

Free - Take One



Shaqah

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

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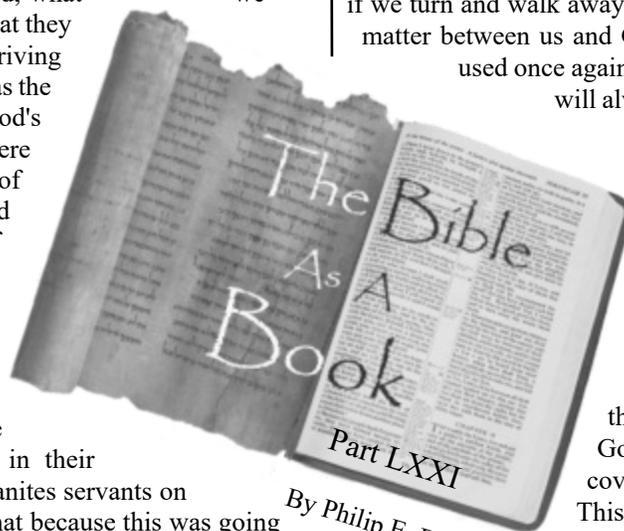
In our last segment, we finished up our introduction information for the Book of Judges which is the information we commonly cover as we go into each book. That caused us to look at how we will approach the chronology of this book or the lack there of. After that we started into our verse by verse overview which mainly covered the subject matter of how Israel failed in their task to drive out the Canaanites as they were suppose to. This is, of course, very appropriate information to start this book with since the fact they did not completely drive out the Canaanites is the glaring reason why there were ever judges in Israel who had to do the kind of work we see them doing in this book. That said, what really should see is not so much that they failed to accomplish the task of driving the Canaanites from among them as the fact they were not listening to God's voice in how to do it. There were going to be a certain number of Canaanites living on the land during some of this early time of Israel settling and growing in the land. However, the point God wanted Israel to understand was twofold. First, they were not to live among these Canaanites no matter if that came about by actually having them in their communities or making the Canaanites servants on some level. The second point is that because this was going to be a task that would span over a significant period of time, each tribe needed to be ready to go forward in driving out the remaining Canaanites when the time came and not simply accept that there were still Canaanites who would stay indefinitely. The fact Israel did not do those things is what brought the angel of God from Gilgal to speak to the nation about their failure, which is the story we see at the first of Judges chapter 2 and where we will pick up as we begin this time.

As we overlap just a bit with where we ended last time, we see in the words of chapter 2 verse 1 the angel emphasizes the fact God had no intent to break the covenant with Israel. This is an important truth and one far too many Christians don't keep in mind when they hear teaching about the chosen nation.

Simply put, God does not go back on His promises, and it is clearly stated here that God brought Israel out of Egypt to do a work with them and through them and that was not a covenant God was ever going to break. What Christians need to understand in order to avoid a lot of false doctrine from being in our thinking is the truth that just as any failure at any time on the part of Israel did not change this fact, neither did any of the events that surrounded the coming of The Messiah. Never means never! God will never break the covenant to use Israel in working His plan for this world! Those of us outside the chosen nation may also choose to be a part of working God's plan, but if we turn and walk away at any point that is a totally personal matter between us and God as to if we ever turn back to be

used once again. Israel on the other hand, as a nation, will always be used in some way, shape, and form no matter what that form may look like and it will, in fact, look different depending on how much or how little the nation is looking to God for their guidance and in following or not following the Law God gave them.

In verse 2 the angel talks about how the nation had violated the command of God that the nation make no league or covenant with the people of the land. This the nation had violated in putting some of the Canaanites to tribute. It might seem like all one is doing is making other people servants on some level and that should not violate the commandment of God, but such a thing is a violation. Why? Because God does not see any individual as owning another individual no matter how we may look at it. In God's eyes there is only an agreement, a league if you will, between people. What that agreement consists of, what it's meant to accomplish, as well as who has and who has not got the power in the situation is irrelevant to that point. Verse 3 also covers the fact God would not break His covenant with Israel. It does this by talking about what God had told them would happen if they did make such covenants with the Canaanites. In that event, God would not drive the people out, and instead they would become a thorn in Israel's side. To be clear, none of this is about God



By Philip E. Busby

P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539

(970) 593-9468



acting to make something happen as much as it's about God not doing anything and the results being what they will, by nature, be. God wanted to use Israel to drive the Canaanites out, but if they did not move to do such a thing God would not just make it happen by some other means. The natural result of having Canaanites among them would be that Israel would be corrupted and drug even further off course from the ways of God. That fact is a main reason why God wanted the Canaanites destroyed in the first place.

As was so often the case and is so often the case with us when God tells us we have failed, Israel was very displeased and cried. Verse 5 tells us it was Israel, due to this encounter with the angel, that named the place Bochim. However, it also tells us another important fact that shows the nature in all of us. No matter if we accept there is a God in heaven Who is The True God of all or believe in some other false god, when we feel we have failed we want some formula to make it right. For Israel that formula would seem to be what they did in fact do, and that was to sacrifice to God. However, sacrifices are only a symbol of something that has to be real in our heart, and so often was/is not. Many people, if asked what the symbol of sacrifice meant, would tell you it should be that we are sorry, but that is not the whole of the matter and it is the wrong word to use. Yes, being sorry is and should be a big part of it all but it's really only what leads us to do what God is really looking for us to do, and that is to repent! To repent is not just to be sorry because many people are sorry they got caught and punished or scolded for their wrong actions, but to repent is to turn and determine we are going in the opposite direction. There is a story concerning Israel that took place early on in their journey of getting to the south end of the promised land that also shows us it's important to understand what we are repenting from. In one of the early times of God wanting to bring Israel up through the south end of the land, the people refused because they did not trust God could give them success. Once they heard what the punishment for this would be, they repented of their lack of belief and headed out to battle the Canaanites. In doing that Israel was defeated very badly. (Num. 14:40-45) Why? Because God was not looking for Israel to just do what He originally told them to do, God was looking for Israel to follow His instructions and those instructions had changed! Israel would not enter the south end of the land but instead take the journey around to the east side which they, in fact, took. What we see here in these verses of Judges is not so much that God did not want the nation to go forward with exactly what they were suppose to do in the first place, but they still desperately needed to hear the voice of God and follow it in order to know how to go about it considering the mess they had now created.

As we move on to verse 6 we see that transition we talked about last time. It is a transition from information that shows us why the nation would have the trouble we find they were in as we read this book, back to more of a chronological restart. This incident with the angel happened at some point further down the history because we are told when Joshua was done with the major fighting he would lead, the nation went out into the places they had gained as a possession and continued to follow God for the remainder of Joshua's life as well as those elders in Israel that had come into the land with Joshua. The reason this is not so clear to many people reading these words

is that we forget that commandment of God that the nation would not drive out the Canaanites all at once but that it would be an ongoing process for a time through their history. (Ex. 23:27-30) Essentially what the judges in this book represent are people God rose up to lead the nation in going forward because they forgot about the task they were to complete. This was clarified by the angel's words to the nation. The angel stood ready to help them in their fight, the problem was Israel became too comfortable to carry that fight as time passed. That is why we see the judges coming along at times and in places where Israel was in desperate trouble. It was in those times the people called upon the name of The Lord and asked for His help. God would then send that help in the form of what we now call judges; people the stories of which we read in this book.

