's will but for God to give us what we desire, even with the notion we believe we are doing what is best for God's kingdom. The fact these Jewish religious leaders may have thought it in the Jews' best interests that they be an independent state, but only if they got to continue molding the Jews, should help us understand why they had very specific ideas of what they wanted The Messiah to be.

Now, it's a key point to understand these religious groups were really the ones who came to fill that Ethnarch void after Rome made the southern half of the promised land a direct Roman province, in spite of if any particular person or not held the specific title. For the time, these religious leaders were the ones the Jews, at least many of those who lived in the South, looked to for those things Jewish. This means the thoughts about how to handle Jesus could not have been more different between these religious groups and the Roman authority by the time of Jesus' trial. The religious leaders wanted The Messiah to come, because they believed The Messiah could free them from the Romans in the ways they saw as a benefit. This means in their minds The Messiah needed to be one of two things. He either had to be a true conquering hero that had the power to drive out, if not completely crush the Roman Empire, or He had to be a great politician.

The part about The Messiah being a great conqueror doing the job is obvious, but if He could at least be a great politician, The Messiah could work the situation with Rome even better than they had and gain a great deal of freedom from the Romans. If Israel could outlive another empire, surely The Messiah would keep Israel from ever being overcome by another power, so all would be good. However, in either case, one of the true prerequisites for The Messiah to be doing what they thought was best for the Jews was that He be directly in step with these religious leaders. Understand that just as many "Christian leaders" today believe what they do and think is best for all Christians regardless of how much some of their thoughts may not be in line with God's Word, the religious leaders of Jesus' day thought they knew what was best as well. Thus, what they wanted was a Messiah Who had all the power to accomplish the things they couldn't accomplish on their own. If what they saw as right for the Jews was not what The Messiah was going to use His power for, He would be of no use to them. This is the corruption of the mind religion can bring, and it outweighs the advantages those who argue in favor of religion make as to why we should

all be guardians of it!

So what we had at the time of Christ were religious leaders who knew what the people knew when they put the Maccabees in charge so long before, and that was the fact a faithful prophet would rise. To be more specific about the prophecy, we are told Elias must first come. This is what Jesus' disciples were asking about in Mark chapter 9, and Jesus tells them he had already come. That prophet was John the Baptist, and what we are told is that the religious leaders were very interested in John as he started to gain the attention of the Jewish people. Just as they believed certain things about The Messiah, the religious leaders had their ideas about this great prophet as well. They were a bit baffled by the fact John had all the marks of being that prophet, but instead of coming to them in Jerusalem, he was way out in the Jordan River baptizing people. Now we could go into a whole study about the ritual baths the Jews used and how this all relates to Jews understanding what John was doing, to some degree, out in the river, but that would take us way off our subject right now. Suffice it to say, the religious leaders wondered why John was out there at the river when there were plenty of ritual baths in Jerusalem?

This is why the religious leaders go out to see what John was doing. They knew very good and well it was important, but at the same time it did not involve them. Not only had John not come to Jerusalem to use ritual baths to do his thing, he had not consulted or contacted the religious establishment about what he was doing in any way, shape, or form. This was concerning to the religious leaders right from the start. Thus, when they come, John already knows what they're coming for. He knew they came to have a talk with him as to why he was doing everything he was doing outside their religious authority and/or blessing. Since John did not recognize them as an authority he needed to answer to or consult in any form, they do not need to have their talk with John, and indeed John makes it clear their thinking was heading them into trouble before they get the chance. As they approach, John says to them, "...O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Matthew 3:7-9

John goes on to leave nothing to their imaginations about the fact The Messiah was just around the corner, and He was also not going to just accept whatever religious notions they thought were right for the time. Jesus was coming to cut down the trees that did not bear the correct and good fruit. John also uses the metaphor of getting rid of the unwanted parts of the grain harvest by using fire. This is important to our question about if there is or was a chosen nation by the time of The Messiah and if it would survive. The parts of the plant that in John's metaphor are slated to be burned up are still part of the wheat, but they are not the useful parts one grows wheat in order to obtain! Thus, these parts are driven away by the wind and burned with fire in order not to just separate them from the useful parts of the plant but dispose of them for good. This is what John was warning the religious leaders about. They were part of the chosen nation no doubt, but The Messiah was coming to use those of the nation who could be used; not to be used by these religious leaders for their purposes.

