



Shaqah

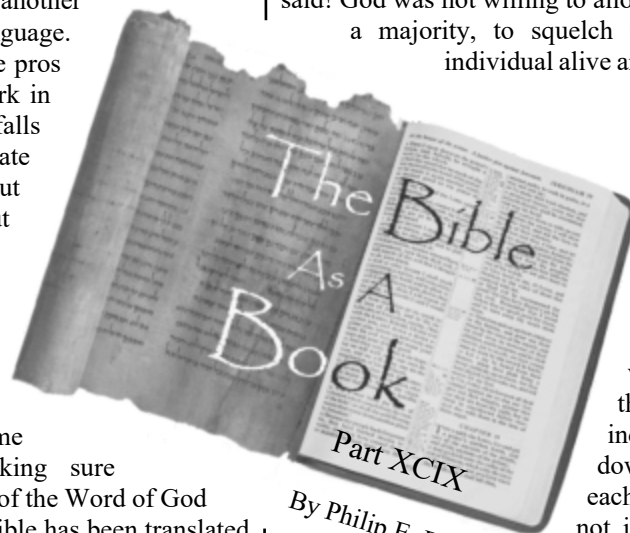
שפדאן

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

Last time we continued our introduction to the Book of I Samuel and were talking very specifically about why the Book of Samuel is divided into a first and second book in the Christian arrangement of the Bible which is not true of the Hebrew arrangement. In doing that we continued the discussion about how the people of the chosen nation had eventually come to a place where they were quickly giving up their knowledge of the Hebrew language which was necessary to understand the Word of God for themselves. This then led into a discussion about the debate the leaders of the nation were forced into which concerned the question of if the Hebrew Bible should or should not be translated into another language; in particular the Greek language. Thus, last time we talked a lot about the pros and cons of doing Bible translation work in the first place as well as some of the pitfalls one runs into when attempting to translate God's Word. In the end we talked about how an individual should go about choosing for themselves what translation to study due to the fact the really hardcore answer is to learn enough Hebrew to read the most original texts. Because that answer was not at issue at the time the Jews were debating the subject, nor is it in our time today, the practical answer to making sure individuals could/can obtain knowledge of the Word of God for themselves, we are very aware the Bible has been translated into many languages over time. What we want to look at in this segment is not so much the continual debate we could have as to if this is a good thing or not as much as the historical facts of how this finally did begin to happen.

For all we have covered about the debate among the Jewish religious leaders one might still think the subject irrelevant when looking at how the Hebrew Bible came to be translated into another language. This due in so many ways to the fact the debate was taken out of the religious leader's hands. However, before we dive deeper into that subject I want to address that what we have covered is of importance. First off, one needs to appreciate that the Hebrew Bible wasn't just one day translated into another language for no good reason. At one point I touched on the fact God has been using the events among

men since almost day one to ensure people have the ability to find and follow Him. This means there are a whole lot of things which have happened in certain ways that are not the perfect way and will of God but which God did affect in order to be sure things didn't move in only the will of certain human individuals. That is really a key point to keep in mind through the study of the entire Bible. People don't often see the interactions of God as being for that reason, and perhaps it's something I should point out more. However, it is why we talk so much about what happened at the Tower of Babel. Not only was that a significant event in human history, it is the greatest example of what I just said! God was not willing to allow the choices of a few, or even a majority, to squelch the free will of every other individual alive and who would live in the future.



By Philip E. Busby

Too often we look at the idea/excuse people love which is that, “The devil made me do it.” and believe there is way too much truth in that because we so often forget there is not just the will of God and the will of Satan that wrestles in this world. Each of us have an individual will! Humans often downplay their will and the affects each of us can have on the events of not just the lives of those directly around us but even far reaching effects we can't begin to calculate. Oddly those at the Tower of Babel seem to have a sense of this many of us would never see the point in even thinking about today. They wanted to affect the entire world right then as well as into generations yet to come. They did such a good job at it, even with the confounding of the language, a lot of the effect they wish to have remains. Sure we can believe Satan had a lot more to do with planting such thoughts in the minds of men, and I won't argue he's more than ready to jump in and help with anything he can that will take man away from the truth of God. However, the reason he likes to jump in has everything to do with the fact he is not like God in being all powerful and all knowing, etc. Satan must use the will of men to gain what it is he wants, and in the end he will not be totally in control no matter what. This, because he has to



make constant compromises with our will. In many ways this is a complex dynamic, but the bottom line is that God has always had a perfect way and will for our creation. He and only He could force that will upon us all, which is a power Satan does not hold. However, the main reason we should not blame God for the things that we feel go wrong and/or for the larger wrong in this world as a whole is due to the fact God works with us in spite of His power. This fact is why Satan has a chance to do the things he desires to do and I want to emphasize the word "chance" because again, Satan has no ability to force us into his will. He simply has some time to try what he wants in this world. While on that subject I'll add the fact he could not care less how much we want to blame him for the things that go wrong because he is not a pure being like God is. He can and often does make mistakes even in attempting to get what he wants. Now before I find myself going off and filling this segment with an entire rundown of all the things Satan is and what motivates his actions the real focus of what we're talking about here is that man also has a will.

Because we are very much mortal beings on a physical level our ability to work for our own will is even more limited than Satan's. The counter balance to that fact is that we are many! Exactly what the population of the earth has been through the centuries is only something we can speculate on, but by this point our population numbers above the eight billion mark! That is a lot of people with a lot of individual will and that is a point that bothers a fair number of humans for a various number of reasons. As we have talked about before, government can be a vehicle for good and it's why God speaks of it in His Word as He does, but when it is ran with the will of men who desire to not just do the job God ordains government to do and instead want to exercise their own will, government becomes a way to enforce specific human will. All this is to point out that in any given situation there are a million or more reasons things come out the way they do. It's not just your choices, or the choices of those around us. It's also the choices of many far and wide in both space as well as time! If God is going to allow us our free will this line of understanding is what causes us to see how He and only He can sort out what the right things are to do within the midst of it all. We will never know the countless times God intervenes in our personal lives and surroundings, much less the world as whole, but what we do know from God's Word is that God is working to preserve our individual ability to exercise our free will if in no other way than to understand we have one.

All this relates to the subject of the Hebrew Bible being translated into languages other than Hebrew because the real truth is that this happened in more minor ways all along the way until it finally happened in the more official way we are getting to in this study. A fact very often misunderstood and in so many ways not well appreciated if even believed at all by many people who call themselves Christians, is that it was never God's intent His words be the sole possession of the chosen nation. It was unto them God's oracles were committed, but the whole point of committing them to any specific people of the world was/is to be sure they were never lost. Putting His words in writing was a way for God to be sure no matter how few individuals chose to listen to Him the foundational structures of what it is to live for Him could be found in a physical way. Giving them to a specific people was one of those times God was interacting with the

actions/choices of men by infusing His Written Words into a specific culture. If men were going to form such cultures, and man certain has insisted on doing so once our language was confounded, God would form a people with a culture shaped by His Word. The diversity of cultures in the world (mostly due to the diversity of languages) would be what caused us all to clearly see and maintain, whether consciously or unconsciously, the diversity we as humans often show we'd rather not exist. God gave it to us, built it right into us, and it's a blessing not the curse like those at the Tower of Babel looked at it as being.

