

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*

Issue #122

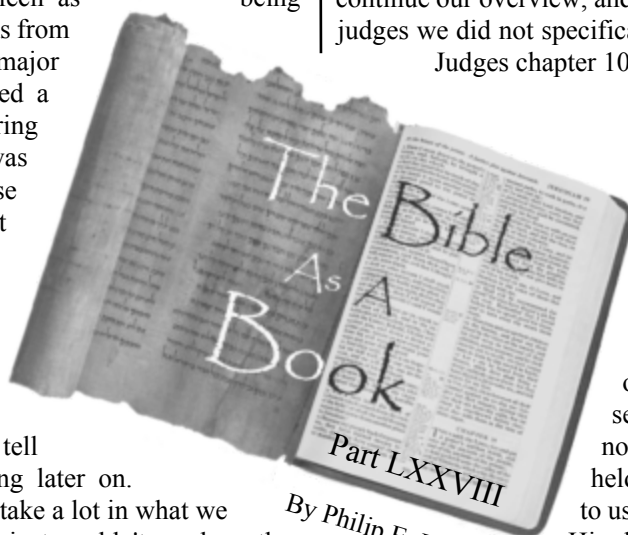
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As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, last time we talked about Gideon's son Abimelech being made king in Israel by the men of Shechem. This did not mean he was king over the entire nation and we don't know just how many people/places accepted him as such. However, it is the first time we see a man take the title of king in Israel and it came about because Abimelech wanted to be king not because anyone persuaded him to take on the role. We covered how Abimelech's reign was short and ended in tragedy due to the very men who made him king turning away from him. The irony is that these men likely turned away from him because they did not see Abimelech as any use to them when fear of attacks from outside sources were one of the major arguments as to why Israel needed a king, and there had been none during that time. In this we see how it was easy to feel attacks came because Israel did not have a king while at the same time see the king as useless once they did have one because they couldn't see how maybe just his existence was keeping attacks from coming. This was/is a small glimpse into the truth God had Samuel tell Israel when they demanded a king later on. They were warned the king would take a lot in what we would call taxation but the nation just couldn't see how they were better off without a human king in spite of all these kinds of facts. (1 Sam. 8:10-18)

After covering the war that ended Abimelech's rule we saw how life seemed to simply return to normal in Israel; almost as if none of it ever happened. This too should have been evidence as to why an earthly king was not needed in Israel, but the people were so into the mindset they needed one, God allowed the next two judges to work in Israel without there being any specific reason for their work. No war, invasion, or the like had taken place yet God sent judges among Israel. What this tells us is that we are now in the time period when it was all but inevitable that Israel would one day have a human king. However, it was still avoidable because all Israel had to do was

repent of the mindset they were in and understand God's perfect plan for the nation. If they had done that both kings as well as judges could have ceased from being any bit necessary. This is why God went into a mode of operation where a judge was not sent just when needed but became more of a full-time position like a king would be. God was giving the people one last chance to see and grab hold of the truth while satisfying what they needed in always having a human to go to with their troubles. This point alone could be an entire study on how we fall away from God and His will but He, in His mercy, continues to interact with us for our good. Putting that aside we will continue our overview, and in order to begin looking at the two judges we did not specifically name last time we will begin in Judges chapter 10 verse 1 this time.



By Philip E. Busby

We are told God raised up a judge named Tola who was of the tribe of Issachar. One small note here is that if you pay attention to what tribes the judges come from you will see they come from all different tribes. There may have been more from one tribe or another and none from several tribes but the point is, God set no precedence concerning which tribe held leadership in Israel. God was going to use whoever was willing to be used of Him because that's how God works. Man wants to establish dynasties that give the right of succession to the son(s) of the current ruler or, at the very least, allow the current ruler to name his successor. This is done because man is prideful, selfish, and violent. Even when we see rulers appoint successors those successors can often be disputed after the death of the ruler for one reason or another. When a son takes charge after a ruler's death there can be disputes, not the least of which can be between the sons as to who is or should be the rightful ruler upon their father's death. This is why people long ago chose the system that the eldest son would take the throne. It was a simple rule that settled the matter in most cases but not always.

When we do such things as humans it might keep

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disputes to a minimum, but we see over and over in history that it is not the best way to choose a ruler. Instead of giving the ability to consider the circumstances of the nation, country, etc., and who would be a good leader or showed leadership ability that could take on the challenges of the day, it removes that from the possibilities. A man not of the king's family or one of the younger sons of a king might show great leadership ability, but if you've set down a rule you can't turn against that rule just anytime you please. These are the kinds of corners we humans paint ourselves into because we are small and limited but God has no such problems. I know some would point out all the democratic ways the world has for choosing a leader in our day and how they cure most of what I just covered about choosing leaders. However, we see on a daily basis how much even that system fails us greatly! This is why we pray God will have His hand on who our leaders are and when we don't feel our leaders are what we want we don't blame God for the fact humans have a free will to choose what they want. That said, the fact man is so small in his thoughts is why we are instructed to pray for those in leadership no matter who they are! (I Tim. 2:1-4)

My overall point in getting into all that is simply that if God is allowed to choose who our human leaders are we are far better off than anything we can come up with on our own. It is for that reason I point out the judges came from various tribes. God chose individuals willing and able to hear His voice and be used by Him to do what Israel needed. He did not just go by who humans might expect to be chosen. This would be shown in how the first king of Israel, Saul, was chosen as well as how David succeeded him in spite of being no relationship to Saul other than they both were Israelites. I'm afraid in saying all that I have jumped ahead to leave a question unanswered which is, why then did God begin a dynasty with David? The answer does not fit in the scope of our overview but I'll hit the high points here. First and most importantly, God was establishing a line within mankind from which The Messiah would come. Yes The Messiah would be of Israel and that helped a lot when it came/comes to the world at large; we all know The Messiah had to be a Jew. However, God wanted to make it even more specific than that for both the world at large as well as for the nation of Israel. This is why God made not just an earthly timeline covenant with David about his line ruling but an eternal one. God told David his dynasty would rule forever! (II Sam. 7:12-17) This was solidified in the fact The Messiah would be a son that came from David's line and that's exactly what Jesus was. (Matt. 1:18-21)

The second point I'll make is that God specifically told Samuel it was not Samuel the nation was rejecting when they demanded a king but it was God. (I Sam. 8:1-9) Since this was the truth God would show them who He would pick to be king by picking Saul. We all know Saul did not turn out to be a good king and this was God showing them how power corrupts. Saul was a good man, but being king ruined him in a way being a judge might not have. In a lot of ways, Saul was a warning that gave the nation their true last chance to, as a nation, call out to God to be their king instead of this insistence they have a human be king over them. God would also use the example of Saul, whom God replaced with David, to show God was the

only one who could rightfully declare who the king of Israel should be. Just as we are talking about here with the Judges, it did not matter to God what tribe or family the next king came from, the important thing was that God chose for the nation a man willing to walk with Him and gain the ability to lead in the ways of God. God would give Israel such a man in making David king, but even David had his faults which hurt certain individuals as well as the nation in various times and ways. Men are corruptible and that's just the truth.