Once Jesus is on the scene, He too does not come to them in Jerusalem to consult with them or get their blessing. The religious leaders had already been warned by John that this would be the case, but instead of taking John's advice to repent of their ways and prepare their hearts to be open to what The Messiah brought, they prepared for Jesus to be something they might have to deal with since it seemed He would be in opposition to their authority. This should shed new light on why we see what we do as Jesus moves among them. John stayed mostly in the wilderness and did his ministry among the common people, and while that did not make the religious leaders happy, they could write him off as some crazy guy whom people were foolish to listen to. On the other hand, while Jesus did most of His ministry in the North, Jesus was popular beyond belief, and was performing miracles even they had to admit He could not have been able to do if He were not of God. (John 3:1-2) This worried the religious leaders very much.

What made this worse is that as time went on Jesus more and more came right into the heart of their authority by coming not just to Jerusalem, but the temple itself. The religious leaders watched this grow, until one day Jesus comes riding in on a donkey being worshiped as The Son of David, The King of The Jews, and as such - The Messiah. This is why these leaders go out to order Jesus to stop the people. However, Jesus, just as John had said, did not take orders from them, and informed them this was going to happen if it took the rocks to do the job! (Luke 19:37-40) All this demonstrates the divide between the people of the chosen nation at large and the religious leaders; meaning Jesus' death is not to be blamed on the chosen nation as a whole in any way. It was a specific group of religious leaders who debated for a time as to if Jesus could be used or manipulated into being used for their purposes. When He could not be, they turned to attempts at discrediting Jesus. Why? Because the common Jews were becoming more and more convinced Jesus was, or at least might just be, The Messiah the nation had been waiting for.

One of the things those who believe the chosen nation as a whole should be blamed for Jesus' death will argue, is the fact that during Jesus' trial Pilate brought Jesus out to ask the people who they wanted released for the Passover. Pilate offered the choice between Jesus and a man who had been a leader of the rebellious factions, but Jesus was not chosen. This is where we must understand the true power of religion, for it is rooted in the most basic desires and faults of men. Pilate did not pick a leader of rebellion against the Romans as the other option by accident. Barabbas was not just the random guy the guards happened to grab out of the prison when Pilate said he wanted to give a choice. Barabbas was chosen by Pilate because from the very first moments the religious leaders brought Jesus to him, Pilate was baffled as to why these people whose useful existence as leaders depended on them taking care of those things Jewish would bring such a matter to him. At the same time, Pilate was also intrigued at the possibility Jesus might be a better choice than them!

Pilate was always in search of an answer to his Jewish "problem," and in putting a man like Barabbas up against Jesus, Pilate was testing the people to see how much they might desire to have Jesus so He could serve in such a position. However, Pilate was also testing these religious leaders. Was it so important to them to see Jesus put to death that they would be willing to see an individual of the very rebellions they feared would drive them

from power released? If these groups were really the ones to keep the friendship with Rome and peace among the common Jew for Rome, surely they would much rather a man such as Jesus be set free. The fact they were not of this thinking is exactly why we are told the religious leaders encouraged all they could among the crowd that day to call for Barabbas, and the crucifixion of Jesus. (Matt. 27:20) The Romans are by no means the good guys in this story, as Pilate should have set Jesus free using his own authority to do so, but no matter how it turned out, a corner was turned that day in the relationship between the Jews and Rome; one that was not in the Jews favor!

You see, the larger crime of the Jewish people as a nation did not come on the day Jesus was killed, but far earlier in chance after chance being squandered in who and what they had already accepted to basically be in charge of Jewish affairs. Non-Jews like to argue the Jews have been rejected because they rejected Jesus, and this seems to be a simple argument to make if one thinks so highly of themselves they believe they can stand in the place of God and judge, not just an entire nation, but the worthiness of God's plan as a whole. God established this nation and made an everlasting covenant with them. The real reason Jesus was killed was that as it came down to even the people being given the power to see Jesus released, there were just too many who still listened to the religious leaders telling them Jesus did not fit their definition of Who The Messiah should be. Not looking to God's Law for the answer but religious leaders, caused many of the people to come together in following what they thought was the majority decision on the matter. There were too many who were convinced by the simple fact Pilate had Jesus in his custody because holding Jesus as a prisoner had to say something bad about Jesus. At the very least, it had to mean what the religious leaders were saying all along, which was that Jesus could not be The Messiah!