However, the necessity of confounding our language also stands as an example of how God's perfect will is not what we're getting here. It's one of those steps we took away from that perfection. Unity through linguistics and diversity through thought meant we had the perfect way to have a world of peace. That fact is what men after the flood attempted to take advantage of as a way to enslave humans into a common thought/will; a thought/will that did not include God. Thus, when we see God putting His Word in actual physical form as a further way to ensure individuals could access It, we find the multitude of languages made this more complex. However, this is all part of the reason God wanted the chosen nation to be what He wanted it to be. A nation of people who would not need to borrow but whom the rest of the world would want/need to borrow from. (Deut. 15:1-6) A people who would not struggle with oppressive unworkable government systems but stand as a true light on the hill for all the world to see what it looks like to live in peace. A nation that never faltered or failed but prospered in everything it did; helping the world through every generation as God generously gave them the ability! Of course, we all know that is not what happened, but what God's Word shows us is how prepared God was to deal with the fact the chosen nation would be a group of people who illustrate to us all how we fail to be what God wants us to be.

God still used the things the nation did to be sure they were not lost among the world but they were very much mingled with the world and thus, seen by people all across the world. Have you ever wondered why so many people have so many conspiracy theories about how the Jews have some secret plan to take over various nations and/or the world? Well there's your answer. No matter where people have been or gone in this world it seems Jews are always around in some capacity like no other specific people are. No matter how much time passes Jews continue to survive the battering of culture shifts and downright persecution that comes at them from every side. Why does this happen? Because God committed Himself to work through this nation of people and He has never broken that commitment! In turn this means from the beginning of God giving His first words to them, which were what we call The Ten Commandments, there has been a reason for the chosen nation to share those words with those outside their nation. Through the actions God asked of them in the Law He gave them, they represent God's Word to the world. There has always been a reason for people to take notice of the chosen people and that's why we talk about the nation failing to maintain the Hebrew necessary to continue accessing and understanding the Word of God for themselves.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that Jews losing Hebrew in favor of Greek, as well as a couple other languages, wasn't a

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment we continued looking at the time Isaac goes to Beersheba, which was the place his father Abraham had planted a grove in order to worship God. As we have discussed we don't know for sure if Isaac was going there specifically to that grove, but the chances of that are quite high because the very night Isaac got there The Lord met with him. It's likely that worshiping God and hearing from God more directly was one of the main reasons Isaac had gone to Beersheba. There his father Abraham had met with God very directly and Isaac would do the same. Now, last time we continued talking about how we as humans are the ones who change things and not God. With that we discussed how human thoughts are the reason groves went from being something a man of faith like Abraham planted to something God forbid in the Law He gave to the chosen nation. From there we continued the discussion about how much people do not understand the words God spoke to Isaac were a way of saying to Isaac and all of us that God is not the God of the dead but of the living! To further that understanding we covered several things in the New Testament, one of which is the fact the religious leaders of Jesus' day wanted Him put to death partly because they didn't understand that fact. We ended by getting back to the direct words of God to Isaac about how through Isaac God would continue the work He had promised Abraham He would bring through his seed. All that kept us in Genesis chapter 26 verse 24, and we are ready to begin verse 25 this time.

After hearing these words, Isaac built an altar to God and again, this was likely in the middle of the grove his father had planted. This was a special place where God had shown both these men of faith He had not left them nor forsaken the plan He had originally given Abraham. This family would remain strangers in a strange land but God was certainly there with them, and building an altar was a way for Isaac to worship The Lord and show his appreciation for that fact! This was also a way for Isaac to acknowledge he understood God was working, even in ways Isaac might not see. It is certainly true Abraham left this earth having seen little evidence God's plan was moving forward, but he never doubted God and neither would Isaac. He would build this altar and call upon the name of The Lord as a way to signify this land was dedicated to the purposes of God. That means it was holy and it mattered not who believed that, understood it, or accepted it. Isaac had the promises of God confirmed to him and knowing it was true is all that mattered at that point. Thus, Isaac would settle in for a long stay here, once again establishing his family's presence both at this spot as well as on the land as a whole. We know this was true because the words of verse 25 tell us Isaac had his servants dig a well at Beersheba, and that's not something you do if it's not a place you intend to stay and have a continual presence in!

However, verse 26 is where we see the real importance of doing such a thing because if you look on a map and see where Isaac had been and where he was now you'll note Isaac had moved quite a bit east of where his conflict with the Philistines

had taken place. As we talked about before, Isaac didn't avoid the Philistines but he also didn't push back on them in the way some people would have expected him to. This because traveling the land and establishing his family more and more across this land was a big point of he and his father's lives here. The Philistines pushing at Isaac just caused him to travel around the area that much more but primarily to the south. Now Isaac would go further east and be back on that familiar north south trek he and his father before him had primarily traveled. This means Isaac was now a bit out of the area the Philistines at least believed they controlled but we find that this fact didn't stop the Philistine king from coming to Isaac once again. Abimelech would come with a man whom we are simply told was a "friend" named Ahuzzath. When we see that wording of this man being described as a friend we need to remember how much the world was not locked down and so official like we think of things today. That is to say, this man didn't need a title to be important. Abimelech is by all indications, not just the name of a man but the name any man who took on the leadership role over the Philistines took. Like other things we've talked about it would be interesting to know exactly what this word meant to the Philistines that it became more of what we would call a title today. In any case, it is the word or name the Philistines' king took and we can't be sure if that was in an overall way or just the "dynasty" that was leading the Philistines at this time.

The point about things not being so official as we see things today is only to point out each group of people had their own way of looking at the right way to form the governing powers that ruled them. Some people very well may have had more official structures of one form or the other, but for many people in the ancient world a particular person for reasons only that group of people fully understood (if anyone ever did/does) came to be their leader. As we have discussed, it was a very typical practice for that man's son or daughter to take on the role when the leader died. This is why we talk in the terms we do about kings and dynasties. However, it has always fascinated me when I see a people so predominately have a name/title for their version of a king because it opens the door to consider maybe, just maybe, such people didn't put their governments together in such a direct and what we might call primitive way. Sure many people did have a name/title for their king, but those were often just a way to say king in their language or to denote what god or placement among the gods of the people the king held. This has a lot to do with why Egypt had a Pharaoh. However, in reading the Bible we are seeing a record that has been kept for a very long time, and we do very often see the generic use of the word "king" to describe leaders of various people. This can come in a lot of ways because of translation into our language from the original text, but still it is a generic title being given no matter what language you're coming from and going into. Thus, you end up with the translation of king in English and likely because the word for that in Greek or Hebrew is what it was brought to us from.

This means when one of these title/names like the Philistine king had cuts through all that and makes it to our eyes over three millennia later, there's something to be said about it which has more than likely been lost over time. That said, the fact it remains instead of being changed to some generic word like king is interesting, and I bring this up now because the other point of interest is this Ahuzzath is not called an advisor or a subordinate leader of some kind. He is not named as being a priest of the Philistine religion or otherwise. He is just a friend and that could indicate that his position in the Philistine governing power is something we don't really relate to. He was not given a title because that title wouldn't have meant anything to us. This might sound like an odd subject to get off onto but again, I repeat where I started this and that's the fact government was not so official as we think of it today. The world was not so interconnected as we are today and that meant there weren't titles for government positions used in a very universal way. That's why I point out the word "king" is used. It doesn't get more generic than that when talking about the leader of a people, especially when you want to go beyond saying the leader was simply a chief of a clan or tribe. All this raises the question of, was governments among people as primitive, for lack of a better term, as we think they were?