Now, all that might seem to contradict the point of why God set a dynasty beginning with David, but that's just because in pointing out some of the things God showed the nation through all this, my second point may have gotten a little lost. The nation rejected God, not a man, in demanding a king. God would show them how difficult it was to get and keep a good man in the position even if God Himself was choosing who that man would be. This truth comes about because men can follow God at some points in their life and then choose to turn away. Rejecting God is what the nation was doing in wanting a human king and in the end, the door would be open for the people to choose their king. If you don't believe this point just look at what happened. Only David's son Solomon ruled after David's death before a majority of the nation rejected David's dynasty and appointed a different king over them. This is how we get that split between North and South in Israel. The northern kingdom would go through various dynasties like so often happens in a nation and God would maintain David's throne/dynasty in the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom would eventually fall and disappear as a nation but the southern kingdom, or what we call Judah, survived and is the reason we call all the people of the chosen nation "Jews" in our world today.

Because man is a freewilled being there is only so much God will do to force us into His perfect plan and ways. This is what we were talking about in our last segment and what we have ended up covering here some more. Men will choose their own king(s). That is just how men are, and once Israel rejected God as their king that's how it would be in Israel. However, all along the way God continued to work among and through the chosen nation. God has never left this world nor forsaken it no matter how much humans reject Him. God showed the ultimate example of this through Jesus' coming to this earth and being murdered on a cross as if He was a criminal! When He first established the nation God knew they would one day reject Him as their king. (Deut. 17:14-20) Where we are studying in the Book of Judges just shows us the progression of that truth coming to fruition. Thus, God would send judges like Tola when no specific reason to need a judge seemed to exist. In this we see God offering a better alternative to Israel having a true king. God was giving the nation judges to act in much the way a king would but with a couple of major differences. First off, judges did not take all the best in the nation in the form of taxation. How nice would that be? Second, which is what we have been discussing in truth here, God was the One Who picked the judges along with easily removing them and/or replacing them as He chose. This was a great thing God could do with judges which God knew the nation would not accept once they had a king, and that is a big part of the answer as to why God ever established a dynasty through David.

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we continued the story of Abraham's servant being in Mesopotamia to seek a wife for Isaac. In that segment we ended up only covering one verse due to all the things that verse can show us about how to act in faith. Abraham's servant moves quickly, not because that is always the way God wants us to move but because he knew in that situation it was the correct way to go about what he had been sent to accomplish. He knew this due to his faith which put him and kept him in step with God and His timing. In speaking about God's timing we also discussed the fact the Scripture tells us Jesus' return will be quick as well as soon, and those facts can seem to be in contradiction with the fact it has been so long since Jesus walked this earth. Thus, we talked about how God looks at time very differently than we do. We discussed how we often feel life is a way to get to an end and God wants us to think in the eternal ways He created us to live in. This is not simply because those who put their trust in The Lord will have eternal life, but almost more important to understand is the fact we, being given the Tree of Life, were created to think in these terms. The bottom line is that our thoughts need to be more like God's thoughts and our ways need to be more like God's ways. All this brought us through Genesis chapter 24 verse 33, and we are ready to begin 34 this time.

Verse 34 is where the servant begins to tell the story of his mission and reason for being here to the family. I made the statement in an earlier segment that Rebekah did not recount the tale of how she had met this servant in all its detail. However, the servant would do that in later verses so that the entire family could hear, not just the part Rebekah knew, but the entire thing. We are also told in that earlier moment that her brother Laban was present to witness his sister's excitement and words, but what we don't know is if all the other important family members were around to hear her story. If you recall we are told Rebekah ran to her mother's house, and that was so we could be sure this was not just the daughter of the correct man but of the correct woman God wanted the bloodline to come from in order to begin building the chosen nation. However, this also means we don't know where her father and other important to this situation people (if any) were. This moment we are at by verse 34 assures us everyone who had any interest in the business this servant had in Mesopotamia was present, because this meal was not just a celebration of the fact he had come but a reception, if you will, for the fact he was here.

One might wonder why it is important to keep that in mind or even consider that point. We all likely get the idea we need to be clear on the fact Rebekah's father be present to hear the servant's full story, but why possibly others? The answer to that is shown to us in other stories of the Bible as well as in the Law of Moses. As we go through various stories we find that important business is very often done at the gate of the city. This is due to the fact elders would gather there. This goes hand in hand with what we see happen even today when we see older

people gathering to, talk about the olden days. Younger people often take this as simply a way for older people to pass their time because if people are retired in one form or the other there is more time for such activities. However, with older ages also comes the lessening of energy within the body as well as stamina it takes to continue the kind of work one has done throughout their lives. This was especially true in more ancient times because the work most people had to do was very physically demanding. The fact their kind of work could lead people to die before they reached too old an age is why we have the old saying about dying or dropping in the harness! To pass away while at this physically demanding work was not uncommon and something some people, especially men, desired to do before they grew too old to be working in such a manner.

For those men who did live long enough to give up working, "in the harness," it was typical for them to gather at the gate of the city. This gave them purpose in a way that was not physically demanding but very much so needed. Most all these men had long life experience and with it, wisdom younger people do not have. Thus, they would serve as judges on local matters and in some cases very serious issues. This was very necessary in places where there was not an official government to take one's grievances to, and the other very important item this activity served is that it gave a way for business transactions to be recorded by witnesses. Today we like to put everything in writing, but in older days paper was not as readily available as it is today. There was also no real good place to keep such records and we see not too far back from our time this was true even in what is called developed countries. There is no end to the list of records that are lost due to things like the local government buildings burning down. Even in our day of digital record keeping with backups and the like, some records still do not survive for one reason or another in order to be referenced in the case of a dispute, and there in is the real concern. As much as companies, schools, and many other entities one might interact with may require proof of this or that, the real problem with losing records shows itself when there is a dispute over some transaction between parties that has been made or claimed to have been made.

This is really what we are talking about here. For all major transactions, and there might be no greater transaction in the time period we are discussing than that of a woman being given in marriage, there needed to be witnesses who could later vouch for the fact the agreement was made! This telling of the story of his journey that the servant tells in these verses may not be taking place at the gate of the city but no doubt the entire family was here and witness to the words, at the very least. At the better end of that thought is that neighbors or maybe more importantly trusted friends of various individuals may have been here as well. In any case the servant will tell his story in great detail, and the fact he did it was for the sake of being sure

all involved were clear on how this all came about and what he was asking. It may seem to us while reading this story that these verses are a redundancy. We might be asking the question of why we need to read through the servant's verbal telling of events we already read about as they were happening? However, that is the wrong way to see what we are reading. Like any good story the power of reading is the power to take you to places and times other than where and when you are or maybe ever have been. Just because the Bible is not meant to be a book for entertainment does not mean this same dynamic is untrue when it comes to Its stories. Yes, we read the events as they happened, but now we too get to be witnesses to the transaction this servant came to accomplish and how his mission brought him to this point! If one does not care then you do not care, but there is something here to be seen and learned from as once again I bring up the point this servant is representative of The Holy Ghost in the same way Isaac is of God The Son and Abraham is of God The Father.