Thus, starting in verse 8 we see how Joshua lived to the age of 110, and he was buried in the land he had chosen as his possession among Israel. The exact location is described for us enough to get a good idea of where he was buried but not specifically to the point his grave could be found, which is a good thing. The main point is that Joshua, that man who had been at Moses' side through most all of Israel's struggle and journey to the promised land; that man who had led the nation in taking the promised land was not like Moses whom God took into the mountain to see the land from afar before taking him to his true home. Joshua was buried at a ripe old age in the land he came to see as home on this earth, and that means he was buried very much in the heart of the land God had promised to give the nation. Verse 10 emphasizes the point again that the generation that came between the generation of adults who left Egypt and the generation that would be the first to truly live in and on the promised land was a special generation that served The Lord. Unfortunately, as much as they served The Lord in their personal lives they failed to raise the next generation to do the same, for that generation we are told did not really know The Lord. This is not a criticism of the generation of adults who entered the promised land. As to how well they raised their children we don't know. Parents can do everything right and the children still come out wrong. This is the truth of humanity and the fact we each have a free will. Just because all the right training and teaching the children needed in order to follow The Lord might have been given to them, doesn't mean they chose to do it. No matter what kind of parenting was done the end result was simply that the next generation of Israel were the ones who began the downhill slide that caused the problems we see coming upon the nation in this book.

Verse 11 makes it very clear this is when Israel went off track and began to do evil in the sight of The Lord, as we are told the way they did that was by serving, "Baalim." Now, "Baal" and "Baalim" just might be two of the most misunderstood words in all the Bible. If we listen to archaeology we will find there was a god named Baal, at least by interpretation. The interpretation of course is the fact they only find references written in languages long ago extinct. Whether the word they are finding as a name was truly the same word the writers of the Bible's text penned is impossible to say with certainty. Nevertheless, I will not argue they are or are not interpreting the writing they find correctly in finding evidence there was a god among the Canaanites or at least in the land that was named Baal. What I will say is that it is anything from a

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we continued our look at Abraham giving his servant the job of going back to Mesopotamia, to the family Abraham came from, in order to find a wife for Isaac. We discussed the fact Abraham made it very clear the servant was not to consider a Canaanite wife for Isaac under any circumstances. It was not just a preference of Abraham's that the servant find a wife among his family back in Mesopotamia, it was that or nothing! This was made even more clear in Abraham's response to the servant's question about what he should do if the woman he found was not willing to come with him back to Canaan. Specifically the servant asked about if he should bring Isaac back to Mesopotamia if that was the case. To this Abraham made sure the servant knew the answer was no! In all this we talked about how much we need to trust God, even when it appears to us His will is not what is going to happen if we don't bend the rules a little. How Isaac was going to get a wife, much less the correct wife, if none of the women in Mesopotamia would come with the servant was not his concern. God would make a way for His will to ultimately be accomplished, no matter what the servant encountered. All the servant needed to do was follow the instructions he was given and the outcome would be what it would be! That brought us through Genesis chapter 24 verse 6, and we are ready to start looking at verse 7 this time.

As we come out of verse 6 we are at a point where Abraham is making it very clear to the servant he is not to bring Isaac back into Mesopotamia. As we talked about, this was because God was building the connection to the promised land which the family desperately needed. It was one thing for Abraham to follow God's instructions to come to this strange land of Canaan and sojourn, but quite another for future generations to see it as home and not just be here because that's what God had commanded. I don't say that in order to suggest Isaac himself would have problems returning to this land should he go back to Mesopotamia nor that Jacob wouldn't come to Canaan just because God told him to. No, this has nothing to do with judging the character of any one individual. Instead, what we need to understand is that God was setting up the family to eventually be more than one immediate family unit and from there, of course, God would eventually make an entire nation out of them. In case it's not totally clear to some let me just say, nothing about God's plan had or has anything to do with forcing someone to be a part of it. As I have pointed out on numerous occasions in my writings, if we look at the Law God gave to Israel it's far more about cutting people out of the nation for not being willing to follow it than it is about trying to lock people into the nation. In truth there is nothing in the Law that attempts to lock people in, and that's a point we need to be crystal clear on, not just about the chosen nation but about the nature of God and what He wants from each individual!

No matter who we are God has no interest in tricking us into being part of His people. This was/is as true for anyone born into the chosen nation as it is for the rest of the world.

That's not something God does, and the Law shows us the truth of what God said in Revelation 3:16 "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." We have to want to be with God. Thus, the people of the nation needed to want to be with God in order to truly be of God, but to build a nation out of a bloodline as God was doing through Abraham meant that not everyone who would be born into the family, and later nation, was going to want to be a true servant of God. As it relates to what we are talking about here, that means not everyone was going to follow the voice of God in coming to this land as He commanded, but that was alright. God didn't/doesn't need every member of the chosen nation to be totally sold out to Him. Would God prefer that be the case? Of course He would, but we know from the beginning of man's existence that was not going to be the case with any large group of people. Therefore God wanted to make Canaan more of the solid home for this family and in turn that would make it the solid home of the nation's forefathers. That could not be accomplished if men like Isaac vacated the promised land for great deals of time. What we even see in the later part of the family history in how Jacob does go to spend time in Mesopotamia is the fact Isaac and the core of the family remained in the land. By the time of Jacob it was just him being absent for a time. If Isaac had left at this time we are covering here, what would be left is simply the one man and his possessions which God had called out of his home to come to Canaan and that would not have been good.

All this goes into what Abraham was explaining to his servant beginning here in verse 7. Abraham begins to simply describe God as The One Who took him out of the house he now sends the servant to go to; The God Who brought Abraham to this land of Canaan in the first place. Then the point Abraham makes is simple. If God did all this, then God will send His angel out in front of this servant and he will find success in retrieving a wife for Isaac! This statement truly goes back to what we were talking about last time concerning Abraham's growth since the days he and Sarah chose to use Hagar as a surrogate in order to have a son, and what it shows all of us is no matter how far we think we've come with God, our faith can always be grown. With that we need to grasp how true it is that we will not always find our faith growing in some overall way because there are so many areas of our faith that need to catch up with where other areas already are. In Abraham we see a man who already had such great faith in God that he left his home in Mesopotamia to come to this strange land in the first place. One might think that about as hard a leap as one can take just because God says so. Others may not think so much about it, but stop, close your eyes and really think about what it would mean to you if God asked you to do such a thing. Remember, we are not just talking about a move to another place near by but the kind of move that would take you totally out of contact with your family and friends. Such a move is almost impossible for us to think about in our modern day due to all our technology which allows us to communicate all over the world. However, when Abraham followed God in

what he did, he was truly leaving his old life and home behind!