That question is not one we really can answer. We get clues to what was going on in Egypt and people who study their history will often talk about how "advanced" they were. However, this raises the question of, were they really that advanced in their structures of government and technology compared to the rest of the world at that time or is their only real accomplishment to be "advanced" in their record keeping? That is to say, maybe they were just better and more prone to write things down, which is what has left the records people are going off of when they talk about the Egyptians so far down the timeline as we now stand. This has relevance to the student of the Bible no matter how much we ever can or cannot answer such questions because it relates to that understanding I hammer on all the time. The Bible clearly shows us not a timeline that follows all the world but a specific line of history. This is not to exclude the rest of the world as if the people in other places, nations, etc. were/are of less importance but it is to show us, it proves to us, God knew what line of history going from the Tower of Babel and coming to our modern world would shape the more universal thinking we clearly have today! This is why we are told about the Tower of Babel to begin with. It's not just the story of how man's language was confounded and became so diverse many people of the world have no idea what someone not speaking their native language is saying. It's the story of how the thoughts devised shortly after the flood God sent to wipe the world clean of human corruption went forward to seek a way for man to overcome God!

If we don't want to talk about overcoming God in that it feels a little too much like what Satan attempted in taking over God's throne, that's fine. It is only to say, man took of the fruit God told them not to because they believed it would make them wise. This fact is why Eve was worshiped by many people from very early on. As religions of men got more complex the direct connection of some religion's primary female deity got less and less about being the woman the Bible names as Eve, but it's a main part of why the primary female deity exists in almost every ancient religion the world over. Even within Catholic prayer

books, songs, and the things people of the religion are taught to recite, there are examples of worshiping Eve or "the mother of all men" for her actions. To some, even many who consider themselves Catholic, this might seem like a shocking thing, and that's a very good sign for you as an individual if it does because clearly what Eve did should not have been done. However, it stands as an example of how true what I'm saying is that this was something that was either still clearly understood at the time the Catholic church formed and that's how it made it into the doctrine, or it was something so prevalent in the minds of those forming the Catholic church they included it without needing any "include all the pagan thoughts" pressure to it. That example aside, the reason men like to think of it as a good thing to praise Eve for taking the fruit is twofold.

One, it happened. It's something we as humans did and as the saying goes, there's no sense crying over spilled milk. Maybe it's the idea of, if life gives you lemons make lemonade, but today we might be more accurately prone to say, it's something we need to "own." Unfortunately, when people go the direction of talking about owning their mistakes they aren't talking enough about the idea that you've made your bed and now you have to lie in it and instead end up acting as if other people and/or society as a whole should do something to help them out of the consequences of their mistakes; if for no other reason than to honor the fact they're willing to own it. The second reason people desire to worship Eve is the fact many do believe it was a good thing for us to gain the knowledge of good and evil in spite of the fact we went against God's direct commandment we not do it! It is to make the same mistake Adam and Eve made which is something we've talked about before, in confusing knowledge with wisdom. We have the knowledge but we clearly show how little to no wisdom we have for handling it, and we see the results of that every day all around us!

However, believing we are wise we root ourselves in the thought we could go at things on our own and we didn't need God. This is a primary reason God had to send the flood so short a time (relatively speaking) into man's history. As much as that should have spoke volumes to us about how we needed to finally turn to God and ask His help in forming our lives and world, people immediately turned to the question of, how can we keep God from "interfering" in our world ever again? To some this may seem like an almost impossible truth considering how obvious it had to be to people so short a time after the flood that the God Who created us was powerful beyond our comprehension. However, that has never stopped people from trying to overcome Him in some form and way(s). For those shortly after the flood it was the belief they could bind together and if all of humanity was in agreement that would send God away, at the very least. A thought I don't mention much when in this discussion is that people likely believe there was chaos before the flood. People were just randomly eating and drinking and making marry doing the sinful things they did and that is what made God act in destroying humans almost in their entirety. In contrast to that, the people in the post-flood time period felt they would do things differently and they would do it by organizing men into something they felt had "meaning." This is why I say it's really clear that the statement preserved for us in the Word of God about wanting to build a city and a tower to reach heaven before man separated in different directions across the world is not speaking to the people wanting to violate some

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LXXIII

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."

As we continue our look at the history that shows us how the Roman Empire came to be looked at as a Christian empire, we started talking last time about what choices the Roman government had in their struggle to remain relevant in the minds of the world. We discussed how the true Gospel was spreading and doing the work it was meant to do and that was creating a large group of believers who no longer cared about the things of the world the way people attempting to build an empire did. A statement made in last segment to sum up what that meant to the Romans was that Christianity was becoming an empire of its own. It was an empire without borders and without an earthly government structure the Romans could attack. All this was true because Christianity had not yet been clouded by the existence of a religion. Discussing that point eventually led us to look again at the Ten Commandments and very specifically we covered the first four which have to do with our relationship with God. That relationship is what those accepting the Gospel were embracing and putting first in their lives and that is what really troubled an empire that wanted all eyes on them. That is why the main point of last time was the fact the Romans had two ways to fight the ever growing lack of relevance the empire was facing. First, they needed to find a way to restrict these Christians and second, they needed to find something to put the eyes of the people back on the empire as being the big accomplishment of men in this world.

Now, what we did last time was by far not the historical study I know some are hoping we will soon continue. However, this is why we have been doing our look at the history; it's what makes the history relevant. There is within the history all these things going on concerning what men want and/or feel they need whether the need is real or not. This is why we have talked about the barbarians and their filtering into the empire slowly but surely. One can look at history, and in truth many are taught the history of this time as being that one day the barbarians marched across the Rhine River and collapsed the empire to eventually form what we know as Europe today. That might be an over simplification of the teaching/thinking most people have in their heads but it's not far from the shorthand version many people who have any idea how the Romans fell will give you. The deeper truth is what we have been looking at, and that's the fact that man had by the time of the Romans been working on the Tower of Babel idea for a very long time. We've talked over and over about the degrees of success and failure most of these empires and groups had but the overall struggle to make it work in some grand way has always been the point. Thus, we also want to see how the continuance of that struggle did not end with the Romans coming to power, nor did it end when the Roman Empire fell! Things among men just keep morphing and

changing but so much is a repeat on many levels of what has been.