For the religious leaders it was better that a rebellious thug like Barabbas be released than Jesus. Barabbas would just go on to do something stupid and get arrested again or even killed. Jesus, on the other hand, was taking the nation down the path of truly grabbing hold of the freedom the Romans had given the Jews, and leading the people into the paths of following God's Law first and foremost in their lives without concern for who or how bad the secular government that was over them at that point might be. If the Romans had to be dealt with later on, then so be it. If the Romans had been the ones to determine Jesus was a threat to them, then it would have been up to Rome to choose how to deal with it, but at the moment Jesus was more acceptable to Rome than the religious leaders. Yet, Jesus did not take advantage of this fact during His trial. Why? Because Jesus was working to set all things straight among the Jews. Jesus truly came unto His own. (John 1:6-14) The fact the chosen nation did not receive him as a nation was their choice to make, just as it had been their choice to do or not do many things God had given them the opportunity to take advantage of all along.

In short, if rejecting Jesus was grounds for the Jews to be dismantled or rejected by God as His chosen nation, why were they established or not rejected long before this time so they would not have had the chance to reject The Messiah? If your answer is anything along the lines about how they were serving a part in God's greater plan by being the ones who would kill The Messiah, then why would God reject them for that? To that, one

can argue they were on the wrong side of events just as Pharaoh put Egypt on the wrong side of events at the time God wanted to release Israel from bondage. However, Egypt was not established by God. Pharaoh was simply standing in the way of God's will, so God took him out of the way and accomplished that will. On the other hand, the chosen nation was established for just these moments.

Everything in history shows us Jesus was sent at a time and in a way that made Him an advantage to not just the Jews and what they really needed, but the Romans as well. We clearly see Pilate had no interest in killing Jesus, Herod Antipas was not desirous to do it either, but not because they accepted or were even thinking about if Jesus might be The Saviour of the world! It would seem the Romans would have been in favor of the Jews having Jesus as their leader, but nothing more. So what sets the Jews apart from all the rest in being the ones to reject The Messiah? The fact that unto them was given the Laws of God, and instead of knowing that Law and waiting to see it fulfilled, they had built a religion they believed could define Who The Messiah should be. This all happened not so we could look back and judge the Jews for killing Jesus, but so God could demonstrate exactly how that kind of thinking is what is going to get any true believer in deep trouble if we do not guard against it!

This shows us that if your argument is a chosen nation system did not work so God went to a church system in order to have a chosen nation, then you are arguing for the chosen nation's replacement to be held together by the very core thought of religion which caused those in the chosen nation who did so to reject The Messiah. We should stop to think about the fact that if the chosen nation was rejected and replaced, any replacement would be poised to make the same mistakes the chosen nation made. The only advantage such a group would now have is that they have gotten to see the pitfall that caused the chosen nation to make the mistake. However, why should those who were not first chosen be chosen now simply because they have an advantage the chosen nation did not have when those who were first chosen now have that same advantage? This brings us to the same point about how God could have rejected the nation before they had a chance to kill Jesus. Nothing has really changed.

God did not set the nation up for failure, He set them up to have the best chance anyone could have. One can go into all the arguments about how maybe the Romans or other people could have fulfilled the plan by being the ones who killed Jesus, but thinking that way misses the point completely! Might it have been true the Romans would eventually come to see Jesus as a great threat? Yes, but while Jesus was sent to be The Saviour of the entire world, Jesus did not come to them, He came to the chosen nation. This was done because the chosen nation was there to show us how much even a nation created for the purpose of waiting for and receiving The Messiah was still thrown off by human thinking. Thrown off so badly that they rejected God almost because He came down in human form. If this could happen, what other nation could have been expected to see Jesus for Who He really was? Before you bring up the point that many people did see Jesus for who He really was, stop to remember two things. One, many of the people you are talking about were Jews, and two, point one is why what we call the church exists. Thus,

God's plan of establishing a chosen nation did, in fact, work, so why would God reject that nation?