Just about the biggest point in all this is the fact God speaks to us on our level. We humans are the oddest creatures full of so many faults and flaws it makes us wonder some days why God even bothers with us (at least it makes those who have humility before God experience such thoughts). We so very often seem to forget and/or never understand Who God is; how powerful He is; how above us He is! It is easy for us to give lip service to the idea we understand this but we turn around and take actions, living our lives as we do, showing we clearly do not get the point! Then we turn around and in other ways totally see God as so far above us He is unreachable, untouchable, etc. These two contradicting attitudes feed off each other in many ways. There is no shortage of times we actually live our lives without the concern for the fact God is watching and wanting to be by our side. Why? Because we feel He is so far away He can't possibly be mindful of little old us! We are truly children tossed about by every wave of thought and the thoughts of this world. (Eph. 4:14, James 1:6) We are such young immature beings, especially for being allowed a free will, we find it easy to be arrogant and afraid all in the same moment.

The truth of how we should conduct ourselves is not complicated it's just hard for us to pull off. We need to trust God and respect God as God. We need to learn more and more of Who God is, and with that our respect will grow. That said, the reason we are able to learn such things in order to do such things is because God has, since day one, came down to meet us at our level. He has in no way compromised His perfection and nature or His position as The Only True God of all that exists in order to do that, but He has done it. As believers we talk so much in our day and age about how Jesus came to this earth to be God with us and that's a truth. (Matt. 1:23) However, the almost laughable fact is that as powerful as we see that event as being, Jesus coming in the flesh to literally walk among us was only necessary because as much as God has come among us, as God, we still doubt Him! I know I've covered this before but it's just so true and so many do not see it that it makes me cringe at times. This is why I find myself going back to the first of Genesis over and over. We believe we are so special that we live in a time on the other side of Jesus' first appearing, but He is the God Who literally spoke everything into existence with the exception of us!

Humanity exists because God Himself touched the dirt of this very earth we walk upon and formed our physical being with His own hands. We exist because God Himself literally breathed the breath of life, very specifically, into Adam's nostrils and man became a living soul. (Gen. 2:7) With Eve being created using a part of Adam both male and female exist and many more living souls have and will exist in our universe. In spite of those facts Eve listened to the serpent's words because he was a physical being standing, yes standing, before her. (Gen. 3:13-14) She considered his words and took her actions on the basis it seemed logical in her mind at that point to doubt The All Powerful God Who created her. Then she convinced her husband who also acted as she had because the woman who had been made using a piece of him was standing physically with him and God was so far away. However, God was always there in some form because He is God! The fact they understood how much He is God is why in the aftermath of eating the fruit He told them not to, as they were scrambling around to find a way to cover their nakedness, they hid when they heard God in the garden. To them the "physical" proximity of God's voice scared them into the bushes. Need I go on through example after example to show the fact God has been God with us all along but we doubt His ability so much, even when He shows Himself as God, that we feel we have something so much more now that He finally came to the earth and walked with us as a man!

Now, before anyone believes I'm attempting to demean in any way the coming of The Messiah let me clear the air. I am not demeaning God, I am talking about the utter unbelievable level of disbelief we as humans have in God! Recently I have posed a question in my writings that I will repeat here. What makes more sense, that we accept God as real and The Only True God of the universe when He shows Himself as God (meaning powerful and so much more than we are) or when He appears as a man? The answer seems obvious and logical but humanity's history shows us that's not how it is. The final age of this earth is marked by God coming as a man, and one day He will return as a man to rule the way a man with great power would and no human before ever could. He will rule as a man for a time period before this all comes to a close because this is what we've needed and even after Jesus' first appearing still need, but why? The answer is that we are so focused on being flesh that only flesh will convince us!

With all that in our minds I point out that what the servant is doing here is exactly what is needed among men. The answer as to why we need to have it recorded for us in almost pain staking detail is the same reason God eventually had to enter the timeline in the form of a physical man. God wants us to be crystal clear on the facts of how this all unfolded in real time and He allows us to see the details even when many people would say the wording is redundant and unnecessary. Well, it might be unnecessary if one was writing a story for entertainment but again, that's not what the Bible is. The Bible is a serious account of man's history and how God has done far more than His part (as humans would normally measure what is expected) in order to show us He loves us and has ensured the truth of His Words and intent have never vanished from the face of this earth! If you've followed all I just covered there and paid attention you'll see how just in this writing I made a loop

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LII

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 continued our step back to talk about the fact history tells us the Roman Empire was a Christian empire in its latter time. This is all done so we might see why and how a "Christian" empire could both differ from the religion of the pagan barbarians to the north of Rome while at the same time be something those pagans wanted to rebuild after seeing how much the same it was to their own religion. What we really have been looking at is the way the religion of Christianity was built to be a universal religion, and this is something true Christianity was never about. God is willing to offer us a way to continue our existence with Him for the same purpose He originally created us, but He is not into the idea of bending what He opens salvation's door for in order to attract as many people as possible. As we look through the Bible we find God has always worked to make sure the knowledge of Him and His reason for creating us are never lost; that it never becomes something most people cannot find. This is why we say the door of salvation is open to all men and God said it is not His will that any perish. What an attempt to make Christianity a universal religion forgets is the second part of what God said when He said He was not willing that any perish, which is the fact He wants/needs us to come to repentance. (II Pet. 3:9)

Repentance is the key word there but this too has become a problem in our world. People falsely believe they can define what repentance is. Maybe a better way to say it is that the religious mind believes it can define what is necessary repentance for the sake of receiving salvation, and sadly that is the basis upon which most of what calls itself Christianity is built. The truth is that repentance, as in the words that tell us God wants us to come to repentance, is not an object. In other words, repentance is not a noun but a verb. Repentance is not something we do in our lives and then claim we are saved. Repentance is not a thing we make a part of our being and then, as a Christian, we simply maintain. Repentance is the action we take, continuously. When we first step our feet on the path that leads to salvation we are making a commitment to turn off of and from the broad path that leads to destruction. (Matt. 7:13-14) As we walk the path of salvation we find we have to continually repent which means turn from the ways we would normally do things in accordance to our own thinking or the thinking of men in general. This is how we stay on the path. This means a Christian's life is a life that is constantly yielding to the will of God. The difference between the truth and the religion is seen clearly in statements you hear people professing Christianity make.

When they are confronted with believers who do not believe in taking part in many activities of the world they will almost immediately judge such believers as "legalistic." They will point out there is no place God's Word says, thou shalt not

do this action or that action. Their argument is that if there is no direct rule against something then it must be alright to do or be involved in as a Christian and those who believe otherwise are making up rules God did not lay down. This, like the trick we talked about in last segment, seems to make sense at first glance. However, such thinking only makes sense if you are thinking in very legalistic terms and believe repentance is a noun and not a verb. True believers don't look for a line they don't want to cross in order to maintain their salvation. True believers understand, on at least some level, that we are not as yet saved so there is no line out there to be found. We each must do what the Bible tells us and that is to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. (Phil. 2:12) We fear God because we know He is our ultimate Judge. We fear our flesh because we know the works of the flesh bring death not life. (I Pet. 4:1-6) We tremble at how easy it is to get distracted from our walk in faith and end up off the narrow road that leads to salvation. The way we can keep ourselves from getting distracted is to continually repent of those things which can so easily beset us in order to get our eyes back on our faith in God. (Heb. 12:1)

Legalism is a way of thinking we need to be careful not to have in our lives, but it is not defined by how many rules one has or whether or not there is a thou shalt not in the Bible to backup all those rules. Legalism is what far too many who claim to be Christians are depending on getting them to heaven. The only difference between now and past generations of believers that many today would look back at and label as "legalistic," is the fact the past held many rules and today Christians hold few to none! All this relates to our look at how the religion of Christianity was built to be a universal religion and that view matters because the hope was that it could be the universal religion the world would finally follow, post the Tower of Babel. In other words, the religion of Christianity was built to be just another iteration of what was sought at the tower. This is why in talking about the progression of empires the king's dream in Daniel followed and which shows us the seven heads of the beast in Revelation, we discussed who they were as an empire but not so much about who they were religiously. In short, they were all baal worshipers so there is no real need to study their specific gods, etc. They worshiped many gods and those gods were forces within the creation and not The Creator Himself. Baal worship in theological terms is polytheism which is the worship of multiple gods. The change Christianity brought to the Roman Empire as it became "Christian," is that it changed the religion to what theological terms would say is monotheism. This is the worship of one god.