There is a cord of truth that runs almost unseen by the world at large which connects the actions of men at the Tower of Babel all the way through the major empires and coming up to where we live today. That cord is what the Bible is covering because it's the real truth underlying all the hustle and bustle of man's everyday world! That endless hustle bustle is what always strikes me when I get up high some where you can look out across a great distance of a city. This is more often than not when I have a reason to be on an upper floor of a taller building, and in those times I often end up stopping to just watch for a little while. In doing so, one can observe a grand mix of buildings with people coming in and out of them as well as people passing each one on their way to somewhere else. You see street after street, often with more cars than some of them were designed to handle, headed in all the various directions. As I watch all this I find myself thinking about where all those people are going, what they are doing and the bigger question of why each one is headed where they are. This, of course, is a complexity of human existence that only God can grasp, but what often fills my thoughts is the amazement of the world humans have built in general. It's a temporary world but the tremendous effort we as humans put into making it what it is astounds me. (Matt. 6:19-21) Not because a lot of it isn't something many of us are thankful to have because it facilitates our ability to eat, have a roof over our heads, medical care, etc., but all of that living and existing is for what?

That is actually a question that is plaguing the minds of many people more and more as the years go on and many people can't define that's what they are really suffering from. We have accomplished so much in the way of human existence only to leave many people with the feeling existence is not really something they want to continue. We have more creature comforts in our modern world than people of the past ever had, yet we feel so empty that the maintaining of such things almost seems more burdensome than it's worth! Why do so many feel this? Because of what we really hit on last segment. We humans have been and are very selfish. We want what we want but when we get it the good feeling of obtaining most things is so fleeting it often ends up being more depressing than positive. This happens because of the real point last segment was driving at, and that's the fact there is no reason to exist without God in our lives. While many people the world over claim to be Christians, God is not really a tangible part of even their existence. God is not an important part of their existence if for no other reason than living for God almost feels like a side note to the struggles we still face in maintaining our existence. Outside of the feel good church services people flock to, individuals are constantly struggling to figure out how God is relevant to the life they live outside of church.

Now, I know there is always the platitude parts we've been taught to carry with us about how God is our comfort and strength etc., and in certain moments those things are more than a platitude in people's lives. However, like so many other things even those feelings are fleeting as the world and this life presses in once more or continues to press in, in ways it refuses to relent over time. All these feelings are why the Bible teaches us not to focus on the flesh. Today you're healthy, tomorrow you're sick. Today you're young and tomorrow you're old. Today what you've build is shinny new and tomorrow it's turned to dust. Seasons come and seasons go, that's how the fleshly life works. It wasn't meant to be depressing, it was meant to be just the way time progressed while we as humans would always have access to The Tree of Life in order to maintain our personal flesh and its health. We lost that once we chose to focus on the flesh instead of the God Who created us and the purpose He created us for. Without that focus life is nothing but these meaningless passing things that come and go. God knew it would hold no real meaning for us in the long term and that's why He removed us from The Tree of Life. It was a blessing more than the curse most people think of it as for the very reasons we have been talking about. Life without God and His purpose for our lives holds nothing but passing time and the weight of that is what most people are feeling whether they understand it or not.

The opposite of that truth is what the Romans were seeing around them growing every day. Through the Gospel people were finding true faith in/with God and their lives meant something that transcended this fleshly existence while still living in the here and now. It doesn't make sense for people who are focused on what they can build in this world and they see it as a hindrance to what they are trying to do. So they began to persecute those who were living in faith, and this is where they started because as we talked about last time, there was no organization or government to go to war with; only the people as individuals who were walking in faith. Going after the individuals made the Romans feel they were doing something because it was a physical act and fleeting physical acts are all the people living in the flesh understand. It would take some time for them to realize that the more effective tool against true Christians was to form a religion they as a government could eventually use as the identity they lacked as well as keep many people from finding a true walk in faith. Those are all things we'll get to, but that's what I meant above in talking about the history we've been looking at. Rome didn't fall in a day and in many ways Rome didn't fall at all! In so many ways Rome simply morphed and changed until one day it looked so different than its original form it was no longer recognized. Where we are in this study is a point in history where the goal of the Romans was to not make such a drastic metamorphosis because the concept of being the great Roman Empire on the surface is what appeared to need saving.

That last statement is another one of those write a whole book on kind of things. One of the reasons Daniel was shown what he was and John was given the more finished version of that illustrative prophecy speaks to how much people fight people for what is essentially just the same animal in some new skin. A particular version of what man is attempting to form means a lot to the people who form it. It can continue to have a lot of meaning to the people who are born into it as well. This meaning ranges from being a simple natural desire not to see the

old ways pass all the way to the hardcore belief that what now exists is the best version and as such is worthy of protection. All that being true in the minds of humans, this is where we see Satan is not really on the side of humans the way he likes to make it seem. Satan doesn't really care that much about how things have to change and morph just as long as the baseline concept continues to distract people from the truth their lives are meaningless without God! Satan doesn't care how many generations live and die and he'd be perfectly fine with humans continuing to live and die for eternity if it prolongs his own sense of value for his existence. Why? The answer once again comes down to that word, selfishness! It's why the first and greatest commandment is to put God first but the second one does go on to tell us to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matt. 22:34-39) It's why the first four commandments of what we call the Ten Commandments are about how we consider God and the other six are about how we treat each other.

I've said many times there is no way for us to really be able to follow the second commandment if we don't follow the first and greatest commandment, and I stand by that statement. However, most things in the Bible are multi-faceted. While it's true we can't really understand how to fully follow the second greatest commandment without following the first, the second does point us in the right direction. People easily miss this because in their selfishness following any commandment of God is looked at as a way to earn their way into heaven or so they think. One can say they know they don't have to, and can't, earn salvation but there is still that nagging feeling that says there must be something we have to do to be standing on the correct side of some line in order to be saved. Therefore it's easy for what calls itself the church to say the second is actually the greatest commandment because striving to follow the do unto others as you would have them do to you, is a seemingly physical action way of staying on that correct side of the line! This is why I say you can't follow the second without the first. Don't be fooled into thinking, in your human understanding, you can figure out how to stand on the correct side of any line without yielding to God and His will; not just His will for your life but the greater overall will that concerns human existence as a whole! All that said, my point is that even if we don't understand and/or believe what I teach on that issue, there is a big danger in being motivated into doing and acting a certain way because you believe it keeps you in a correct place.

That danger comes in when we can't even see the more obvious to the fleshly eye aspect of the second commandment! If we'd stop thinking about what we gain for ourselves when attempting to follow that commandment we'd see how much the pure nature of the commandment is to give us what we claim we want. What is that? In the broadest view it's "world peace." In a more individual view, and the view more important to us as individuals (because not a high enough number of individuals will ever follow it to accomplish something such as world peace), is that it teaches us not to be selfish! Again with what might seem to be the over simplification of something, but there it is. The commandment itself acknowledges we are first and foremost selfish. God uses our own selfish desires as the baseline for how we are expected to treat others. That is to say, if we want something we should consider if others want it and how will it effect others for us to have it no matter whether others can or can not have the same thing(s). If we want to do

something, we should consider if other people want to do that same thing and how us doing the thing effects others when we do, or don't do that thing. If we stop to meditate on all this we begin to see the overwhelming feeling we should get when we don't take the second commandment as a platitude and really think about what it'll take to follow it in earnest!