While Christians vehemently point to the necessity of Jesus' death in order for God to receive the power He needed to save us, many want to reject the Jews for fulfilling that purpose, all the while not thinking about what accepting Jesus would have been about. Jews as a nation accepting Jesus as The Messiah would have been about acknowledging His right to lead and teach them. What would this have accomplished? It would have accomplished them being able to learn and understand the Laws of God in deeper ways than any of us could ever hope to learn. This would have taken the chosen nation not just back to the paths of righteousness in ways they had not been since days such as those of Moses and King David, but further down that path than any purely human leader could ever have taken the nation. The result of this would have been a rise of the chosen nation to ultimate heights in illustrating the plan of God through their righteousness in ways we can't comprehend.

So what would it have taken for us to see this? Think about it, even if the religious leaders had accepted Jesus, would people such as Barabbas? There would still have been those angry at Jesus for not totally freeing them from Rome. If we say that's not true or ignore that fact, there is still the truth the entire nation would have needed to accept Him as a whole, or a vast majority of it, at the very least. However, at what point in the nation's history do we see this kind of unity in acceptance of God's ways and for how long? If men were able to hold to such ways and beliefs longterm, there would have been no need for The Messiah to come and offer Himself as the solution to all the problems because there would be no problem. You see, we're back to the Garden of Eden. If Adam and Eve had not taken of the fruit they were told not to in the first place, none of this would have happened. If man had followed God's direction after that, there would have been no worldwide flood. If man had learned his lesson through the events of the flood, there would have been no Tower of Babel, and on and on we go!

God is showing us just how much we can't do this on our own! Even if He steps in and offers Himself as the solution to our failures, we are so stubborn we don't want that answer because we think we know better. This, God has proven to be true right down to coming and physically walking among us. This sinful human nature is the base reason for why the chosen nation killed The Messiah. Making this nature apparent to us all is why God specifically allowed it to happen. Leaving no nation of the world to be specifically cursed for killing The Messiah is why God contained the illustration to a nation that already belonged to Him, one for whom He takes full responsibility. When we stop allowing the very thinking that caused the chosen nation to reject The Messiah to lead our thoughts, we will see the beauty in why God set up a chosen nation and how much they show us all the pitfalls true believers are most apt to fall into!

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

At the same time, this situation involved a perspective from King Abimelech and his people's side that was all about Abraham being a man in God's service. This is why when it comes to this side of things we are told that what happened clearly placed the blame for the wrong on the king's shoulders.

Abimelech had failed to see Abraham as the man in God's service he was, and he had done Abraham wrong. It did not matter if Sarah was just Abraham's sister no matter who he was, but because Abraham stood in the work that he did in God's service, Abimelech would need to pay a price for his wrong so he would know he could not come out against Abraham thinking he could win. Anyone coming against Abraham's house would be met with defeat, not because Abraham was necessarily righteous enough to deserve it as some people think of being deserving, but because God had a plan for Abraham's house, and God would protect His interests! This is a message the king seems to get pretty loud and clear when we look at his reaction to just God coming to him to inform him he had done wrong. However, God wanted to connect the punishment directly to the crime. Abimelech had chose to grow his house by taking a woman from another man, and now his house would become stagnate as all the women in his house would be unable to bear children.

God would also connect this truth directly back to whom Abimelech had wronged so he would have no doubt why God had specifically stepped into this situation to correct a wrong he may have done to countless fathers and male family members by taking women of their house. The king would need Abraham to pray for him. It would seem in real time it really had not been long enough for it to be completely apparent that Abimelech and his house had totally lost the ability to conceive children. However, that is why it is good the king did what he needed to in following God's instructions. A king who could not continue on his family line would not be just a dynasty in trouble at the time of needing to pass on their power to a son, but in people losing trust in the stability of the dynasty long before that moment. Such a thing could easily lead to the downfall of an entire kingdom. Thus, whether they were completely aware of their condition or not, it was only due to Abraham praying for them that Abimelech's house was healed and they once again had the ability to bear children.

This point might leave one to wonder, if it was true the king did not as yet fully understand the consequences of not having Abraham pray for him because he yielded to God's instruction so quickly in this matter, why did God make it a reality? After all, God knew the king would obey, right? First off, we should be clear on the fact this was a physical reality whether the king understood it or not. If it had not been, we would not have it here in verse 18 laid out in black and white. As to the why it needed to be if the king was going to do what he was told, we need to appreciate how much we are so very fleshly minded. One of the greatest things God ever had to do for us is because of this fact. God had to come down in human form to physically die before our eyes and raise from the dead. The reason this was necessary is because so many would not have believed He could save us otherwise! When God said He

closed up the wombs of the king's house, God did it, not because the king might or might not know from physical proof this had happened, but because this is how God works among us.