Thus, Abraham had great faith when he came to this land yet he still found himself not letting God totally lead when it came to believing he and Sarah could still have a child. What we see in that story is an area of faith Abraham needed to grow, and this is so often the case in our lives as well. We get stretched and pulled in different ways to make sure our faith is not just some weak bubble we live in but a strong and true shield against the things the devil throws at us. (Eph. 6:16) At times this can be very hard but in the end it will be worth it. That's what we are seeing here in the verses we are studying now. Unlike God telling Abraham he would have a son, here we are not told God came to Abraham and told him to send his servant to retrieve a wife for Isaac. One might assume that is just what happened, but I believe it shows us something else of importance we should be careful not to miss. I have talked at times about how we have those moments or times when we see great things from God. Those are the moments we tend to focus on and we never really remember or ever grasp how much God is at work in just our every day. I often use the example of the children of Israel traveling the wilderness on their way to the promised land. They grumbled about food and water so often but God always showed them they'd be alright. God would do this through miraculous things like turning bitter water sweet or bringing water from a rock. (Ex. 15:23-26, 17:1-7) God gave them manna on a regular basis and sent quail among them to give them food, but as much as we love those stories none of this was necessary. (Ex. 16:1-15) How do we know this? Because we are told after they made it to the promised land there were other things God had done which the nation just never saw as so dire they were not going to survive without, yet God took care of those things without them even noticing. This was simple things like the wear and tear on their clothing which did not happen. (Deut. 8:4) They were so focused on having food and water, so afraid an enemy would destroy them, they never stopped to notice it had been an awful long time since they needed a new pair of shoes!

Having the kind of faith that simply trusts God and walks through life not needing to see those great miracles, to simply know and follow God's will is a very hard place for most of us to get to. So I point out here that we are not told Abraham had one of those grand moments where God came to speak to him and tell him to send his servant to Mesopotamia because we should note, while that is absent Abraham knew what to do anyway. This is not to suggest Abraham had not talked to God about this or was simply one of those "name it and claim it" people who believed Isaac should get a wife from Mesopotamia and therefore he just had faith to believe it would happen. Abraham very likely did have a time or times when he and God spoke about this issue, but it didn't take a grand moment to know what the will of God was. Abraham simply knew from his daily walking and talking with God that Isaac would need a wife of the right bloodline, and when the day came he received news that his brother back home had a family that could provide that wife for Isaac, he knew that was the answer from God for how to accomplish the goal. Like I just said before, Abraham came to this land with the distinct possibility he would never see or hear from his family again! The fact news, so specific to the matter at hand came to him all the way from Mesopotamia, shows us a miracle all in of itself. Abraham did not need anyone to lay it out for him. He was getting old, and to tell the truth,

Isaac was getting on in years himself. Abraham had no doubt thought about the issue of a wife for Isaac on many occasions but he and Sarah remained patient through the years for God to show them the right way to handle it. They waited so long, Sarah passed away without seeing it come to pass, but Abraham remained steadfast in waiting upon The Lord until the right moment and/or information came.

This is why Abraham could say with confidence that the servant would find success in retrieving a wife. Abraham knew God had been out in front of him all along the way, even at the times he had feared it was not true. If God had brought this news all the way to Canaan, it had to be because there was a wife waiting for Isaac back in Mesopotamia. The girl didn't know it but her heart was already being prepared for this servant's arrival as well. All the servant had to do was trust God had it all under control and make the physical journey to bring her back. What kind of faith and how strong it was in the life of this servant is the point of what Abraham says in verse 8. There we see Abraham telling the servant that if the girl was unwilling to come with him he was released from this oath. This is not a back track or way of saying all I just covered about Abraham knowing it would come to pass might not be a solid truth. No, verse 8 is about the servant's faith as well as a reinforcement of what I just said about Abraham's faith. If the servant feared to take this oath or might be tempted to do anything to bend the rules in order not to fail, Abraham, once again, assures him it's better to get God's will right or not do anything at all. The servant had nothing to fear. It also shows the faith of Abraham in this matter once again, in that Abraham was so confident God would give the servant success he is willing to release the servant from his oath altogether and leave the job with no backup plan. That truth is emphasized in the fact the one part of the oath Abraham does not release the servant from is the part about not bringing Isaac back to Mesopotamia. As we covered last time, if there was one thing the servant was absolutely not to do, it was that. He was not to take Isaac back there!

Verse 9 tells us the servant was confident enough at this point to do as Abraham asked him to do in the first place, and that was to take hold of Abraham and swear he would do just as he was instructed. As we move on into verse 10 we see a very similar thing in the servant that we saw in Abraham. If you think back to times such as when God told Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him, I emphasized the point of what was not there. What is not there in those verses following God's command is any hesitation whatsoever on Abraham's part in doing just as God had told him to do. We are told Abraham got up early in the morning, took up the supplies he needed for the task and left with Isaac to do as God wanted. So too here we see no hesitation on the servant's part. He simply gathers up what he needs and off he goes. Now one might argue the servant had no reason to hesitate because Abraham had released him from the oath if the one fear he had about the girl being unwilling to come with him came true. However, this shows what a good servant of Abraham's this man was. While it might seem he had nothing to lose but to disappoint his master, this was still a long journey to accomplish a very uncertain task. The servant had no idea what lay ahead of him and he was going on very limited information.

Again, we must look at this from the perspective of the

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XLV

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 more extensively about the idea of personal doctrine and how that should be what really guides our lives instead of something we are just taught by an organization of men. The simple rundown of that is the fact that doctrines of men can be right and wrong in all sorts of ways, and while this can be true of our personal doctrine as well, there is a great difference between trusting a man or group of men are right and coming to what you believe because you are striving to walk with God. If we blindly follow men for what we believe we will likely find ourselves out in the cold on Judgment Day whether the doctrine was right or wrong. This because what God is actually looking for is that personal walk with Him and not just the following of any set of rules. We got into discussing all this because we were attempting to find our way forward in the historical look at the chosen nation following the time of the last Jewish-Roman War and the circumstances this time period put the Jews in as a people. What we were attempting to see is how much the doctrines the Jews followed would guide them and develop into more of the people we see today.

That discussion also caused us to start looking at what is called the Oral Torah and the ways in which it played a part in all this. However, we never really went too deep into that subject because of two things. First, there is the fact I pointed out before which is that this study is not meant to be a study on the religion of Judaism. We are in the discussion we are in because understanding how religion shaped the Jews is part of understanding their history and that helps us see the connection between the chosen nation we are shown in the Bible and those we know today. The second factor has to do with details. In most cases I would say details were very important. However, therein lies the problem with the Oral Torah. As we have touched on before, the Oral Torah likely took shape not too long after God gave the Law to Moses in the wilderness. From there the written Law was put into practice but God did not intend every detail to be covered concerning everyday life and how to apply the Law to it. Instead, God wanted the people to know the Law for themselves and in knowing it they could seek the ways it was meant to shape the everyday lifestyle of an individual. In turn this would shape the nation as a whole because a nation is nothing more than what the individuals in it make it to be.

Thus, after the Law was given more directly to the people the question for each of them was how do we put this in practice as we go about daily things such as preparing food, gathering supplies, even scheduling our days so as to recognize the Sabbath, feast days, etc. As they did this, not everyone was going to come to the same conclusion on all these points, but if the Law was followed in sincerity by each individual there

would be a lot of things done by individuals which would at least mirror a lot of things others in the nation did. The Oral Torah, as it came to be known, would develop out of this natural process of applying the Law and interacting with others who were doing the same. Its intent would be good and it would help with things such as the raising of children in the nation. Children are always asking "why?" Why do we do this and why in this way, at this time, etc. As all parents know, some days seem like an endless stream of why because all children are learning as they go and are not going to understand all the actions, choices, etc. of those who are charged with their upbringing. However, as much as children of the chosen nation would have questions about what any of us would consider normal human life, they also would have many questions about why certain things were done certain ways when there was no obvious reason for putting forth the extra effort to do some of these things the Law would require.