You might note that I did not capitalize the words "one" or "god" in that last sentence. The reason is that monotheism does not mean you necessarily worship The One True God. It only means you believe there is only one supreme power or being you would consider describing as god. Of course, when it comes to the religion of Christianity the claim is that one is worshipping

The One True God, but what we say with our mouth and do with our actions can be two totally different things! The other problem is that the religion is not really monotheistic in anything more than mouth service as well. This is where we get a bit back to looking at the Jews. The Jews of Jesus' day would easily be described as legalistic and people will often point out how Jesus rebuked them for that fact. However, the more important point to our discussion is that in looking at all the Jewish religious leaders had become by the time of Christ we see they still, if not more so than ever, totally believed the God they served was The One True God. Why is this important? Because we see in them a people established by God Himself; given a Law by God Himself; maintained by God Himself; and yet they still came to a place where they were not pleasing God by living in His ways. This they did without leaving the monotheistic belief system or forgetting God Himself. This is why I made the statement last time that the religion of Christianity does not get points for claiming to believe in The One True God. It does not get points for claiming to be of The One True God. Even Satan believes and yet he is the devil! (James 2:19-20) This is a nutshell way to see what I mean when I say the Roman empire had become a "Christian empire" by its later times, but that does not mean it was of God and therefore something pagans would want to totally reject.

This is why I point out, the Christian religion, especially the religion being followed by the Romans which made them a "Christian empire," can't even properly be called a monotheistic religion! Sorry to pick on Catholics over and over but we see this best in Catholicism. Catholicism believes it is a good thing to make graven images which are set up in their churches. This would be bad enough if it was just images of Jesus, but it does not even end there. Thus, all the elements of polytheism are seen when we see statues of Mary, Joseph, Peter, and the list goes on and on. If we overlook the graven image violation of this, there is the argument that one is still worshiping God when they pray to a statue of Jesus, but what about the others? The argument for all the other images is that they represent saints, the list of which is very long. Just like pagan worship of old (and some still today), talisman are also present in the form of amulets and the like which are often worn around one's neck. Instead of the image of the sun, moon, stars, etc. or some god that represents such things, there is a saint or an image meant to depict God Himself. In all these things we clearly see the worship or belief in multiple gods. You may believe God is the only God and the others only derive their power from God but that's splitting hairs. It's also something some pagan religions with multiple gods can claim. Thus, the point is, you believe saints, angels, and the like are agents you can pray to and/or depend upon to watch over you and this attributes God like power to them. In saying that I don't mean to speak to the simple idea they have power we in the land of the living do not, but in that they are out there as agents of God making decisions about how to care for you, protect you, guide you, etc. If you don't think that's a god in the same way many false gods the world believes in are, you don't know much about false gods. Baal worship is the worship of elements that have real and observable power in our world, and they certainly derive their power from God for He created all things. However, it is not correct to pray to them and through your adoration of them, worship them, so why would it be acceptable to pray to saints, angels, and the like?

Now, all this may seem like we've totally lost track of the subject at hand, but it is my hope that in doing some of these quick flybys of various things in the Christian religion we can see more and more how the religion is very much the same as what all pagans worship. The point the Jewish religious leaders showed us well is that men who claim to serve God can easily believe they possess the power to dictate a lot of things with the excuse they act as God's agents on this earth. This is a lot of what is leaned upon when people who claim to be Christians pray to saints. Saints are nothing more than people who have already died whom the church believes had/have gained power to act as agents of God and can do so after their death. It is the belief these dead believers have power to interact in our timeline events day by day and that's why people put trust in their protection, guidance, etc. Protection, guidance and such things are all the same things pagans seek from their gods. So all we've done is left pagan false gods in order to begin worshipping "Christian" false gods. To round out the point for the multitude of Christians out there who would say, I've never prayed to or believed in saints and such, there is a deeper, underlying issue we need to see in all this. Many who claim to be Christians want to be Christians because they want these same things whether they believe in saints or not. Wanting God's protection and certainly His guidance is not a bad thing but we need to stop and ask ourselves what we're really seeking because many people want what God can do for us, in the here and now as well as into eternity, but we don't really want God Himself!

Wanting God, or maybe the better way to say it is to say, yielding to God as God in our lives is a very different thing than just wanting what He can give us. Yielding to God as God requires us to let go of (repent) many things most people don't want to give up in this life/world and life/world to come. This is why the Bible tells us the things of this world are at enmity with God, and this means Christianity cannot be the universal religion. (James 4:4) To be universal it would have to include all the elements man wants. Pagan religions do this well and that's why we call them pagan, but the bottom line is, you can't just Christianize pagan thoughts and desires expecting God to accept such things on the basis more people will adhere! However, that is what the religion of Christianity has done and for centuries continued to do; both Catholics as well as Protestants. This is the reasons the pagan barbarians from the North country would destroy the Romans and seek to rebuild what they had torn down. They would even begin to build what was to them the world of Christianity, and Lord willing we will come back around to that in this study later on. However, what we need to do now is take a step all the way back to see at least the basic history of how and when the Roman Empire became "Christian" so we may follow all this into why the barbarians did what they eventually did.

If I'm not mistaken, the last specific emperor we spoke of in this study was Hadrian, and one interesting thing about Hadrian in relationship to our look at the North's barbarians is that Hadrian was the emperor who wanted to focus on defensible borders. This was not to say the borders wouldn't continue to get pushed further and further out as Rome continued to desire expansion but that once those expansions were made a true line would be drawn between Roman and non-Roman. That last statement is an important thought and way to see what began to happen among the Romans and to the Romans as we move forward. It is also why one of the specific things Hadrian is

known for is the building of "Hadrian's Wall." This was a wall built in the Roman Province of Britannia. Britannia is a name or word that sounds familiar to a lot of us today because we know of the country named Great Britain or what many simply call Britain or England. The Romans had moved all the way out and up to begin swallowing up the islands that lay off the coast of what we would call mainland Europe today; the most prominent island being that of Britain. There Hadrian would literally establish a line between Roman and non-Roman!