There are many consequences in this life that we may or may not know but are true just the same. We seem to understand this point when it comes to blessings, but we can waver even on those. How often has something disastrous been physically altered so that it was out of our way before we ever got close enough to know it was in our way? We have no idea, but if we live for and trust in God, it has likely happened many times! How many consequences to our actions are not immediate but will be a part of the reason many different things happen in life? This we also do not know. This is another reason we need to serve God in humility asking for His forgiveness. We can judge Abraham in this situation because we see Sarah was taken and thus, it did not work out, but would it not have been just as wrong if it had of worked out? One can argue it would have been worse because Abraham would not have had the evidence he had done something wrong. In many ways the "punishment" for Abraham in this situation was simply having to endure the fact his mistake had, once again, ended in losing Sarah and failing God. This second point is one that means a great deal to a person of great faith. Having some real physical consequence to our action is a good thing in many cases, because to obey is always better than sacrifice! (I Sam. 15:22)

Just as it would have been simply wrong, or worse, for Abraham to feel his plan of telling the Philistines Sarah was his sister was acceptable to do, it was equally as good, or better, that Abimelech obeyed God's instructions about having Abraham pray for him in order to turn back consequences he possibly did not yet have confirmation were true. We must never forget, whether in this life or just how it affects our ability to get to heaven in the end of it all, there are consequences to our actions both good and bad. More times than not we will never be able to directly tie those consequences back to what we did, which is often true even when the consequences are very apparent in this life, but that doesn't stop them from being there. We have to be very ignorant not to understand that for every time we see the negative of our actions, this is only a small percentage of the times we have done wrong without seeing a direct consequence. This is where we come to that point of understanding just how much we are an individual who is not without hope because God can save even the worst of us, but the responsibility for showing we care not to remain in the imperfection we now live in, which is what will cause God to choose us for salvation, is directly incumbent on our being mindful of how we live each day of our lives!

Now, as we begin chapter 21 of Genesis, we can not say for sure just how long it had been since the incident with the Philistines. However, this we do know, not a lot of time had passed, because from the time of God's visitation with Abraham before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah to the time Sarah was to conceive would only be about the space of a year. Just how soon after seeing the cities destroyed did Abraham move his house down to the south is not clear, but one would think it was not too long. One way or the other there's still nine months to be covered between Sarah conceiving Isaac and giving birth.

This means while most of the information about events might have taken place during the year in-between, nine months go by in just the first couple of verses here in chapter 21. We are told The Lord did for Sarah what He said He would do, which was return her to the ability to conceive a child, and that she did. Without any drama or complication Sarah and Abraham conceive a child, and Sarah gives birth. It is also specifically pointed out here that it happened in just the timing God had chosen, and this is interesting.

Some may be asking why this is interesting considering how much we are always going over the fact God has a plan and things are done according to His timing, but think about it. The one really interesting fact about the birth of Ishmael is that it happened. What's so interesting about that? Well, Abraham and Sarah feared they would not be able to have a child together because they had not had one up to that time. They took things into their own hands in an attempt to accomplish what God had said was to happen. The end result of this was that Abraham had a son through Sarah's handmaiden. What this tells us is that God had not shut down Abraham's ability to have children, but exactly as is described, Sarah was unable. Now, before anyone thinks I'm trying to lay something negative on Sarah, my real point is the fact that if God had not specifically orchestrated this, by closing Sarah's womb, she would have had a child before now. When God said He would "return" her to the ability to bear children, it was a reference to the fact Sarah had passed the time in life a woman was able to bear children. (Gen. 18:9-15) However, it should be noted God did not say He would also open her womb. One could argue that for all the years Sarah was in childbearing years without having a child, God should have mentioned He would also open her womb.