This would be even more problematic as children witnessed the world outside the nation not doing many of the things they were told to do and this making them seem strange to others in the world. For children the dots needed to be linked together on certain issues of daily life and why it was done due to something the Law of God had instructed. As with any children growing up in any culture this would be done orally by their parents, family members, and even just others they knew. However, as this organic process of teaching children moves through time, such lessons can get boiled down into sayings or stories of a sort that attempt to emphasize just the "moral" or main point we wish to pass down to a new generation. Some of these can be very clever and helpful, and if we become parents ourselves we may even give almost word for word the same lessons to our own children. All that said, as adults many of us can look back and see how not all such childhood lessons made much sense at the time. I can remember asking my grandmother many times what something she would say meant and she would almost always tell me, "It's just an old saying." The old part is the problem in that the expressions or stories were more often than not something put together at another time and contained references to things no longer common to everyday life. While in the end I came to understand most of her "sayings," I can see how the next generation would be left even more clueless to some of their meaning than I originally was.

This kind of problem is why anything oral is going to morph with time. The base meaning might not morph but the way that meaning is expressed might be in order to help a generation living in a different time period get the same point. This kind of human expression is what the Oral Torah is all about. While not necessarily being stories so much, it was a way to cover details of life and how to apply the Law. It was passed down from generation to generation, no doubt being modified in some ways along the way to ensure it helped each new

generation. If such a thing has a basis in something solid this kind of idea can actually work, but it all depends on how much each generation holds to the intent of teaching the solid thing the oral lessons are anchored to. This point is why we have talked so much about doctrine over the last couple segments. Talking about the Oral Torah being something solid in and of itself is silly. To say it did not change drastically over the centuries of its use is just nonsense. Its intent when the tabernacle was standing was based on the nation living as a camp. Meaning all together with the tabernacle literally at their center. When the nation entered and settled in the promised land, various illustrations used in the Oral Torah as to how to go about daily life had to be removed, replaced, and some new things added. It's a simple matter of time and space as many things would change when the nation spread out across the land. Eventually the more permanent temple was built and this too would change certain ways of going about things, if for no other reason than the terminology would change. After the tabernacle was no longer able to be in the middle of the nation's camp it was placed at more than one spot in the promised land as the years went by. Degrading of the nation in following the Law even caused the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant to be separated from each other in time. Amazing as that is, it stands as an example of how both we as people who are suppose to be serving God as well as those who are the true enemies of God's ways are responsible for the mess this world is in, but to get back to my point, once the temple was built in Jerusalem that city became the permanent spot to look to. This had to change certain things about the Oral Torah, and we know it most certainly did because Jerusalem is mentioned in it.

Of course, in Israel's history they come to the time of the Babylonian captivity. At that point the nation was removed from its land for the most part and more importantly the temple no longer stood. This changed almost everything, and as we have discussed, this was the time many of the ideas came into motion as to how to be Jewish without the temple. It is truly foolish to believe there was not a lot that changed about the Oral Torah during this time! Then a point we touched on recently is that once the nation returned to the promised land and the temple was rebuilt, many things that were implemented as a way to be Jewish without the temple still remained in place. Once again, the oral teachings about why certain things were done certain ways had to be changed, and that means the Oral Torah changed in a big way once again. Through all this process of time and events there were good ways in which something like the Oral Torah could and should change, but among men the bad always comes alongside the good. However, the main point I'm getting at here is that while we see all these times and ways the Oral Torah had to have changed, the written Law of God stayed the same. This fact is a main reason why God instructed the nation to inscribe the Law on so many of the physical things they would see and use daily. (Deut. 6:3-15) Things like posts and gates, walls, and monuments were to have the Law of God inscribed on them. People not only did not have the ability to print books and in doing so distribute written copies of the Law back then, but in any case people become complacent in their reading of the printed word. By putting God's Word in front of Israel every day on everyday things, it was not just a way of making sure a certain amount of the Law could be absorbed while going through each day, it was a reminder of the Law's existence!

You see, knowing the written Law for one's self is important because without it any oral tradition will have no correct basis of truth, and the same goes for what we call doctrine today. We can hold all the traditions we want but we need to be living God's truth, and that's a point the religious mind has trouble with. While some people believe the Oral Torah was given at the same time as the written Law and others believe various things about how long it has existed, it really doesn't matter. The point is, anything oral is going to morph and change with time. If for no other reason this is true due to what is sometimes referred to as the gossip effect. When information passes from person to person it tends to change. That is not just due to the fact people don't always remember correctly or didn't hear correctly in the first place, people often have their own way of absorbing information and re-telling it. It's not that they want to change what they've heard, it's just a truth of how they see life and its events. I think we all have a tendency to put a lot of the information we hear into a narrative we believe we'll remember and/or understand later. In doing this we may believe we are preserving information when in fact we can often be only preserving what we thought the speaker was saying or our perspective on what we saw. Someone else might have a very different view on the same words and/or events.

This truth is seen when police question people who have witnessed a crime. So often, in spite of the fact all the people they talk to were in the same general location and witnessed events firsthand, police can be amazed by how many different accounts of the event they get from all the witnesses. So we see in all this how much any version of an oral law would need to be based on written words to really hold truth through generation after generation. That's exactly why, no matter what kind of wisdom God may have given at any point on how to follow the written Torah, the written Torah given to Moses would always hold authority over any one person or multiple people's hold to a tradition or way they had come to follow the Law. This is part of that organic walk with God He wants us to have, and the written Law encouraged that. It encouraged discussions among the Jews and questions within individuals, but no matter what that led anyone to, we must be careful in the end not to do what Eve did after her discussion with the serpent about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. She tried to figure it out on her own, but we must seek God! This does not mean we will always agree on the answers even if we all do this with sincerity, but the reason why that is true is the same reasons we have covered in why an oral law would not maintain integrity over a long period of time. This is by no means a way to suggest that the truth is flexible or changes with time. The point I'm making is exactly the opposite!

The truths of God are solid and unchanging. That's why an Oral Torah can't truly hold sway over the written one God directly gave to Moses. God needs to work with each of us in order to come to the full truth and nothing but His truth when it comes to how to live our lives. That's why God speaks to us through His Word, not just in giving some set of rules and regulations as many might interpret the written Law to be, but in all the stories and events God shows us throughout the Torah and on into the historical, prophetic, and even poetic books of the Bible. God is trying to give us the information, as well as the avenue, to find the whole truth. It will take much time to figure

it all out and that's why God wants to take us into eternity with Him instead of losing any of us to the place we call hell. Walking with God and finding His truth is a long growing process, but one we can and must start here and now if we truly desire God. That said, each of us will grow at a different pace as well as in different areas of our lives compared to others around us at any given time. We may be able to help others find something they are struggling to find the answer to while at the same time they just might help us in another area of life. This is why we were instructed not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, which is an instruction Paul gives while writing specifically to Hebrews (Jews) about how to follow the Law and understand how it points us to Christ and His sacrifice. (Heb. 10:25) It is also why the writer of Proverbs tells us, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Proverbs 27:17

The Oral Torah was simply that, a way for Jews to debate the Law and at times preserve some of the conclusions that were reached as to how to follow the written Law. In doing so those conclusions could be shared with others as they sought answers to the ways of God, but no matter how much of a help or not the words of the Oral Torah were/are to any one individual, it was/is a danger for them to be looked at as required laws to be observed and practiced religiously. They certainly should never have become looked at as the way to be a "good Jew!" In spite of that truth, which we have been pounding at for the last couple of segments or so, that is a lot of what happened in the time period we are talking about in Jewish history at this point. A fact we have covered about this time period is that the Pharisees became the driving influence behind Judaism. The Sadducees were all about the strict ceremonial laws that were anchored to the temple. That form of thought lost value once the temple was gone and even more so after enough time passed that the hope of seeing it rebuilt began to fade. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were already a major group with ample sway over a great deal of Jewish thought. With the Sadducees' way of thinking being all but completely impractical and other groups already being in the minority, the Pharisees really led the way while all other groups basically faded out of the picture.