Whether our goal is for others or the selfish desire to keep ourselves in the correct place to receive salvation, we should come to see this commandment for the crushing thing it is. If we would do that we would in turn see how much we need God's guidance in how to follow it because in so many ways it seems we can't even live and breathe our own lives without in some form violating the commandment. By doing the everyday things we need to do to care for ourselves and survive it seems we take from others in some form. Isn't a little selfishness necessary to survive in a world where there literally may not be enough resources and/or the ability to get those resources to every individual so we all can survive? Why do we have the right to survive and have any comfort when there are people who don't and/or can't have comfort? These are the kind of questions we can drive ourselves crazy with if we really start considering all the aspects of what it could mean to love one's neighbor as one's self (especially if we trip over the "neighbor" word). This is what the religious leaders of the chosen nation had clearly done by the time of the New Testament concerning the Law of Moses in general. They had developed so many things based on their own thinking, the Law had become a true burden to the people of the nation and their ability to live every day. Such things were never God's intent other than to show us how much we need His guidance to get things right. However, we as believers have a really bad habit of becoming legalistic no matter if that's going overboard with things or becoming so liberal we feel the commandments almost don't matter.

Either way we end up not seeing how much God is trying to tell us to give up our selfish ways and consider others around us. In turn, we need to give up our selfish ways and yield to His will and ability to teach us the right paths to walk. The fact so many, no matter if they do or do not claim to believe in God, never give up their selfishness is why God's Word tells us hell has been enlarged to make room for many who were never intended to go there. (Isa. 5:13-16) We can talk about how selfish Satan is and how deserving he and the angels who followed him in rebelling against God deserve to be cast into the lake of fire, but we often don't consider how much we deserve the same fate because our actions and ways are motivated by the same underlying selfishness that led Satan to take his fatal actions. This also brings us back to that truth that what man has been trying to build since the Tower of Babel is all still alive and well. The same selfishness that motivated men to build that tower and city not long after the flood is what still motivates us today. We can each have our own thoughts and ideas as to what it should look like which is the part that makes the same beast look different at certain points in time than it does at others, but just as Revelation clearly shows us, it's just another head of the same beast. (Rev. 13)

The Romans, of course, cared very much about their particular version of the beast and this led them to make an attempt to stomp out what was a true threat, not just to the

Roman Empire but the beast as a whole! This is one of those things where Satan has to work with what he has and at the point the Gospel really began to spread the Romans were that something. Again I say, the problem with true Christians is that they have their eyes on something other than what this world can offer and the Romans were all about what could be accomplished through man's actions. This is why Jesus told us you can't serve two masters. (Mat. 6:24-34) If the world is what you're focused on it will be your master and God will not be given room but if God is Who you seek to serve, the things of the world grow strangely deem. This was the truth the Romans were seeing in the growing number of Christians both within and without of the empire's borders, and this is what's brought us to talk about the Romans persecuting Christians and specifically the subject of restricting freedom of religion in general. In so many ways the beast, a government like the Romans represent, is a religion in and of itself. It's a way of life, at the very least, and that's why governments love to write laws that are clearly not just about protecting citizens from those who would do them harm and balance a monetary system so all citizens have a fighting chance at resources they need to live.

The Romans had resisted restricting freedom of religion because of those factors we've covered before. They believed to be a Roman citizen was the highest honor any individual could have and so they developed a true secular system that could be more inclusive. They also knew they couldn't compete with the Greeks before them in devising a religion as well organized and thus, popular with the people which could be their identity. This thinking had worked for years for the Romans but as we have also discussed Rome still had a very centralized power structure of government and that was by necessity fading as Rome's reach exceeded its grasp. In short, Rome was proving the Tower of Babel concept incorrect and that's something no other empire had really done. How do you maintain the greatness of something you have slowly but surely had to dismantle? For the Romans this was nothing short of a crisis, but they couldn't turn back on what the Roman government had become without causing a civil war that would truly collapse the empire. This is the point in the study where we start to develop an understanding about God's chosen nation and the lessons we can learn from them as Christians at large. One of the ways governments deal with internal crisis, which the greater population of the empire, nation, etc. may or may not be totally aware of, is to find something they can focus the attention of the people on. There is nothing better for this than to create the illusion of a common enemy the government must attempt to stamp out for the greater good of all its citizens.

In times past this was the chosen nation. They were a clear group of people which at many points in time had their own official government structure that could be attacked. Even when the Jews did not have an official government structure the Law God gave them caused them to live among the people at large by congregating together in community groups that could support individual efforts to live according to the Law. No matter if the chosen nation cared or did not care about God so much, they had been given a culture through the Law they, just like any other people of the world, wished to defend. Because their culture had been given directly to them by God they were/are a peculiar people within this world. The only reason Jews today may not

seem as peculiar as they could be is because their culture has been borrowed from by other religions which wish to claim to be the chosen nation instead of the Jews and/or just to craft their own religion because, as we've touched on before, man has to make up his religions as he goes along. There is no real basis for the ceremonies people who worship false gods follow because their gods are not real and therefore have no true demands of them. In any case, Jews have been a great thing for governments to point to and say, "These are the odd people causing all the problems we face." It's easy to paint them as the people who follow the things they follow because they think they're better than the rest of the world. It's easy to claim that contrived belief is justification for fear Jews will want to take over in some way shape or form and force their way of doing things on all of us!

These are the simple ideas that made it easy to cause things like the story we see in the Book of Esther. These peculiar people with their strange laws are disruptive to the harmony of an empire. That was the base argument. The cure was to wipe them from the empire by killing all of them, and the order by the king had already been signed and sealed by the time Esther goes into the king to beg for the life of her people! It has also been easy to use the idea the king is god as a way to get the Jews in trouble such as we see in the Book of Daniel. The argument in that case was that the king should sign a law saying he and only he could be prayed to or into the lion's den you would be thrown. Someone like Daniel was never going to give up seeking The One True God and when this was pointed out to the king shortly after signing the decree even the king himself was not powerful enough to reverse what he saw as a grave error on his part. It would take God closing the mouths of the lions to save Daniel from the death that stood before him, and while we focus on the miracle and mercy of God, the story is a grand example of how easy it is to paint the people of God as the problem in a world diametrically apposed to the ways of God!

All this and more is why it should have come as no surprise to the Christians, both then as well as now, that you will become a target for those who love power and the attempt to create what man can create without God. Sadly today many who call themselves Christians don't seek God enough to be peculiar to the world and that's what the religion of men was/is hoping to cause. However, at the time of the Romans, Christians were only Christians because they accepted God into their lives and it changed them into something just as diametrically apposed to the world as the chosen nation had ever been. It would be easy for the Romans to say, the real problem we're facing is not the fact people have a free will and don't want to yield to a centralized government as the world's government but that these growing in number Christians are the odd balls causing all the disruption we didn't previously have! In painting Christians in this light the Romans didn't just gain the ability to persecute Christians with the support of a lot of the people within the empire, they literally created for themselves the moral obligation to protect the people of the empire from this growing "threat"!