This may seem like a small point of no consequence, but it is an example of how much we need to be careful to translate the Bible as best we can when coming out of the original text, and not interpret the text as so many English "translations" do. We should be careful even in the idea of attempting to make the text flow better in our language because any small thing, such as this point, could be lost in translation. God did not say anything about opening Sarah's womb, because by that point God was not stopping her from having a child. What was stopping her was reaching the biological time her body quit preparing every month to have children. Thus, during all the years she was of childbearing age her womb was just fine, but God was keeping a child from happening. This is interesting in the aspect of what we just covered concerning the king of the Philistines' punishment for taking Sarah, being that all the women of his house had their wombs closed until Abraham prayed for God to release them. This was a truly tragic event in the mind of Abimelech and his house, but for Abraham and Sarah this same thing happening to Sarah was not a punishment in any way. Doing this to Sarah was all about God accomplishing something in and through their lives in the way He wanted it to be.

This goes hand in hand with all the other points we've been talking about in this segment when it comes to God using

us, but that being separate from our personal faith in so many ways. In spite of the fact this kind of action would clearly be seen as punishment to most other people, and indeed it concerned Abraham and Sarah very much, God did it to them just so they could accomplish His plan in a greater perfection. God could have told them to simply wait to have a child, but the fact they did what they did to end up with Ishmael speaks volumes to how much their personal faith was not up to the task of following God's instructions to the letter in this matter. All this shows us how true this was in their thinking, not to mention their physical ability to restrain from even risking having a child before it was time! The point is that God does not do things against our will, and this speaks to that point about yielding. As Jesus prayed in the garden the night He was taken into custody in order to begin the process of being tried and sentenced to death, He prayed to The Father about not having to go through it all if there was any other way. (Matt. 26:39) Of course, man's thinking caused there to be no other way, and Jesus was willing to go through with it in either case. Jesus' willingness is, of course, the ultimate example of this righteous thinking, but the basics of this is what each of us need in order to do the work of The Lord.

At any given moment our faith may not be up to the challenge, and that challenge, such as it was in Abraham and Sarah's case, may be very longterm. However, if we are willing to yield to God's will on a level that supersedes our day by day faith, God can use our lives in all kinds of ways, even if that takes changing physical circumstances that would take us in a wrong direction but which we would choose if left to our own devises. Abraham and Sarah desperately wanted to have a child, even tried a way around not being able to do so. However, in the end, God held back Sarah's ability to bear a child, because what was larger than their daily ability to do as God asked was their willingness to be vessels of God's work!

I don't know if I am making this point very well, but I pray that I am giving every one of you something to think long and hard about. It is easy to serve God when things go our way and are as we expect. It is not so easy to serve God when both these things are not true. Thus, we each must choose whether we will give up at any point or continue on through with God. Holding on to God with the thought things will get better when we learn how to yield to Him is something we can teach and preach on all the time, but a part of living for God we do not often think about are those times when things aren't going our way, not because we have done something to mess up, but because we couldn't help but mess up if God did not stop us. Will we continue with God even when we don't understand the why year after year until it seems our time in life has past the point of no return? If we're really going to be instruments God can use, we need to be able to do so. We have to seek God with all we are, then trust Him over whatever happens to us. We need to understand, when God closes a door, it's not time to jump out a window!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

the way false gods are worshiped by men. Israel was to be careful not to think there was a need, or fall to a desire to serve the false gods worshiped by the people whom they had driven out of the land. This was important, as many people believe worshipping the gods that "control" the region one is in is crucial to finding success on a particular land. They were also not to incorporate the way others worship any false gods into their worship of The One True God. God tells Israel that everything He hates the most was done by these people in worshipping their false gods, including the sacrifice of their children to them. Israel was to ignore all these traditions and follow God's Law alone, adding nothing to it and taking nothing away from it! This was true even if a prophet or great religious leader came along and claimed they had a new revelation that showed them they were to go off and do things not in God's Law. Listening to such people or ignoring them would be a test for Israel that would show if they really did love God, because it would prove whether they were willing to obey what He had told them or were looking for something new and different. It would show whether they believed God's Laws were ways of truth or no better than any other man-made religion.