This brings us back to that main point about the Pharisees which we talked about before; the Pharisees had a style of going about their teaching of the Torah that lent itself to what so many felt was needed at this time. The Pharisees were about study and debate; the exact things which created an Oral Torah in the first place. Thus, the Pharisees would take this opportunity to make Judaism all about that. This would not be such a problem in changing Jewish life from at least what we see at the time of Christ to this time, even with the loss of the temple, save one human desire that should never come into play when talking about the things of God. The way we might put it today is to say, the Pharisees wanted to crush the competition! It was not enough to see a "rival" group like the Sadducees fade away due to lack of interest in what they offered. The Pharisees wanted to solidify their thinking as "Jewish" thinking. One way I've heard it put is that the Pharisees wanted to move Judaism away from an "Aaronite" priesthood which they felt the Sadducees represented. It is in that thinking I find serious fault!

Now, as I keep saying in this series it's not my interest

to judge the religion of Judaism nor to delve too deep into it. However, this point we just covered has to be made and a few things have to be said about it. I have written much about doctrine and religion throughout these last segments as well as this series in general so we can understand this point clearly. If one wants to understand why Jews of today might look different enough from what we believe we see in the Bible, here it is. Long before God brought Israel out of Egypt it was His intent to make them a holy nation. (Ex. 19:1-6) The word "holy" means to be set apart for the things of God. All the people were to be set apart from this world and the way other nations/people go about their lives and thinking. What was to guide Israel was their relationship with God! That point I can't emphasize enough because I don't want anyone to come away from what I'm saying with the idea God wanted to contain the Law to a very few even inside Israel. However, there is a big difference between ceremony, even ceremony God has commanded, and having a direct and personal walk with God! That is why God did give all of Israel, as well as the world, the Law but, in fact, did limit its ceremony to a very narrow group. If we look at the enactment of the Law's ceremony as a whole, that was contained within Israel. If others even wanted to take part in things such as Passover they needed to start following all the stipulations the Law put on members of the nation and join the nation. (Ex. 12:48-49)

This fact is why there are people who falsely believe and teach individuals were saved before the coming of Christ by becoming Jewish. They see this fact and believe God's intent was to give a Law and anyone who followed it would be saved. That false thought right there is not far from what the Pharisees were pushing which led to what we see as Judaism today. If I've said it once I've said it a thousand times, the Law teaches us the ways of God but the ceremony is part of that lesson not the actual tangible life changing result God intended us to get from the lesson. Following the Law no matter how strict it was ever followed by anyone, nor could be followed, has never and will never save anyone! Every human who has and ever will be saved has been or will be saved by God's grace in offering us a relationship with Him (faith) and us accepting that offer and actually walking with God. No formula, no ceremony is going to save anyone; only faith in God has the power to save because only God has the power to save! God wanted to ensure His truths were not lost from the minds of men so He embedded ceremonial enactments into a nation of people, through the giving of a written Law. These enactments or what I often refer to as the representational parts of the Law show us the truth. However, this is where we go back to what I said above about how we each move at a different pace. That part is true, but not as important as the fact God's truths are so deep and wide, there is no way any of us will find it all in this life.

Why is that important? Because as I have stated before, there is no way even a written law given by God Himself could cover everything, nor did God make an attempt to give us everything through the Law He gave to Israel. So what does that mean? In its simplest form it means, the ceremonial representation given to the Jews is not much more than a way to get our attention. Now there again I have stepped right in and made a statement many might be upset about, even feel is sacrilege in some way, but it's so very true. That said, I by no means say it to minimize the ceremony. It is important!

However, it should help us understand that the fact it's limited to just the people of one nation is not a problem. When I speak of limiting it, let me be clear I mean only that certain things are limited in that no one who is not a Jew can take part, while other things, such as the Laws for eating, can be done by anyone, but none of it is required for salvation. The only ways it can even be argued it is necessary for the Jews to keep practicing such things in order to be saved is due to the fact God ordered them to be the ones to represent His Laws by practicing them on a physical level.

What this means is that the Sadducees were wrong in their thinking that the ceremony was everything, but they were not wrong in believing it was contained or imprisoned, if you will, in an "Aaronite priesthood." Thus, the Pharisees were more correct in emphasizing study and debate of the Law but incorrect in thinking all the nation were priests in the same stripe as the Levites and the specific bloodline of Aaron. God did, in fact, limit the Law to one nation when it comes to the Law's full physical enactment. However, God also limited a large part of what the Law said the Jews were to do, to being performed only by one tribe within the nation. The Levites were the priestly tribe. (Ex. 2:5-8) Then God further limited significant parts of even those ceremonies to one specific family within that tribe. That was the family of Aaron. (Ex. 3:1-10) Even within that family at any one time the position of High Priest, who played the most significant role in carrying out the Law's precepts, was limited to just one man with whom it was entrusted until death. Upon his death the position would pass to his eldest son or if required, the next eldest of his male siblings. In all this, we see God did "imprison" the Law in a very narrow path! Does that sound familiar? It should because in and of itself, that truth shows us the truth Jesus told us directly is the hard facts of life. Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matthew 7:13-14

God did and does want us to see His truths and in the practices of the Law are not salvation itself but the way to find salvation; a way to find that straight gate and narrow way. It is not that way, and if the people of the chosen nation and the world would understand that, they would better understand what Jesus meant when He said, "...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 14:6 Jesus described Himself as The Bread of Life, The Door, The Good Shepherd, and more. (John 6:35, 10:9, 10:11) Does that sound familiar? It should because in Jesus' words we should clearly see the correlation between how Jesus described Himself and the way God described Himself in the Hebrew Bible. When Moses asked God at the burning bush who he should tell Pharaoh and the children of Israel had sent him, God told him to simply say, "I Am" sent him. (Ex. 3:13-15) God was saying, I am whatever you need. The fact that was not just a message for Israel is seen in that I Am was given as a name for God. God is whatever any man, Jewish or Non-Jewish, needs. He may not be what you want, and one is free to make that choice, but He is what you need! The religious leaders of Jesus' day understood this clearly and it's why they accused Him of saying He was God. However,

if you can't wrap your head around that at least understand Jesus was telling us He is, the way to find, get, and have God in our lives!