One of the ways the Christians really fell into the same category that the chosen nation had often been placed in was something oddly opposite between Jews and general Christians

no matter if they were Jews or non-Jews. When it came to Jews they had been seen as a troublesome people with peculiar laws that had caused problems for ages. That is to say, the Jews were a big problem because no matter how much the world changed around them they continued to follow and believe in the God of their forefathers. When it came to Christians, the idea of following Jesus as The Messiah the Jews had been waiting for was looked at as something new instead of the fruition of something waited on for centuries. This, of course, was not helped by the fact the religious establishment among the Jews had been the ones who rejected Jesus to the point of wanting Him put to death while it was the Roman governor who couldn't figure why they were so adamant about it. However, one idea finally started to take hold among those who were apposed to Christians and that was the thought that whether one was talking about a Jew or a non-Jew, these Christians had abandon the customs of their fathers! If one was a Jew who had accepted Jesus then you were considered to be one who had rejected Jewish authority because as a whole the Jewish religious establishment rejected Jesus. If you were a non-Jew you were seen as someone who picked up on something totally new and in doing so had left behind the customs and the culture such customs form which your fathers, grandfathers, and so on had established and believed in before you were ever born.

For the great Roman Empire this was a perfect way to see the issue! While the people at large living in the empire by the third century A.D. had soured somewhat on the idea of persecuting Christians (this mostly due to the fact there were so many becoming Christians, it was hard to not have a friend or family member who had accepted Jesus), the Roman bureaucracy could sit on their thrones on high and declare the greatness of the Roman Empire had been built by their father's traditions! These could now be framed as traditions people were forsaking to become Christians and in turn harming the empire at large by doing so! The growth of Christianity might have created more people with friends and family who accepted Jesus but this argument about being a threat to traditions would have greater effectiveness than it could have in the first and second centuries. For a perspective on that we need only to look at the estimated numbers of how many Christians there were by the third century. While there are no hard numbers within the records we can use to calculate this precisely, the number of church buildings that were being erected along with the effects Christians were having within society leads to a crude estimation of Christian growth from 1.1 million at the halfway point of the second century to around 6 million by the start of the third century. Maybe a better way to see how afraid the Roman government was of this growth is to point out the fact, that's somewhere in the neighborhood of 10% of the total population of the Roman Empire at that time!

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

intent of God that humans go out into the world and subdue it.

Sure there is a clear commandment from God that man was to have dominion over the planet, but never was there anything in the words that indicated how fast any kind of spreading out needed to take place or that spreading out was a way to accomplish the subduing of the planet. (Gen. 1:26-28) The planet, and eventually the universe, would be man's dominion due to population growth if nothing else. We could live in it and use it for our purposes. Before the cursing of the ground we don't even know how much what we call environmental abuse the planet could have easily absorbed. True or not true that it could have taken a total continual pounding from us, I believe God's words about dominion did not indicate abuse as much as stewardship. Yes, we were the beings for which the rest was created and as I keep repeating we would have been the only creatures in the universe who lived indefinitely, meaning our bodies returning to the ground upon death was not needed to balance the world. From that standpoint alone we see the planet was an amazing place and not nearly the fragile thing it is today. People worry about over population and the ability to feed everyone in our world today but that would never have been a concern for many reasons had we not walk away from God as we did in the beginning.

I could go on to stress that point more but we've covered it many times. God did want man to spread out and have dominion over the planet but this was a very natural thing we could do as the population grew. Individuals would go out into the world traveling and even settling far and wide as we still see people do today, but in general if humans spread more due to the growth of the population than it did specifically going out intentionally, there is no indication in God's words that wasn't totally fine! Thus, when people said post-flood that they wanted to build a city and a tower before they all spread out too greatly, they were clearly concerned about instilling thought patterns not just in keeping everyone physically together. The belief was that if men could be organized we could do without God but even if you don't buy that or maybe I should say, had you lived at the time and not bought into that idea, there was still the thought that organizing ourselves better would cause God to leave us alone to live as we wanted. If men found a purpose that didn't include God, God would have to accept that. Amazing as it might seem, this isn't far from the truth. Of course, I say that lightly because the part that was/is far from the truth in that thought is that God never committed Himself to stay out of our lives no matter what. However, it does come down to the free will He gave us. Men knew by that point in history that God did greatly respect man's free will to do as he wanted as long as it wasn't something that brought us to such a corrupt and useless state God was forced to act as He did with the flood!

Thus, it stands to reason, or it did to them at the time, that if they organized all of humanity and gave us a purpose of some sort, it would at the very least keep God at arms length, so to speak. If men of great ability lead humanity as a whole to do something productive in some way, even if that productivity was just doing fleshly things, God would respect our free will and allow us to live on and on without intervention on His part. From there it didn't matter how far and wide individuals went as long as the basic idea went with them and they respected a man-made

center of power rather than what God had made in giving man the Garden of Eden and then driving us from it when we chose a path that took us away from Him. This is the reason God acted to protect the individual by confounding man's language. Language drift, as we call it today, would cause people to yes, go out across the planet, but only to form their own little Tower of Babel societies and the cultures that go along with them. This was not ideal when it came to what God wanted us to do and be but it preserved human diversity man's plan would have wiped out. Within this diversity there was a chance for the individual. This was larger thinking than the people at the tower could grasp. Maybe they were in some ways right that organizing themselves and giving themselves a fleshly purpose would cause God to respect their free will and not wipe them off the face of the planet. However, they couldn't calculate the fact the individual's rights would be violated in doing what they were doing and God would have to act to protect that in a universal and long-term way!

So yes, the world would move forward in that way as we have discussed over and over; and yes, cultures of all sorts would spring up with God's eyes on every one of them and the individuals they consisted of. God would continue to "come down" to see what we as humans were building all over this planet, but His intent in doing so was/is to call to the individuals that make up the world. So why does the Bible focus on a particular line of history? The answer is that the beast concept that was originally begun at the Tower of Babel and which God put a sword through its head to kill, man would resurrect. (Rev. 13:1-3) Because diversity was already secured by the confounding of the language at the original Tower, God did not have to act again to strike it down in a similar way. However, God would act to insert His ways into the mess man was making in order to affect the beast man was once again attempting to build. These are the stories we see in the Bible and the main line of history the Bible follows is very much about the world as a whole. Yes, other great nations, civilizations, even empires came and went but the line of those the Bible follows would eventually become what man might call the gold standard for how the world ran. Diversity will always remain but the ideas we see around us about nations with governments negotiating with each other and fighting each other for resources, power, etc. is dominated by the ideas developed through the line of empires the Bible focuses on, and it's why God made sure He formed a chosen nation to give His Written Word to.

They are and will remain the anchor of the things of God in this world. Jesus came unto His own and He will return unto his own, meaning the chosen nation. They are a focal point that people who both believe God exists as well as those who claim to believe there is no God will find God working through. Prophecy is clear on no other point than that fact, and in talking about Abraham and Isaac we are studying the beginnings of God putting that plan in motion. This is why I got into all this while talking about this one simple fact given to us about the Philistine king bringing what is only described as a friend with him to meet with Isaac. As covered above, we know a lot about the Egyptians and that is primarily true because they kept such good records of their dealings and activities like almost no other culture has left. However, the big thing I like to point out when talking about that issue really relates to the larger point I'm driving at in this segment, and that's the fact man was more advanced in those days than most of us can imagine today! This is another one of

those facts most people would find laughable and sadly many of those people who claim to be Christians. The tired old argument is, we have way more technology than people of the ancient world ever had! We have stored knowledge not even rivaled by people like the Egyptians and Greeks of the past! On and on the pathetic thought pattern goes but here's the real point, a lot of what we have is because we are so dumb. Yes, you heard me right, but if you want me to put it in a nicer way I'll simply say, our brains have deteriorated so badly since ancient times our memory and ability to think doesn't even begin to touch the average human mental capacity of ancient times!