Hadrian's Wall ran 73 miles (117.5 km) to reach from one coast to the other across the width (east to west) of Britain. Today what is left of that wall is credited as being the largest example of Roman architecture in Britain. It was begun in 122 A.D. and what you probably have already guessed if you didn't already know it, the wall was built to defend that flank of the Roman Empire from the troublesome barbarians in the "unsettled" north of the Britannia region. This northern area beyond their wall, the Romans called Caledonia and that covered most of what we know as Scotland today. This was good for Rome in the short term but bad for it in the long term. Actions such as these were a solid way of taking possession of land people more native to it felt the empire had no right to take. These kinds of moves made sense to an empire in the same way they make sense in a world like today where nations have clearly staked out borders, but to a very agriculturally based native people who had little to no sense of what it meant to be a nation beyond the idea of family and clans, such a move simply meant all resources to the south of the wall were cut off to them by a people who did not have a right of any kind to them. This was a very frightening thing to such people and one should be able to see how, on the part of the barbarians, concern for their survival was as much a part of what caused them to push back against the Romans as any other feelings they might have had.

If we attempt a brief walk forward through Roman history in order to lead up to the time of its collapse, we see how Rome's end didn't happen overnight, and while Rome had a durability the Greeks did not possess (as we talked about in our last segment), the Greek way of attempting to win people over by changing their culture would probably have worked a bit better among the barbarians than the brute force the Romans went at them with. These kinds of subjects are what make me write or want to write pages that speak to how hard the devil, as well as many men, attempted to reign humanity into one group, but we see the diversity God created in humanity and preserved in confounding our language is always pushing back this idea. What we need to see is that when it comes to the barbarians, unlike other powers that had taken imperial control from their predecessor, the barbarians were not even thinking imperial thoughts. They only wanted to survive and if possible make life easier for their existence. That's why I point out the Romans taking actions such as building a wall was not really understood in any terms by these barbarians other than how it threatened their survival. Rome just kept pushing further and further and something had to be done to stop it. This was necessary to such a great degree it was worth dying in the trying if they must. This is one of the first main points in what made the transition between one power to another truly unique when it comes to talking about the transition from Rome to the barbarians who would build Europe!

It is also a large part of why the collapse of the Roman Empire was looked at as a setback which is a point we have discussed before. Rome's collapse was the end of imperialistic levels of power existing in the world; a level of power the world has argued long and hard over in our modern age as to who should hold it. However, that last statement is getting way ahead of ourselves. Getting back to Hadrian, the building of a wall and general concern for the borders of the empire was only part of an overall plan Hadrian was focused on or is known for. If you remember or look back into previous segments of this study you know we talked about how Hadrian is credited with consolidating the empire both culturally as well as its territory. We can interpret this as one desires but the thought that comes to my mind is that Hadrian knew the empire had over extended itself a bit too much. It was becoming apparent to Hadrian the empire had taken in more territory than it was able to defend and that fact did play a factor in the end as to why Rome was not able to defend itself against a not so rising imperial power as the barbarians. Hadrian also understood on some level that the Tower of Babel effect (as I like to call it) was beginning to be a problem. It was one thing to hold the high Roman culture and ideals in Rome and even for much of the territory surrounding it, but it was another for it to be respected and practiced in more of the outlying areas of the empire.

A point we clearly see when it comes to the time of the Greeks is that culture was becoming everything. I say it that way because again when we look at why the Babylonians were the head of gold, we see Daniel tell the king, "...Thou art this head of gold..." Daniel 2:38 In that time the empire was not as much the power as the king at its head! Who cared what cultures you took in or how much or little they took on of yours! The king was the undisputed ruler and power in the world. That begins to change with the Medes and Persians. That's why the animal Daniel sees in his vision that represents them was lifted up on one side but that emphasizes all the more how much the animal had two sides. (Dan. 7:5) In spite of who was stronger at any given point, both the Medes and the Persians shared power, meaning no matter who the king was, he was not going to have the power the Babylonian king had. All that being true, we still see in the story of Esther that culture was not a big push. The fact there was various people of various cultures mingled in and around the empire was not really a concern. The only concern that arose at the time was that there was an odd culture, the Jews, which an evil man convinced the king needed to be put down because they were a threat to the king's power and with that the imperial power.

These kinds of truths are why we can talk about things the Babylonians did but we don't have much to go on when it comes to their culture. The same is true of the Medes and Persians and there are still people who carry the name Persians today. This all changes when we speak of the next imperial power which was the Greeks. It's true that the Greek Empire started with a powerful king but immediately upon his death we see how much there was no loyalty or obligation in the minds of the Greek people that they follow a singular ruler. In ways even the later Romans could not hope to match, the Greeks could all be Greek with no argument while the empire was divided into the hands of four main rulers. This would shortly boil down to two main factions of Greeks, but the Greeks were already very democratic in their thinking which was a serious shift from the empires that preceded it. This is why I made the statement that

as one studies it and thinks upon it the metals used in the statue of the king's dream were perfect as all God's ways are perfect. Brass is not as beautiful as gold but it sure is a lot harder! This is true even compared to silver. Brass can take a beating and still gleam in the sunlight or be easily polished back up to do so. Brass is also resistant to corrosion meaning it can take being in and washed over by fluids such as water and many others. These are all perfect symbols of the Greek culture and it's why we still see Greek culture, even more so than Roman culture, in the world that surrounds us today. Thus, I repeat that by the time of the Greek empire culture was becoming or had become everything. Hadrian saw this, and as much as Rome believed a more democratic system was the right way to go about things, which in turn meant individuals meant more, Hadrian believed Rome could no longer afford to be some mixture of various people with multiple cultures.

This is why we came to talk about Hadrian's cultural push at the time in this study that led us to the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Hadrian was the man who decided it was time to turn greatly to the Greek way of thinking but there was a problem when it came to both the Jews as well as the barbarians! The problem with the Jews we have looked at and should understand very well that it had to do with Hadrian attempting to force culture on the Jews which would require them to abandon the Laws of God. This the Jews would not do and the last of the three major wars the Jews fought with Rome would begin. However, when it came to the barbarians just the opposite problem existed. I said above that the Romans might have had more success with the barbarians if they had approached them with the Greek culture and now I may seem to be contradicting myself. However, I assure you I am not so allow me to explain. When the Greeks were doing the things they did which resulted in the desecration of the temple and the eventual rededication of the temple which became the celebration of Hanukkah for the Jews, the Greeks were attempting to spread their culture as a way to spread their empire. In many ways the Greek culture was their empire! This meant they wanted to influence as many other cultures as they could and persuade them to become Greek, even if that was only a little at a time. When it came to the Jews, they were internal to the empire and considered troublesome. Their push back against this cultural war caused the Greeks to become aggressive to the point they began outlawing Jewish things. This was not something so necessary to do among other people because other cultures melded quite well and simply became Hellenistic with ease as time went on.

What I meant with my statement concerning the barbarians is that this same thinking might have won the barbarians over a little at a time as well. Mind you, it would have been a steeper climb because as we have talked about the barbarian culture was harsh but it could have worked. So the question is, why did Hadrian have so much trouble since he was the one pushing to make Rome a great Hellenistic world? The answer is exactly that. He wanted Rome to be Hellenistic and simply saw the barbarians, as well, barbaric! Hadrian's concern about strong borders speaks to what I'm trying to say here. Hadrian in a sense had abandon the old empire idea. When it comes to how the Babylonians fell to the Medes and Persians, we see it was swift. This is due to the fact there was no such thing as a wall which could defend the empire. This was true because the idea of these empires was that they not only controlled the world

but that they were the world! The idea was that whether in truth or not, the world outside of what we historically see as their borders, actually acknowledged them as their rulers. Of course, the fact very powerful people existed in all cases, specifically ones that would eventually overthrow them, who did not consider the empire their ruler, is the reason the Babylonian king was shocked when the Medes and Persians came. There was no massive army standing in their way and certainly not a wall!