The Law was truly this kind of thing. Unlike Jesus, it was not God Himself but it was of God, and that fact is why Jesus is also described to us as "The Word." (John 1:1-5) In all this we see God reaching out to us in all kinds of ways with the hope we will see and find the path of faith that leads to His salvation. Whoever you are and no matter how you absorb information or events, God is literally screaming to you through His actions and words, "Come and walk with me!" (Rev. 22:16-17) This is the struggle the Jews went through. They went from much of the false thinking that so many even today still have as Christians concerning the Law being what saved them on some level instead of being what lead them to salvation, to making the Law a religion once it could no longer be physically practiced in the way it clearly describes it should be practiced at the temple with a High Priest. In this way, Judaism (speaking of the religion it became) is not far removed at all from the religion of Christianity! This is a fact so many fail to see and/or refuse to accept, but it's the truth. So many "Christians" are or can be so high-minded against Jews and Judaism but fail to see when they point a finger there is three pointing back at them. The most basic reason Jews of today look so different from what some might expect Jews to look like if they really are the chosen nation we see in the Word of God, is the same exact thing many who claim to believe in Jesus Christ are living right now!

If we expect to make it to heaven some day, to be welcomed into the eternal Kingdom of God, we have got to change our thinking! That is the reason I go on and on about the dangers of religion. Like the Sadducees and the Pharisees, there can be a ton of good things within what we believe, but if we attempt to turn what we believe into some kind of formula we will stagnate our organic walk with God and fail! In all the ways Christians look at Judaism and judge it as wrong, we should see the chosen nation still doing the job God intended them to do. Before Jesus ever came the Jews showed us the road that takes us down to stagnant religious thought which can reject God Himself even when He literally is looking at us physically face to face. (John 1:11) Later, after the temple was destroyed and before Christianity had been shaped by men into the solid religion it became, the Jews went forward wanting to create a much more "democratic" system of belief where more than just priest disseminated the Law. They wanted a religion controlled by men, and because the Pharisees offered what seemed more of the thing to do without the temple they were able to solidify and codify much of the Oral Torah, eventually even making it non-oral by putting it down in writing. Always, always, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12

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

day and age we are talking about. We can be asked to get on a plane and go to a foreign country and anyone who is not a seasoned traveler will feel a bit of apprehension. This is especially true if it's a place we have never been and this is a day where, once more, we have communication technology to help us stay in touch with those we depend on back home. This servant would have no plane to get there fast. He would make this journey over the long road riding on a camel. Once he left Abraham's house it would not take him long to travel outside the region he was familiar with and be very much on his own. As we also talked about, traveling back with a woman was not going to be as easy as even getting there. This has a lot to do with why we are told specifically in verse 10 that he takes 10 camels. He knew he needed to be prepared with supplies to get all the way there and all the way back, and in believing God would give him success he also prepares to bring back a wife for Isaac. As we see later, the servant also needed to take with him the traditional gifts one would bestow on the family giving up the girl. This was and remained very customary over the centuries in many cultures. I'm sure some cultures even today still hold this custom as a required element of giving a daughter to a man to be his wife. As much as the culture in America today has changed and rejected many of these traditional things, it is still very important to many fathers that a man ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. It is also still very much tradition for the bride's father to walk her down the aisle on her wedding day and make the declaration that he is giving his daughter to her new husband.

There has long been an understanding that the bride's family is giving up something of great value and in times past that was recognized with gifts. However, gifts or no gifts this was another element in what could have caused this servant to hesitate as what he was going to do was no small task. He was headed out to a family of people with whom he had no connection other than the fact he was Abraham's servant. As if that was not bad enough, he was going to ask them to simply give up one of their daughters so he could take her off to the same land Abraham had gone to and never returned from. The family would have every reason to believe if they gave this servant one of their daughters they would never see her again! Even in the traditions of the day, that would be a very tough thing to agree to, and we see that later when Jacob attempts to take Laban's two daughters and their children off to the land of Canaan. Laban, who was the brother of the woman this servant would end up bringing back to be Isaac's wife, would not be happy to see his daughters leave for Canaan at all! (Gen. 31) All that aside, verse 10 truly shows us how much the servant not only showed no hesitation in going but also he wasted no time getting to Mesopotamia. Again, we should be struck by what is not there as much as by what is. The servant's journey could have befallen any number of obstacles along the way to Mesopotamia yet there is no mention of anything slowing him down in the least. We are told he packs up what he needs and leaves and just like that, he was there at the place he was told to go.

One interesting note before we leave verse 10 is the fact the city the servant goes to is named "Nahor." Now Nahor is the name of Abraham's only surviving brother but it is also the name of Abraham's grandfather. (Gen. 11:22-26) Some say this place

named Nahor was the same place as Haran when Terah first moved Abraham, Lot, and their wives after leaving the Mesopotamian Valley. This belief is based on the idea that instead of just Abraham and Lot, they say Terah brought the entire family up to Haran and while Abraham left for Canaan his father and brother Nahor remained. If one believes this you must also believe that it was Haran at the top of the Mesopotamian Valley that this servant went to and not deeper into the valley and closer to the Chaldean territory. All this I doubt very much. There is no reason to believe Terah actually took both his sons to Haran. Nahor is not specified as being taken but Lot, who was Terah's grandchild, is. Why would that be the case if Terah moved the entire house? To that there is no good answer. Another problem with this theory is that it's likely the name of the city Haran, as we see it in Genesis, was used because that's what Terah named the city, naming it after his deceased son, Abraham and Nahor's brother. I would even go so far as to say Terah and Abraham had a lot to do with the success of this place, which set at a crossroads of trade paths, which would give Terah a legitimate right to name the city and the Bible would use that name. Of course I could be wrong, there are no records which tell us the facts, but I believe this is the case and if Haran was named for Terah's son it would make no sense for other members of the family to change the name to that of Terah's father or his son who were both named Nahor.

On the other hand, there is every reason to believe that the specific area where Terah had lived, or a place slightly off from there where Nahor moved the household after Terah left with Abraham, did become a city due to the success of that household. That being the case it would totally stand to reason that the name given to that place would be the name of the living patriarch of the family who at that point would be Nahor. One of the reasons this makes sense in not to suggest Nahor was arrogant or that his son(s) were, but when a large family lived in an area it only stood to reason that area would come to be known by the name of the head of the house. For instance, before it became Nahor as in a city, this area was the land of Nahor. That's not a specific title but just a fact which in human language is how many titles often come about. If you delve into the etymology of a lot of names of different places you find there is no shortage of names which in fact mean, "Land of...", you fill in the blank and the name that follows that land is the name of a prominent person who lived in the area. Thus, while at the time it may very well have been the case the entire area was known as the Land of Nahor, any city which developed there would easily come to be known as the city of Nahor. In the end it makes perfect sense that the city we see named Nahor here in Genesis 24:10 was in fact a city much closer to the south end of the Mesopotamian Valley than any city in more the northern parts, of which Haran is so far north it's hard to even say it's in the valley.