If we didn't keep good records and have organized education to keep passing the knowledge down to the next generations we'd have nothing! We pat ourselves on the back for being so clever and more organized than those of earlier times all the while not seeing how necessary to our very survival it is that we do such a thing and how unnecessary it was for people of the past to do it. One of the reasons Egypt appears so significantly within the Bible's narrative in spite of its lack of direct connection to the other empires the Bible focuses on, is the very same reason we see them keeping records like almost no one else. The Egyptians were beginning to realize there was value in keeping records and passing on knowledge in a more general way than father to son, mother to daughter ways of doing it within families and communities. There was power in coming up with something and then leaving a record so later generations could start from where they left off instead of at square one. A big part of why this made sense to them in a way it had not to generations and people before and other than them is because people had good memories like we don't relate to today. People also had brains powerful enough to see facts, even things we later would call scientific and mathematical "discoveries," as just obvious. It amazes me how hard it is to teach this and keep it in people's heads, but evolution is not true! If anything the main concept of evolution is one hundred and eighty degrees from true!

Since we took of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil we have been on a downward slide not an upward evolution into something greater! This really became true when taking of the fruit caused us to be driven from the Garden of Eden and more specifically The Tree of Life! We've covered it before but we have to keep that in our head no matter what the education system has taught us. Ancient people didn't see the reason to keep a record of a lot of the knowledge we find so important today to preserve. Again, complex things for us seemed simple to them and it's why we can look out at the structures we build with all our modern technology and see how little of it is going to withstand the test of time. On the other hand, there are examples of structures and various things ancient people built still standing to this day and which we can't really figure out how they accomplished! We might do some of the things ancient people did by using our modern machines but we see no evidence ancient people ever built such complex machines. Again, it's something we find pride and bragging rights over ancient people about, but then when we consider some of the things they did that are still standing millennia later it should make us stop to think how much more clever those people were that they didn't need our complex machines to do

what they did.

Now, let's see if I can bring this back to where we started with Isaac and the friend of the Philistine king before I run out of room. Whether I've made the point clear in this writing or better in one of my others, the basic is simple. People of the past had mental capacity we don't have today. Does that show up only on the pages of the Word of God telling us we once had a Tree of Life and evolution is untrue? No, it shows up in the things people we think of as "primitive" accomplished without seemingly breaking a proverbial sweat. Thus, the further question is, do you think this is only true when it comes to things like our ability as humans to build and create artifacts? If you do then you're thinking way too small again. The answer should obviously be no! What does that mean? A whole ton of things we really don't have the space to cover in this segment, but the one I wanted to point out this time in talking about the friend of the Philistine king and the issue of the Philistine king's title being an example of a title not generally translated as the word "king" is how much we have no clue what forms of government people of the ancient past actually might have had! Maybe you find it a stretch and/or something not worthy of dwelling on for an entire segment of writing but I disagree. If we are told this man with the Philistine king was best described as just a "friend" yet held the clear position of importance he did, it's more than reasonable to assume it's because the man held a position we wouldn't relate to in our narrow thinking. Because that's true, the words here in Genesis don't get bogged down in the way some of you are thinking I have in this segment with attempting to explain to us what might have been a fascinating structure of the Philistine government and even its culture in order to explain exactly who this man was. It simply calls him a friend and moves on.

There are so many things we believe people of the past would be blown away by seeing if they could time travel and see what we have built today, but I tend to think we'd be surprised how critical they'd be of us. They'd wonder why it took so much of our resources to build some of the things we build when it could have been done so much easier if we only had the brain power to understand things that came to them naturally. They'd probably be in awe of our obsession with record keeping due to how hard it'd be for them to understand what little the human minds of today are able to maintain. Lastly, for this segment I'll say, the thing they'd probably be most blown away by would be the forms of government and organization we use and think are the culmination of the very best ideas coming to us from people like the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. In short, they'd probably be very disappointed seeing where the path they believed humans were on in their time has led humanity, and all of those thoughts should give us a clue as to how God actually sees what we think of as our "great accomplishments"!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

big contributing factor to the Hebrew Bible being translated into other languages but again, in the end it wasn't the religious leaders within Israel who were responsible for the first, at least best known, official translation. The shorthand version of the story shows how much time changes things while in so many ways leaving them very much the same. God had used Egypt as a place for the family of Abraham through Isaac, through Jacob to truly grow into a nation of people. This was God inserting His will into what was the growing resurrection of the beast we see the deadly wound in the head of, illustrated in John's vision from God. (Rev. 13:1-5) God would ensure Egypt would not be the resurrection of the beast by putting his chosen nation there and then specifically asking Pharaoh to let them leave. Of course, if one is attempting to take over the world piece by piece the last thing you want to do is let a piece of the world you think you already own to just up and walk away! God knew the arrogance of Pharaoh's heart long before that particular Pharaoh was ever born and that's why the words of the story keep telling us God hardened Pharaoh's heart. God didn't have to reach into his heart on some controlling of his free will way and make Pharaoh choose to act as he did. God simply asked something of Pharaoh that was next to impossible for a man in his position to do because it was in Pharaoh's heart to build the beast God had already shown would be a mistake!

Thus, God would bring His chosen nation out of Egypt after showing the world what He could easily do to destroy any power man thought he had to resist Him. God would drain the resources of Egypt as they desperately gave the people of the chosen nation everything they asked for in an attempt to get them away from Egypt and out of their lives as quickly as possible. (Ex. 3:19-22, 12:31-39) The centuries would pass and Assyria would end up being the resurrecting of the beast and the first world power really allowed to touch God's chosen nation as they walked out from God's protection but not God's plan to use them. The Babylonians would come next and then the Medes and Persians. Through it all the people of the chosen nation would be both scattered across the world as well as many returned to the promised land. The Medes and Persians would give way to the Greeks and eventually the Greeks to the Romans. Every single iteration of the beast would be affected by the chosen nation and probably in more ways than we can appreciate. All through that time it's impossible to believe God's Written Word was not to some degree translated into languages other than Hebrew, at least in part, and certain books such as Esther might possibly have originally been written in something other than Hebrew. The truth is we don't know because any such translations didn't survive nor records of their existence survive to be found. What we do know is that there came a day when a language became so popular and in such wide use that more people across the world were at least somewhat familiar with it and, of course, that language was Greek.

Even long after the Romans brought their Latin to the world Greek remained the popular language, especially among the scholarly minded community. This has a long and complex history, some of which we've touched on in this study and some of which we've covered better in other studies. However, over the years there developed the idea that human knowledge needed to be preserved in a large way. In a nutshell no matter where in the world this idea had been tried (this includes evidence of such

attempts in South America that were destroyed by conquering invaders) the one that stands to this day as the most obvious and complete attempt in the ancient world is the library that was developed in Alexandria Egypt. Scholarly men had already been gathering there during the time of the Greeks in spite of Athens rising to be more of the capital of the world. Maybe it was just the way it worked out but it almost seemed as if there was something appropriate about the capital of a major world power being separate from the place where a scholarly attempt would be made to collect and translate the knowledge of mankind. What better place to do that than where the beast almost resurrected post Tower of Babel! This is why I brought up the fact God made sure the chosen nation was in the midst of all these major human events concerning powers and empires that would be the foundation of the modern world we know today. It's never to say many other very knowledgeable, fascinating, and inspiring cultures didn't exist in the world, maybe even cultures far more advanced in many ways than those we practically worship from antiquity, but they did not go on to be the cultures that shaped the world of the future whether for better or for worse.