In spite of this the Medes and Persians lived with this same arrogant thought, and while it was apparent the Greeks were a threat to them they were totally unprepared for the firestorm Alexander the Great would bring upon them as he swept in the age of the Greeks. The Greeks saw the threat but believed their culture could win all and it worked so well on so many levels it's frightening to look at how on their way to a true world empire they might have been! However, the Tower of Babel effect would have its way as God intended and there would be a great power in the Romans who might have thought the Greek culture was pretty grand but still wanted to hold the scepter. So once again, we're around to that point of why we ended up with what we call a Greco-Roman culture to study in our modern world. In truth, what Hadrian was attempting to put in place for the empire was very much a Greco-Roman culture because as much as he revered the Greek culture he was a Roman at heart, and Rome had some pretty deep rooted thoughts the Greek culture was not going to wash away from their minds.

Rome was an empire of laws, and for the individual what that made monumentally important is that you could be a Roman citizen! You could be Greek in culture but to be a Roman citizen was something that still meant more than culture ever could. This was the thought pattern of the Romans and the point they wished to spread. They could put up with a certain amount of differing cultures within their empire, including the Jews, but that is because it was clear in Roman law who was in the Roman empire and who was truly of Rome! Hadrian's attempt to Hellenize the empire was exactly that. He would consolidate the empire culturally using Hellenistic ways. He would build walls and become more forceful than the Greeks on the issue of people within the Roman empire being Greco-Romans. This put the Jews in his cross hairs while it excluded the barbarians in a way people outside of the empires had never been previously. It actually began making the Roman empire less of an inviting thing than even it had ever been. If one's dream was to one day be a citizen of the great Roman world you not only need to be Hellenistic to please your emperor but to even have a shot more and more you needed to be born and raised inside the Roman empire. This was just one more way in which Hadrian's actions alienated the barbarians of the North. They were already not a people the Romans respected in any way, and thus the name barbarian was used to describe them. Now they were also becoming walled off from Rome both literally and culturally!

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

that caused me to repeat the Bible is not written for entertainment. However, the first time I said it was to compare the similarity in the way the Bible is written and what happens in entertainment which is to bring you into the story and be in the moment. The second time was to point out more emphatically how much the Bible is a serious account of history and not strictly entertainment. This is what I mean when I say God speaks to us on our level, but we are such shifting sand in our emotions we still accuse or at least wonder why God does things such as what some would call redundancy here in these verses.

If God wrote an account that was simply focused on entertaining us so as many people as possible would be drawn to read the Bible, there would be that many more claiming the Bible was nothing but foolish tales from the past. I say "that many more" because there are already people who believe that. On the other hand, if God had not written the Bible with some similarity to the way entertainment is written we would feel like we were reading a history text book, which most people find daunting to get through while in school and certainly don't want to take the time to read when they don't feel pressured. Thus, God wrote the Bible with just the right balance between making it something we can all relate to on a human level as well as look at in technical detail and study for the pure academics of it all. Of course, there will always be people on one side of the argument or the other who don't feel the Bible is balanced or that the very fact it is written with that balance hurts its credibility but again, that just speaks to the fact there is only so much that can be done as God reaches out to us as freewilled beings. God is able to bring the messages we need to hear into our hearts in exactly the way we can see it best if we'll let Him. The problem is that most people do not walk in faith and even many who claim to will still not allow Him the time. For that reason God has put the physical book we know as the Bible out into the world so all of us have that physical thing we can look into without having to make the slightest commitment to God. This is how much He has maintained our free will and how much He loved us before we loved Him. (1 Jn. 4:19-21)

Now getting back to the details of the story, in verse 34 the servant starts with the most basic of facts, and that's the confirmation that he is a servant of Abraham. This is a small fact but one that when we miss it we do not see how much the Hebrew Bible tells us the story of the same God that we see in the New Testament. While this servant is representative of The Holy Ghost and not Jesus, we know that both Jesus and The Holy Ghost stand in the same relationship to The Father. Jesus repeated over and over the fact He was here on this earth to do the work of His Father and to teach us to do the same. The Holy Spirit is here to do the same by reminding us of Jesus' example. Abraham is representative of God The Father and this servant makes it clear he is here to do the work of Abraham. In this we see the reason God used the illustration of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to help us understand His (God's) nature as well as our own which is created in His image. (Gen. 1:27)

In verse 35 we find the servant goes over details concerning how God had blessed Abraham greatly, and in this we need to remember this family did not know much of what

became of Abraham after he left Mesopotamia. Again, we are talking about a time of little to no communication over long distances and what little there might be was mostly what we would call secondhand; the reliability of which could be questioned. Maybe they had and maybe they had not heard how Abraham was doing in the strange land God called him to, but this servant was both a firsthand witness to the truth as well as living proof Abraham had done well. It's also good to note the servant informs them God had not just blessed Abraham greatly but He had made Abraham great. To be blessed can come in very different forms, especially for us today! For some people being great is rising to powerful positions in something like government or an industry. For some it's the money they make by being there. For some just having a comfortable life no matter how little they have is what makes them happy and content. The reason(s) people consider themselves blessed or not blessed can also have to do with what you have to compare it to. In other words, the background you come from can greatly affect how you see where you are today.

In the day and age of Abraham it might have been a bit easier to define what it meant to say someone had become great, so this wording speaks to both that time as well as ours. The servant's description is that Abraham has all the things important to an agricultural mind in that he has good flocks and herds. Abraham also has things important to the wealthy-minded individuals in that he has gold and silver worth mentioning. Finally Abraham has all the things a great house would have. He has both male and female servants, and in this reference we need to understand that while we might see these individuals as slaves that's not necessarily the case. Today people work their jobs and come home to use the money to pay the bills it takes to have a home. Back in the days of Abraham and the world that existed then one could be very fortunate to have a home as part of a great house. This might make you a manservant or maidservant, but if you were part of a good man's house you were blessed to have such a life in ways many people who would find it insulting to be considered a servant of any kind today can't imagine having.

Verse 36 is where the servant gets to the real point of him being here and that is the fact Abraham had a son and not just any son. Once again, there's that point we keep coming back to in studying this family; the son he speaks of is a son through Sarah! We do well here to keep in mind it was not uncommon for a man, especially of great wealth, to have more than one wife and have children by them. Thus, it's important they know the son the servant speaks of was birthed by the woman they knew as Abraham's wife before Terah took Abraham and Lot to leave Mesopotamia. While it might not have been as big a deal to them back in those days as it is to us today, the servant also points out that Isaac is more in the age range of their daughter Rebekah. While we can't say for sure what Rebekah's age is at this point it's pretty clear from the way the generations in the family lay out that her and Laban both are more in the same generational age as Isaac. As I said this might not matter so much to people of their day but the servant points out Sarah had Isaac in her old age. This makes Isaac younger than they might have expected Abraham's son to be, and when I say that I mean Abraham's oldest son. This being the first time anyone had returned from Canaan to seek out a

wife for any family of Abraham's I'm sure there was an assumption he did not have an older son who was simply given a wife from among the daughters of Canaan. If it wasn't important for an older son why would it be important enough to send the servant for the younger son? Of course, there could be some explanations for that such as what we see Esau do in taking women of Canaan for wives while Jacob ends up here, but in any case the really important point is made by the servant. Isaac is the son who will inherit everything Abraham owns and is. Thus, it was important to Abraham that Isaac's wife be of the right people and family.