This was so serious that God even told Israel they were to kill people who tried to teach the nation should leave the Laws of God or change them. These kinds of teachings were not to be allowed to take root and grow over time but be deposed of for the good of the nation as a whole. God also warns if one had a family member or close friend who secretly tries to get you to serve another god(s) and/or follow other ways besides the Laws of God, especially if it has to do with wanting you to specifically follow another religion that exists in the world, you should not keep it a secret. You should not have pity even on a person you are close to who desires such things, but let it be known what it is they desire to do. As hard as it might be to do so, God even instructs that it should be the one who is close to the person, and witness to such actions, that should be first in line to stone such a person to death. This is, again, for the good, not just of the individual who is being tempted, but for the entire nation in order to ensure such people are driven from the nation and not allowed to lead anyone away from serving God. If there is a person with such desires Israel was not to be a place they felt they could practice their religion, and they should leave the nation of their own accord without attempting to get anyone else to follow.

If you lived in a city where the people were going in a direction of following practices other than the Laws of God, one would want to leave there as well. This because God instructs the nation to look into any place where it is suspected the people are trying to leave the Laws of God to live under other religious practices. If it is found that the people there really are trying to develop or serve another religion, this entire place was to be destroyed by the nation. In order to be sure the last sparks of such a movement were extinguished, every person living in the place was to be killed, for if one is even willing to stay in such a place, they have, at the very least, been sympathetic to those involved in such a movement or complacent about the Laws of God. Israel was no place for anyone to attempt to startup or follow another religion, and this is why the nation was not just to kill all the inhabitants, but destroy their animals and gather

all that is valuable into the streets and burn it. Just as with the inhabitants of Canaan as Israel took the land, such places were to always be wiped clean from the land. Many people would see all this as wrong, but God would not punish Israel for doing such a thing, He would punish them for being unwilling to do such a thing. This is how set apart the nation was to be from the rest of the world!

The next ordinances follow in this same line as they concern cutting one's self and/or unnaturally cutting the hair on one's face as a way to mourn the dead. This because such customs were/are followed by pagans to show hopelessness. Without God there is not hope for the one who is dead, but with God there is eternal life. It is not surprising to see people with no hope demonstrating their sorrow through self mutilation. To cut or even scratch one's self without regard for the blood it draws, the pain it brings, and the scars it leaves is a sign of total desperation and one's inability to change events. However, if we live, we should live unto God, and when we die, we should die with God by our side. If that is what a person has done, there is no need to feel hopeless over their death; and if that is not what a person has done, then they have made their choice in life not to serve The God Who should mean everything to each of us. Understanding this will make the people of God react to events in life in ways others find peculiar, but God tells Israel if we truly serve Him, being peculiar to the world is exactly what we are being called to be.

Next Moses goes into the basics of the Law concerning how Israel was to eat. He gives some examples of animals they are allowed to eat such as the ox, sheep, deer, etc., but the basic law is that among beasts of the field the animal needs to have a hoof that is divided into two parts. Two toes does not count. The animal also must chew their food thoroughly, which involves doing it more than just once. Animals that swallow and then reprocess their food by bringing it up and chewing again we say chew a cud. He goes on to give examples of things that are not acceptable because they have one of these traits but not the other, such as camels, which chew a cud but do not have a hoof for feet. Then there are those such as swine that clearly have a divided hoof but do not chew a cud. Among those things that live in water, they must have scales and fins to qualify. This means most of what we just call fish are clean, but shell fish, water mammals, and amphibians are not. He also defines the birds that can be eaten by giving examples of unclean birds, which show us those things unclean are things that generally do or might eat other animals, whether alive or dead, and maybe most importantly, in doing so they will eat blood. In this same understanding, this means they were not to eat animals they had not properly slaughtered, which had died on their own. However, they could give it, or sell it, to those not of Israel who wanted it. This was one of the simple examples of ways we are shown how much Israel was given laws concerning things that non-Jews were not made to follow. However, we see things in the Law that the understanding of genetics show us are really good things to follow, and Moses reminds of one such item, which was the prohibition of cooking the meat of cattle using milk that came from that particular animal's mother.

Moses goes directly from this to talk about tithes. However, to understand this we must see it in the context of two

things. First, Moses is combining things on the basis he is talking to people who understood the Law by living it already. The nation understood in a way most do not that tithing was/is about giving all things to God which He requires of us, not just the tenth of increase which is the technical definition of tithing. Second, Moses is speaking in the context that when the nation settled on the land it would be different for them to have to travel to the tabernacle/temple instead of just coming to the center of their camp. Thus, Moses makes clear this distance was not to cause the nation to neglect bringing to God's temple what was God's! Of course, this first of all included the bringing of what the word "tithe" means, and that is literally the tenth of their increase, which then became the property of the Levites, and that's why he talks about not neglecting them. Bringing this literal tenth was to be done every year without respect for distance.