As all the various knowledge of the world was being collected at Alexandria into the famous ancient library that once existed, God's chosen nation and in particular the written words God had given to them was of special interest to be part of that collection. I find this one of the most fascinating facts in all of human history. For all the persecution the chosen nation has faced and still faces today, for all the attempts there has been to wipe the chosen nation from various places of the world, if not the world as a whole, the writings God committed to them have without a doubt been seen as something of value to be studied even by the secular world. The irony in some ways is that for all the spread of Christianity today and availability of copies of the Bible in a language most anyone needs in order to read It for themselves, the Hebrew Bible (specifically the Torah) might have been held in higher regard by people of the past than It is now. I say that for a lot of reasons but just think, there were no copies to just go out and purchase and there were not a thousand translations of It to be utilized, yet people still sought out God's Word for the wisdom It held! Even in the Book of Acts we find Philip coming upon an Ethiopian man who had a copy of the Book of Isaiah which he was reading and desiring to understand. The Apostle was able to join the man for a time and explain how the book laid out God's plan and how the events of Jesus' life had just shown how true it was that plan was still at work. The Ethiopian man accepted Jesus as his Saviour and desired to show the world he was dedicated to following The Lord in asking to be baptized. (Acts 8:26-40)

The fields were truly white and ripe for harvest! (John 4:31-38) People were hungry for God's Word and God's plan for their lives and they sought out the ability to study these writings the chosen nation had possessed for a very long time. This is the reason the Torah and eventually the entire Hebrew Bible ended up in the library at Alexandria, Egypt. However, I have to wonder if it took that kind of effort to include the Bible in a library today, how many would be compelled to put forth that effort? I offer that thought just as something to keep in mind as we look at the basic facts of the effort it took to put a copy of God's Word in Alexandria and discussing all we have leading up to this point is also something to keep in mind. We have reached

forward in our discussions to the time of Christ and beyond speaking about the hard choice the religious leaders had in keeping the common people able to hear and study God's Word for themselves. However, the story of the Bible being translated into Greek (again, in that more official way) predates the coming of The Messiah, and there is another interesting thought to keep in mind. The official Greek translation of the Torah and eventually the entire Hebrew Bible we have been referring to is, of course, the translation known as the Septuagint. It is the oldest known Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and it is a translation one can easily go out and find to this day. You can even find English translations of the Hebrew Bible that were done specifically off the Septuagint. That fact brings up yet another interesting discussion that I won't take time to go deep into here, but there are people who believe the Septuagint is what Jesus and His apostles more often than not were utilizing when quoting the Hebrew Bible.

The shorthand argument/counter argument of that debate is how similar a lot of the quotes and references to the Hebrew Bible are in the Greek New Testament (that is to say the not translated form of the New Testament) to what we read in the Septuagint. That's the argument that seems to support the idea Jesus and His apostles were using the Septuagint and not the original Hebrew we have been discussing as being something even people of the chosen nation were losing the ability to understand. In many ways this makes perfect sense in that the people had turned more and more to knowing regional languages, such as Aramaic, but then also Greek because it was the more widely known and useful language of the day. I would never compare a weak language like English to a language like ancient Greek in its power to convey thoughts and ideas, but what we see concerning English today is very comparable to what people of The Messiah's time were doing. Today people the world over speak their more native language(s) to communicate on a daily basis but find it very helpful for travel, work, etc. to also know English. In spite of the lack of wide travel and electronic communication of the day, this was very much the reason people of that time knew Greek along with the language(s) they spoke at home. Thus, it makes sense that Jesus would use the Septuagint's words to quote the Hebrew Bible, right?

Well, the counter argument is simple. Very often Jesus was likely speaking Greek to the masses as He spoke His words and the apostles would have done the same. It might be true that some of their direct conversations with each other took place in something such as Aramaic, but regardless of if that's true or not the written words of the New Testament were, in my opinion, written in Greek. This means the conversations and experiences the writers of the New Testament had and were conveying in their writings (this relates to the words of the four Gospels to be sure) may or may not have taken place in the Greek language. However, the same men who experienced those events or took accounts from people who directly experienced them sat down and wrote their words in Greek. That would have been the only logical thing to do, but what it means is that the conversations witnessed were not so much translated as they were simply understood by the men who physically (as we say today) put pen

to paper! The point is, what you read in the New Testament is very likely similar, if not word for word, the way the Septuagint phrases the Hebrew Bible's words not because Jesus or others were quoting from the Septuagint but because speaking the Hebrew Bible's words in Greek simply come/came out the same and for the same reasons the translators of the Septuagint used those words! Keep in mind, there is a huge gap between having men who spoke and understood both Hebrew and Greek as a native language they grew up using and people who know a language such as English today who have also learned Hebrew and/or Greek. That gap shows up in no greater way than when speaking of translation work.

On so many levels it's really ridiculous to even argue the point of did Jesus quote from the Septuagint more than quote the Hebrew especially for us so far down the timeline from the original events. There are no eye witness accounts of the event telling us that's what was specifically happening. All we know is that when the translators of the Septuagint translated from Hebrew to Greek they chose to use specific phrases and words, and as far as we know that is the same thing Jesus and others were doing as they spoke to the people and those words were recorded in Greek for us to have today! That point is what we have been talking about the last couple segments. People were losing their knowledge of Hebrew in favor of Greek. Some might have by that time been familiar with the Septuagint's words or they may not have been but both languages were available. Using the one your audience was most likely to be familiar with was only logical and it doesn't speak to what side of the argument Jesus was on in debating whether or not the religious leaders insist things remain Hebrew or give in to Greek. It was simply the natural course of the way events unfolded and it's one of the best examples of how God has used the things of men to ensure His Word is never lost! That is what was happening when the powers that be began to collect writings from far and wide to include in the library of Alexandria, and while we want to get to a rundown of how that happened and its relationship to the fact a book like Samuel was just one book in the Hebrew Bible, there's one more point I'll leap ahead and make because it fits here better than it might later.

The grand library at Alexandria is what we might call legendary. Its existence is not just "a legend" because there are too many surviving texts with references to its existence to doubt it was once there. For some it would be their pick for where they would go if they could travel through time and archaeologists would go out of their minds if any large physical evidence, such as some vault like structure with scrolls in it were found today that were a piece of its collection. However, all the wonder and speculation about it aside there is the Septuagint itself and it is a grand surviving piece of that library. Considering how few of the vast collection believed to exist at Alexandria remain to this day the Septuagint happens to be one of them and we could brush that off as simply the hand of God, but consider how God used people and their choices to make this true. People like those of the chosen nation who needed a Greek copy of the Hebrew Bible more and more!

Let's stay in God's Word!