What all this means is that while the servant of Abraham did not likely know exactly where he was going he knew what family in the valley he was looking for and that was the family of his master Abraham's brother Nahor. So the servant goes directly to the place which bears that name with full cultural assurance he had made it to the correct place. Speaking of correct places, we move from this fact into verse 11 where we are told the servant sits his camels down by the well just outside the city. This was not necessarily where he intended to camp for

the night should it be necessary for him to find a place to do so, but it was a common place to stop in those days. The reason why is obvious. In a day when streams, rivers, and bodies of water were the only sources of water to resupply at, not every place had such a source of water near by. That meant wells were dug for each place to ensure there was a good water supply. In any place this could not be done or water could not be found cities did not survive. One might drink from a natural body of water but it was not really what you wanted to depend on anyway, and this made wells even more important. You never really know how polluted a natural body of water is. While in those days they did not have to worry so much about man-made pollution, there was some run off from concentrated settlements of humans. There were also a concentration of animals in cities and towns. If it's your only source of water one might make do, but a far better source of water for drinking, doing dishes, and generally relying on being able to use for clean purposes was to dig a well.

Now of course, due to the fact traditionally women were/are the ones who take care of the house and do most of the washing and cooking, it was also women who more often than not went to get the water for such things. The men were more responsible for watering the animals and working in the fields and that did not necessarily always require going to the town well. This means it was common in those days for about every house to have at least one woman from it visit the town's well both morning and evening. This is why Abraham's servant sets his animals down here. He was here to find a wife for Isaac, what better place to find her than to wait at a place where most all the women visited. Even if he did not meet the woman directly by doing this he certainly put himself in the right place to find out what women were of Nahor's house and unmarried. That said, the servant would not trust just good fortune and placement for his success. In a show of how this truly was the right man for this job, we see in verse 11 the servant takes this opportunity to pray to God. He calls God, The God of Abraham, which makes it clear he is not depending on some false god to show him the way. This servant believed in the same God his master served and on Whom they are both depending on showing His will in this matter of finding a wife for Isaac. In the words of this verse we see the servant asks for two distinct things. First, that he be given good speed in this situation, and second, that The Lord would show mercy to his master Abraham.

The first item shows us again that attitude that we will clearly see throughout this story, and that's the fact this servant wanted to waste no time in accomplishing his task and getting home. What all the factors in this might be is not totally clear, but one thing is for certain, not only did this servant want to accomplish his task to please his master, but I believe the words about not bringing Isaac back to this land had really sunk in for this servant. Being so far from what was his home was not so comfortable for him, not just in the idea he might have been homesick but in that this was a different place with a different culture. If God had a reason for his master Abraham to leave this place and go to Canaan, it must have had something to do with this not being a place that was truly conducive to one's walk with The Lord. This is no doubt true in the fact we see this was

a place of the Chaldean who were known for their soothsaying, spell casting, and general use of what some call the dark arts today. We see this to be true of them even much, much later in the time of the Babylonian captivity as Daniel finds himself side by side with them as the king's advisors. (Dan. 2) While that may not have been so invasive to just everyone in this area, what was also true is just the simple fact the servant did not want to find himself tied up in exactly what God did not want Abraham and Isaac to get tied up in. Being with those who are family, it can be hard to get away from it at times, and while the servant had no real reason to feel the obligation a direct family member might, he did not want to strengthen any connection there might be between his master's house and Nahor's than this situation required.

The second factor concerning the servant's request that God show mercy to his master Abraham is likely not as shallow as we might think. By shallow I mean to say, this is not just a way for him to open this prayer, it was a significant thought in the servant's mind. Abraham was old and he had seen little of the promises God had made to him come to pass in any significant way. As we just keep going back to, it was hard for Abraham to even get to the point of having the one son who would be heir to those promises. Now, in his old age it was not as if Isaac had grown up, got married and given Abraham the grandchildren he might have expected to have before he left this world. At first the family that would be the chosen nation was just two people, Abraham and Sarah. Sure they had plenty of servants so it's not to suggest they were lonely but that was all there was for family. God had even instructed Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away not long after Isaac was born. (Gen. 21:9-14) This meant the family was just Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. By this point we are discussing here Sarah had passed away and that meant the family was not growing, in spite of the birth of Isaac it shrunk back to just two, Abraham and Isaac. As far as the servant knew Abraham might not even be alive by the time he got back to Canaan no matter if he did or did not accomplish this mission of bringing back Isaac a wife. The longer the servant took finding a wife and getting home, the higher the chances were Abraham would no longer be there to see it.

I have heard many Christians express the desire to live long enough to see The Lord's return. I would say it does not matter because if you die in Christ you actually beat all of those who are alive and remain to that moment by jumping over the time we have left and going directly to that point in the time line. That said, I totally understand the desire that is in the heart of those who serve The Lord to see the great promises of God fulfilled. In Abraham's day The Messiah had not yet walked this earth nor was the chosen nation formed, but it was that plan taking shape that was just as special for Abraham and I have no doubt it was a great desire to see it unfold!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

coincidence to a flat truth there was a god named Baal but in any case it does not matter. When the Bible speaks of Baal, and more specifically when it talks about Baalim, It is not talking about the worship of a specific god. Instead it is a word(s) used to reference a religious practice that goes all the way back to the Tower of Babel. I have explained this before in my writings but it serves to point it out here again because this is where we start seeing the term used over and over in the Bible. Baalim is nothing more than the religion which began at the tower and spread out with the people as they went their separate ways after the confounding of the language. In every culture around the world you will find something simple, and that is the fact people worship many gods.

In its most evident form this is the practice of having multiple idols which are or represent gods in the culture; sun gods, moon gods, fertility gods, etc. In our modern times we look back and see the height of this practice in the pantheons of the Greeks and the Romans, but that by no means says it's gone. Today we still have many gods in our cultures and personal lives and that makes us like a few of the cultures we see in the past which we can find no specific evidence that they had a multiple idol system. Humans can worship most anything, but simply put, we see its physical manifestation in the pantheons of idols some cultures had/have. Those pantheons clearly show us physical evidence that the real truth for humans is that we love to worship ourselves, our accomplishments, and any power we believe can move us ahead in them. We also "worship" any power we feel needs appeasement so as not to hinder us in this world. This human truth is why so many people worship God Himself. Sadly they are not serving God as in listening to His will, they are only attempting to appease Him because, as I often put it, heaven sounds better than hell! It does not matter if Israel was at this point actually worshipping idols made after the idols the Canaanites used or ones they came up with on their own. It does not really matter if they were worshipping idols or just ideas of this world and life. The real problem was that they were putting so many gods before the following of The One True God, they had totally lost their way. God will stay with us and never forsake us because it's not His will that any of us perish. However, it is His will we all come to repentance of such activities. (Deut. 31:6, II Pet. 3:9) This is why the first commandment of what we call the Ten Commandments is that we put God before any other gods. If we will just do that, He can take care of the rest! (Ex. 20:3)

The verses go on to make it clear the people of Israel did forsake The Lord in going after other gods which at the very least included gods the people of Canaan worshiped. It also tells us they specifically took on the religion of worshipping idols in that they bowed themselves before them. There is also a specific mention of the goddess Ashtaroth here, and she was the Canaanite goddess of fertility. Worshipping some god or goddess of fertility is common in almost all Baal worship systems. Such a god is more often than not one of the primary gods and very often the primary female deity. This goddess is probably specified to let us know they did in fact worship a very common system of Baal where a main male and female god exists, and what that shows us in its simplest form is that humans worship themselves and hope to gain whatever they can from whatever

power(s) there may be that can help them have what they want. Of course, the main point here is the fact in doing this, the chosen nation had left off serving The One True God! To be clear this is not something that happens overnight. No, it's a process we slip into very easily over time. This fact is why so many can find themselves intermixing the worship of God with other gods. As I said before, if we will put God first He can take care of the rest, but we don't do that. We actually wish to bring The True God down to our level in the hope we will find a way to not have to answer to Him or believe He has no right to judge us in the end. (Rom. 1:22-23) Humans are always looking for some way out of having to have a personal walk with God instead of serving Him, and it is so often not those who say they don't believe there is a God or that they would never serve Him who are guilty of this in its worse form. In truth, it is often those who claim to serve God that are doing it the most and worst. Here, Israel exemplifies that for us to see clearly.