That point brings us directly to the words of verse 37. The servant tells them how Abraham made him swear he would not take a wife for Isaac that was of the Canaanites. This the servant points out for multiple reasons. First, he wants them to know how serious his purpose for being here is. Isaac needs a wife from this family he is speaking to! Second, he wants them to know such a thing was not just his thoughts as Abraham's head servant. You'll remember we talked about early on in this story that such a man might get slated with the job of finding a wife for the son should something happen to both his parents. Sarah was already dead and the servant knew the clock might be ticking down to Abraham as well. However, this servant was here because Abraham had expressly forbid him from considering a Canaanite wife for Isaac. A third point I'll make here as to why it's important he point this out has to do with where we started this segment which has to do with witnesses. I don't think there is any reason to surmise Abraham might mistrust this servant and believe the woman he came back with was not from the right family, but the more witnesses there were to this fact the better. Abraham knew what he had demanded of the servant and the servant certainly knew. Now the family in Mesopotamia knew Abraham had made the servant swear but most importantly, Rebekah now knew how important she was to God's plan!

To further that thought we go on to verse 38 where the servant gives the fact that emphasizes how much not just any woman outside Canaan would do. It is here the servant is clear on the fact Abraham had instructed him on specifically where Isaac's wife should come from and it was from this family he was speaking to. In all these details we see the importance of this all being recounted for us. We get to see how much the members of this family are in no way oblivious to the reason the servant has come all this way after not having heard a thing from Abraham in all these years. In spite of the fact God had far removed Abraham to this distant land, this core family in Mesopotamia was still a necessary part of what God was doing and planning. We see this again when Jacob ends up here later on. The servant is so desirous this family understand all these facts he even goes on in verse 39 to point out he asked Abraham what he should do if no woman of the family would go with him. This had to peak Rebekah's interest and she no doubt was very interested to hear the servant tell Abraham's response to this question. Then we see in verse 40 another truth and that is just how much Abraham was speaking almost directly to Rebekah in his answer to the servant. Read those

words just as the servant puts them in that verse while thinking of yourself as sitting there in Rebekah's shoes hearing all this!

Abraham said The Lord that he walked with and Who walked with him would send His angel out in front of the servant to prepare this all to happen. In verse 41 the servant goes on to explain how Abraham said the servant would be released from his oath if the woman did not come, but that was speaking to the servant. It was also speaking to Rebekah's family, specifically the men of her family who had the cultural right to keep Rebekah from going. However, from where Rebekah was sitting it had to be clear Abraham had essentially prophesied that she would be prepared. If the angel was going out ahead of the servant and here they sat with the servant, it meant Rebekah was prepared. Can you just imagine hearing those words? Now do you see how much the excitement Rebekah almost instinctively had toward the servant when she first met him means? Her excitement was not just her native reaction. She had been prepared by the angel of God whom Abraham spoke of before this servant had left Canaan! Now, I believe I made reference to this once before in this story but is this not once again something that mirrors in it's relationship to the fact John leapt in his mother's womb at just the sound of Mary's voice? It was not the voice of Jesus Himself that John leapt at, for Jesus was in Mary's womb. No, it was just the fact Mary, the one who carried Jesus in her womb, was in near proximity! John, still being just a child in Elisabeth's womb, was joyed to the point of leaping and his mother was filled with The Holy Ghost and began to prophesy of the good things God had done! (Luke 1:39-56) Being a part of God's plan is exciting for those who love The Lord!

The servant would go on to tell the part of the story that happened once he got to Mesopotamia; specifically the well where he met Rebekah. This means he's getting closer to the parts of the story Rebekah already lived firsthand, but she still did not know the details of what the servant had prayed as she was coming to the well and how tight the timing was. As amazing as the previous part of the story had to be for Rebekah, hearing the parts he had yet to cover would certainly fill her mind with the truth that all she had been feeling in this situation was of God. God called Abraham out of Mesopotamia in part to get Abraham away from people who were not serving God as He would want them to but that by no means, means there were not people there who loved The Lord. God had taken Abraham far away into another land where a majority of people certainly were not serving God as they should, but God did it to prepare Abraham to be the father of the chosen nation. Now, through the words of this servant Rebekah was coming to understand how much she was receiving her calling to join that purpose. It's an understanding she most likely had felt for some time, if not all her life, but now was the moment and it would be up to her to answer the call of God for her life!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

In so many ways, this time period we are passing through in Judges is showing us not that Israel needed a king but that God gave the nation every alternative there was to having a human king. This latter part of the Book of Judges is not just a transitional period from not having a king to having one, it's a system in and of itself that could have worked if Israel would have allowed it to. They would not have a king as other nations had a king because they would have a much better system than having a king. If that's not God's mercy and grace I don't know what is! To help Israel see that point we find Tola actually lived in the typical place where power was held in Israel. Once again, it was that central place of Mount Ephraim. Tola did not live in Shechem but he lived in the same general vicinity, and this put him close to where the tabernacle stood in Shiloh and where all Israel was to gather when the time came during the year they were to do so according to the Law. For twenty-three years Tola would sit as a judge in Israel and upon his death he would be buried there in his home town of Shamir.

The next judge was a man named Jair and we don't know what tribe he is from specifically but he lived in Gilead. This means he was probably of either the tribe of Manasseh or Gad which would once again give us a judge succeeding a judge who was from a different tribe. Jair did not live in Mount Ephraim but he still lived in that central area of Israel from north to south. The real difference in his geographical location among the nation is that he was on the east side of Jordan in Gilead. Now, I'm not attempting to make the argument here that judges had to or needed to live in this central area of Israel or that it was where God preferred them to be. I'm simply saying this was the region where Shiloh and thus, the tabernacle was, and it's where Joshua lived the remainder of his life. Now, these two judges which God offered for no other apparent reason than to give Israel a man to look to in the same way they would a king, fit all the human definitions that one would logically look for. In other words, they did not come from some far fringe of the nation where control of the land was in question and/or people were already doing what later develops the people we call the Samaritans in the New Testament, which was intermarry with people who were not of Israel. Both these judges lived their lives in the inner core of Israel and were available to the entire nation.

Also, if we want to look at how judges started acting somewhat king like, we do not have to just look back at Gideon who had a ton of children, even using concubines to do so in the same way a king would. We can look at Jair who had thirty sons, and we are told all thirty of these sons rode on donkey colts. Most Christians, or people familiar with Christian tradition, have burned into their minds from their earliest days the scene of Jesus' parents taking their trip to Bethlehem. Joseph is on foot leading the donkey Mary is riding on. This is not just because they were too poor to have more than one donkey, it's because donkeys are pack animals. Unlike horses, rare is the donkey that one can ride on and control at the same time if you want to get somewhere. Maybe for some very short distances, especially if it's heading from where you are back to where the donkey wants to be, like their food bin, one can ride a donkey, but most of the time a donkey has to be led to get them and their cargo anywhere. What this means is that when

we are told these thirty sons rode young donkeys we are talking about men who probably had servants that led the donkeys so the sons would not have to walk. It's like we think of when someone is wealthy today and has a nice car and someone to drive them around so they can just relax or do other things during the journey.