The next thing Moses speaks of and basically describes as part of their tithe, concerns the requirement that all the males of the nation were to show themselves at the temple three specific times through the year. This too would not change once on the land no matter the distance. Ordering the men to come meant every house would be represented, but since all three of these times were feast days, this stipulation would likely cause all able bodied family members to travel and celebrate these feast as families at the place God chose to set His name. We see a clear example of this when Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover in Luke chapter 2. In any case, males had been commanded not to come before The Lord empty, and holding a feast in this place at a time when almost all others of the nation were also coming means it would be best to bring provisions from home for celebrating the feast. (Ex. 23:14-17) This they would do to come and celebrate these feast in the place God chose to place His name. Of course, there may be some who lived far enough away they were not physically able to bring with them all their literal tithe along with the provisions for their celebration for the feast. In this case they were to sell provisions equal to what they would use for the feast and bring the money with them instead. When they got to the place, or at least closer to it, they could use the money to buy whatever they wanted in order to celebrate and hold the feast.

These instructions are capped again with a reminder that since not all Levites would live in the place God put His name, many communities would have Levites among them. The nation was also to be mindful the Levites that lived in their cities and towns had a way and provisions to make it to the place along with the rest of the nation so they too could celebrate at these times. Going along with providing for Levites, and bringing into the conversation the fact there might be poor among them, Moses instructs there to be an outpouring of giving to both these groups every third year leading up to the Sabbath year. (Lev. 25:1-7) This would be another required giving, and thus he refers to it as a tithe as well. In this "third year tithe" the nation was to bring out of their increase and give to the community at large, allowing those without to share in it. This would be a great addition to stipulations such as the fact they were not to harvest the corners of their fields or glen them,

but leave them for the poor to gather and use. (Lev. 19:9-10) In bringing a fair portion of their increase every third year of the seven year cycle, they would give those who had little, along with Levites who may not have much through the literal tithing process, to increase their store of food and provisions. The timing of these would put one of these tithes at the end of the sixth year just before the Sabbath year, also ensuring the poor and Levites shared in the great increase God said He would give in order to provide for the fact in the Sabbath year the nation was to allow their fields, orchards, and servants to rest.

Going hand and hand with this, Moses tells them that even debt was not to be collected in the seventh year, which is the Sabbath year. If this debt was owed by one who was not of the nation, this would give them a year to save, catch up on debt they might have fallen behind on, or save money for the future. If the debt was owed by a person who was of the chosen nation, the entire debt was to be forgiven. This was all done in the understanding the entire nation belonged to God, and they should trust that He could take care of them even following these stipulations of generosity. The only thing that would ever change the fact there would be debt to totally forgive is when trusting God and following His commandments led them to be a nation where there was no poor who needed to borrow money because all the nation had plenty. This was the plan of God's blessing for the chosen nation. They were to be a wealthy nation that could loan money to other nations, but they would not have the need to borrow from others. If they had followed God in all things, it was the plan that they be a nation that would rule over many other nations, but be blessed in that another nation would never rule over them!

That was the blessing God wanted to give the nation, but as Moses had already told them, there was also another side if they chose not to follow God's instructions. Thus, Moses warns the nation that these stipulations of generosity toward the poor would require them to always watch their thoughts and temptation in this matter. It would only be human nature to think about how one would be required to forgive a debt when the Sabbath year came, and choose to be very restrictive or refuse to loan money, specifically to those who were poor among the nation. The closer they got to a Sabbath year the more these kinds of thoughts would tend to enter one's mind, but if they were to begin refusing or limiting their willingness to help one of the nation that needed help due to these thoughts, the poor would surely cry out to God, He would hear and account it as sin unto those who thought this way. The nation was to loan to the poor what was needed and do it without a grudging attitude. Man may or may not know you resented loaning to the poor, but God would certainly know. It would be the nation's willingness to be good to those who needed help that would cause God to give the blessings that would allow it to never be a problem. They were to trust The Lord for, and with, all they needed and had. They could show their true heart in this by opening their hand to the poor and those in need that lived among them.

Let's stay in God's Word!