To show them how wrong they were in these actions the verses go on to tell us God allowed Israel's enemies to overcome them, take them as servants, even slaves. God pulled back His hand of protection so completely the people of the nation became vulnerable to the surrounding populations on a daily basis. This was very easy to see happen for two reasons. First, the people that had lived on the land before Israel came would, of course, know the land much better than Israel. This is not just to say they knew the lay of the land, but they knew how to grow crops and where to find resources of all kinds in the land. Without God's direction and protection from these people they could take advantage of Israel's lack of knowledge at every turn. Second, the way Israel came in and displaced them meant these people would not be very happy watching Israel live and thrive on what was once their land. This could be so specific to the point certain Canaanites despised the fact certain families of Israel literally lived in houses they once owned and worked land they once worked, even ate from vineyards the Canaanites had planted and cared for over decades. This was the promise of God for Israel that they would get this head start on settling in the promised land, but without God's protection from those Canaanites living around them, much less the ones they allowed to live among them, what had been a blessing was now a curse! (Deut. 6:10-12)

Verse 16 turns us back to see the constant mercy of God, in that regardless of what Israel had done and the level of God's anger toward them for doing so, God would send judges to help relieve their suffering. These judges would deliver the nation out of the hands of those who oppressed them, and a real blessing of God in this would be that the deliverance they received would last the lifetime of the judge. God would do this because He is a God of mercy and He would hear the nation's suffering; He would hear those who called out for the answer as to why this was happening and how it could be changed. God would send them judges to change the circumstances and give Israel the chance to seek Him for how to keep from ending up in those circumstances all over again. However, we are told this did not happen. For the time of the judge's life, the people would once again simply live in the new found comfort the judge had gained for them and go right on living life without caring for the ways of God. In doing this, little would be accomplished during the life of any judge except some temporary relief from

oppression. This continued all through the generations that lived during this time period, and due to that we see a clear example of what all humanity is going through. Humanity likes to think they are on some upward path of enlightenment, but their actions, specifically those they take thinking it's taking them down that path, causes a downhill spiral. Israel shows us this in that each generation who went through this cycle of being oppressed and then freed still refused to learn anything, and that actually spawn a generation after them that would go on to be just that much worse. God wants us to see this because it shows us ourselves and how much trusting in human thought is not going to help us. If we get the overall history of Israel and what it shows us about ourselves as humans, we understand that this cycle, whether slow or fast at any particular time, is what led the nation down and eventually brought about the first appearing of The Messiah. One day, we hope is very soon, we will see this downhill spiral of humanity in general lead to the Second Coming of Christ!

Next we are told that due to the above facts of the way the nation did not come back to Him, God determined that the nations He had allowed to stay beyond the time of Joshua, nations who should have been driven out when the time was right, God would no longer drive out. What this meant was that Israel would be forced to live on this land with nations such as the Philistines right next to them and even among them to some degree on through the centuries to come. Sure, unlike the chosen nation, these specific nations of people would fade and basically disappear as a people as time moved forward. However, that is just a truth of the way all nations, except the chosen nation, go. The point is, Israel would never gain the land they were to gain in later times as they drove these other nations out. Instead, Israel would always have to compete with them for resources and power. We see this to be very true as even in later times when Israel comes to see King David sitting on the throne of the nation, God did not drive out these foreign people. David conquered them, controlled them, and landmass was added to David's kingdom. However, the people remained, always having to be kept in check because as is always the case in any kingdom and especially empires, such people will attempt to break free and rule themselves, if not become the power in the region themselves. Yes, Israel would eventually go through the Babylonian captivity and all the damage the fall of the nation during that time caused, but right up to that time they also lived with these Canaanites around and among them. Once the nation returned from captivity we see even then they never rose to free the promised land to be just the home of the chosen nation. In our modern time we have witnessed the rise of Israel as a nation, living on its land once again, but what do we hear in our news every day? We hear about how they constantly fight with people who are not of the chosen nation for just the right to have a piece of the land God promised Israel, and it all stems back to this time period we are talking about here!

As we start chapter 3 we are told of the specific nations God allowed to remain at that time. What we see on that list are more people than just those we would call Canaanites. Actually the list specifies Canaanites so we know God is also listing people who lived beyond the borders of what was considered

the promised land in those early days. This is another fact we must be clear on if we're really going to grasp the Bible's words which many who call themselves Christians don't have clear. God originally described the promised land as stretching around the Mediterranean to the south and heading west, the direction Israel came out of Egypt, and going all the way north, bending back east, the direction Abraham originally came from. (Gen. 15:18) This means to the south Israel was to one day go so far back the way they had come so as to own everything back to and including the land of Goshen where Jacob's family moved when we say, "they move to Egypt." (Gen. 45:9-15) In the North it would go so far back along the path Abraham used coming out of Mesopotamia, Israel would one day take in everything along that path which Abraham covered after clearing the north end of the true valley of Mesopotamia to come into the land of Canaan. (Gen. 11:31) When one stops to think about what an amazing thing this would be it's hard to even take in how much this would have changed human history. Instead of fighting over one little strip of land along the Mediterranean, Israel would have held the Egyptians from ever rising to any level of world power after God had devastated Egypt in bringing Israel out of there. Israel would have been the reason why the Assyrian Empire would never have even existed, and they would have been the wall keeping Alexander the Great from extending Greek power from the west to the east. This, of course, would have also squelched the rise of the Romans as a power, and many others. Between owning this vital area which is truly the crossroads of the world, not to mention the sea power Israel would likely have become, throughout time there would be no way for any people to live on this earth without having some interaction with Israel!

However, as God tells us here in Judges it was not to be. Instead, God would use these nations surrounding the chosen nation to bring war and trouble to Israel, even to generations of the nation who should only have known peace and prosperity. God would allow this, not as an act of anger, but as rightful punishment. By that I don't mean, do the crime do the time, I mean punishment as a good parent punishes their child. The kind of punishment that shows the direction one should go and the direction one should not go. Just like children the world over, some in Israel would get the message God was trying to show them and others would never believe the truth. In a clear show of how much Israel did not get the point but turned directly to ignoring the Law on so many levels, we are told Israel not only lived with the Canaanites among them, they started intermarrying with them. This practice we see happening so early on in Israel's history is why in later times it was so easy to have people debating as to who was and who was not a Jew. The practice of intermarriage between the chosen nation and those who were not of the chosen nation was not in God's perfect plan, but as we have seen, if God's perfect plan had went forward many things would be so different in our world. However, God being God, worked all this out to preserve for us a nation of chosen people today who over many centuries of living like this now represent a true melding pot of the world's population.

Let's stay in God's Word!