The other aspect of these sons all having this kind of transportation available to them is the fact donkeys were not cheap! Donkeys were very useful animals and still are in some parts of the world today, especially for certain jobs. Anytime an animal is of any size it means they do not breed in great numbers. The gestation period for the female is going to be longer for larger animals and multiple births are far more rare. Even when you do have them, something other than twins are exceptionally rare. With so many good uses for donkeys in those days, to have one just to ride around on in the lap of luxury was saying something but that's what this judge's sons were doing. We are also told they lived in thirty cities, which is not a way of telling us they lived all across Israel. These were likely cities they each founded or their father did and they were likely in close proximity. I say they were probably close together because the name given to the thirty cities means, "Jair's Villages." This doesn't mean they were necessarily all in one clump like suburbs of each other but it does speak to the extensive possessions their father had or obtained in Gilead. We are not given any indication concerning where this man received his wealth but there is certainly no complaints mentioned here about him taxing as a king would to obtain it. If he received this wealth from the people of Israel for being a judge it was out of respect for him. Another possibility is that Jair was just a very wise man who not only served as a judge but knew how to go about his business dealings. If that is the case he would be an example of a man who in spite of his riches was able to be used of God, and that is about the rarest trait of all! (Matt. 19:23-24)

Jair would judge Israel for twenty-two years and when he died he was buried much like Tola which is to say in his home town. That town was called Camon in Gilead. Between Tola and Jair Israel enjoyed some forty-five years of having a known judge to lead them. What is important about this time is again the fact there was nothing such as an invasion to cause God to rise these men up. All indications are that this was a relatively peaceful time in Israel which only God can be given credit for. Like having a king, people from the outside might have feared to attack Israel while Gideon was still alive and once he was gone there was Abimelech which for all his flaws could have been said to bring reservations to the minds of would-be invaders. However, Abimelech killed all the other sons of Gideon save the youngest and there is no mention of him becoming a leader of any sort. It's doubtful people on the outside of Israel, as well as many on the inside, even knew who he was much less feared his ability to lead men in battle. Thus, all signs point to God giving Israel peace during this time with not even a man as a figurehead king to accomplish it. This speaks again to what we've been talking about when it comes to God offering Israel this other option of having a man in the role of a leader or ruler without all the disadvantages of having a king. Through these judges God simply showed Israel He could give them peace.

That last point is very important to couple with another point and that's the fact time was passing. We sometimes get to reading and/or studying these events and forget that generations in Israel are passing. This means the generations that knew the peace God had given the nation in earlier years were in the grave, and with all the events Judges shows us up to this point it would not seem there could be a generation in Israel that knew nothing but peace for quite some time. The stories of these two judges may seem like a simple honorable mention kind of thing, but we are once again looking at one of those moments where what is not told to us speaks as loudly as anything that is. As we step our way up to the generation in Israel who would demand a king we must be careful not to just rush past these couple of stories, and instead grasp the importance of how God giving peace at this time means rest and peace were not just some ancient memory of times long ago in Israel.

Sadly, we see over and over again how God granting us peace often leads to indifference on the part of humans. We truly take peace for granted when God gives it to us, and it appears by what we read next that is what happened to Israel. After the death of Jair we are not just told that once again Israel turned from God and needed a rude awakening. Next we are given a list of false gods and religious practices Israel indulged in and took on. We are told they turned to baal worship as most all false religion is, but we are also told of a specific goddess and other religious practices belonging to cultures who lived around Israel but were not of Israel which they took on. It's not amazing Israel borrowed from other people so much as the fact they borrowed from so many! The reason we can refer to the gods of this people and that people is that people as a group usually take on a primary religion. It's almost like a cultural must be thing since the Tower of Babel. This nature of people was one of the things God was attempting to use in setting up a chosen nation. There could be multiple nations in the world with multiple religious systems but one nation, as a nation, would have as their religious system the worship of The One True God.

In the end result of history this worked. Jews are known as the people who serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It's an inescapable historical fact no matter how many or few Jews actually practice the religion today. Thus, it worked, but when we look into the archaeological records of the Holy Land, there is a lot of ammunition people like to use to say Israel was nothing special in one form or another. The argument is anything from saying the Bible's record of who the Jews are and were is not supported by the archaeological record to the argument that Israel never existed as a nation at all! These arguments are based on the fact there is a lot of evidence the Canaanites and many other people the Bible speaks of did exist and in the area the Bible says they did. If you ask how they know this people and that people existed as a group the answer is, they find religious artifacts belonging to those people. Anything from temples and other religious structures to the actual graven images they worshiped. Inscriptions found on many items just give all the more clarification on who we are

looking at when asking who produced and left behind these artifacts.

These are the kind of items archaeologists expect to find in abundance when it comes to Israel if the Bible's stories are true, but the evidence for Israel as anything more than another Canaanite people is hard to come by when one considers how long Israel lived on and controlled this land. So should that give us reason to doubt the Bible's stories? Some would say emphatically yes but they obviously don't know the Bible's stories well, if at all. The actual answer is profoundly no! This kind of finding by archaeology greatly supports what the Bible tells us over and over. Israel failed to serve God and very often took on the worship of false gods belonging to surrounding people. Israel very often took up the worship of gods the Canaanites worshiped which astonishingly are a people Israel should have utterly destroyed! What it shows us is two main things. First, Israel really was a clean slate when God brought them out of Egypt. They had no ancient culture to draw upon in order to develop their own unique religious system other than the fact their forefathers had served The One True God. Thus, there was no unique pagan culture for Israel to leave behind and us find today. Second, even as many centuries passed, God's Law and actions in preserving Israel did not allow them to develop a solid pagan system. The only system in any way unique to Israel was the one God gave them!

In spite of how often Israel turned from the Law of God, the best they ever came up with was to borrow false gods and religious practices from other cultures, and one more note on that thought is that Israel took on neighboring false religion so readily they contributed to the finds attributed to other cultures and people we know existed in the region. However, before we put too much weight in the thought Israel followed God's Law in physical practice so little there is not much left to find, we need to consider one key fact we see clearly when looking at God's Law. God's Law prohibited Israel from making graven images and most of the religious items produced by the Law were and would be concentrated mostly in one spot. This means at the tabernacle and later temple. No matter how long Israel existed and thrived, there was never going to be a ton of items left to find which told us they were following God's Law. What there was meant to be was an ancient nation living on their land which many people would be astonished to learn still followed customs and a religious system they had maintained for millennia. That did not happen because Israel kept doing what we are studying here and eventually had to leave their land in order to maintain the more important evidence. The more important evidence the Bible is true is the fact the people once known as the nation of Israel exist today in the people we call Jews and this is in spite of all they have done to themselves as well as the attacks the world has constantly hurled at them!

Let's stay in God's Word!

