

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 #127

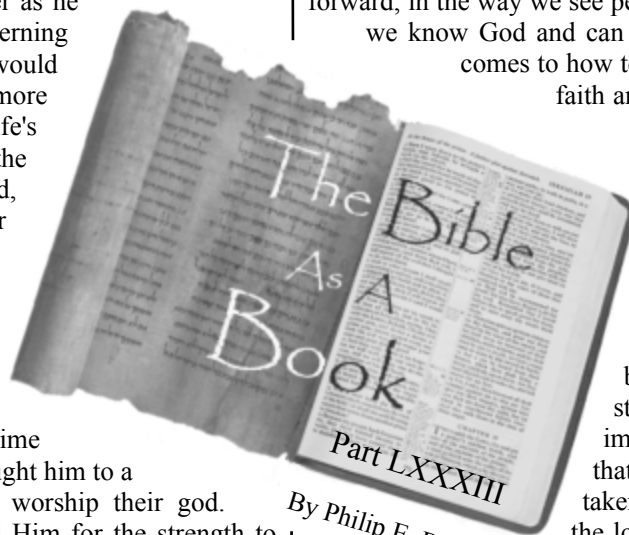
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As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, last time we talked about the latter part of the life of Samson. We picked up at his wedding to see what happened with the bet he had made with the Philistine men and went through how his should have been wife was given by her father to another man. After what Samson did in vengeance for this the Philistines had that woman and her father killed. This caused Samson to seek vengeance again, but after that Samson was willing to forget the matter and move on. However, the Philistines were determined to rid themselves of Samson so they continued to look for a way to capture him. This led us to discuss the relationship Samson had with another Philistine woman named Delilah and how he eventually gave in to her as he had his should have been wife concerning the riddle. Unfortunately, Samson would give in to Delilah on a matter far more important. He would tell her his life's story and why he had the power to do the things he did. As we discussed, Samson's hair was not a formula for taking away and giving him strength as so many believe, but in trusting Delilah with the covenant he had with God he gave her the power to break that covenant. This led to Samson's capture and torture by the Philistines, and we ended last time talking about how the Philistines brought him to a very large party to mock him and worship their god. Samson remembered God and asked Him for the strength to take vengeance one last time by collapsing the house the party was in. In doing this Samson killed more Philistines in his death than he had in his life. This brought us through the end of Judges chapter 16 and we are ready to begin chapter 17 this time.

Chapter 17 begins a story that shows us just how far out of the knowledge of God and His Law the nation was by this point. This is an issue I believe more students of the Bible need to take to heart. Too often we get this idea God tried something using the Law and it didn't work. The right perspective is to understand that Israel did not enact the Law the way they should most of the time and that's putting it lightly. Thus, we do not see God's Law at work as much as we see us as humans being unwilling to follow even a written law given by God that gives

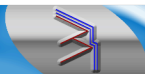
us instructions for how to live. This is one of the most important reasons we all need to study the Law. We almost never see what the Law can do when enacted by a larger group, but we can still glean from it the truths it holds by considering what the Law was trying to create. The other aspect we should really grasp in a story like this is the fact that just because the nation was astray from the truth of the Law, it did not mean they had forgotten God altogether. This is a good thing from the aspect they had not totally forgotten there was a God in Israel, but a bad thing from the standpoint they didn't understand God and His ways. This is why we must humble ourselves in the sight of The Lord and allow Him to lift us up. (James 4:10) If we simply go forward, in the way we see people doing in this story, thinking we know God and can make up what we want when it comes to how to please Him, we stop walking in faith and without faith it's impossible to please God! (Heb. 11:6)



By Philip E. Busby

when he admits to his mother he had it in his possession. She is elated to find this out as she had intended the silver be given to God. The problem is, she wanted to give it to God by using the silver to make a graven image for her son's use. This is a clear violation of the third commandment out of the ten most rudimentary laws God gave to Israel, yet in this story the individuals involved were so devoid of that knowledge they believed they could serve God by making an idol. Thus, the mother takes part of the silver to have one made and gives the idol to her son. Unfortunately, it didn't stop there. We are told this woman's son, whose name was Micah, eventually gathered an entire personal pantheon of idols he kept in his house. These types of activities are exactly why God didn't want people making idols, even if they were to represent Him. God

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also gave the chosen nation a temple which was to be the only place of its kind, meaning having other “temples” and/or items of worship within one's home should have been understood to be a violation of God's Law!

Again, Israel had strayed far enough away from the truth of the Law, none of this was something obviously wrong to them. This is where we see the thought introduced that Israel had no king in those days and that was the reason individuals did whatever they thought was right according to their own thoughts. At least that's the way it gets interpreted a lot of the time, and by doing so it seems to lend credibility to the idea Israel needed a king. The only way these words apply to that idea is the fact a good king, who followed God with his whole heart, could do more to enforce the Law of God throughout the nation. A king could also do things that would help assure everyone in the nation at least knew the Law. However, there is nothing even about those thoughts that say Israel needed a king. This is true if for no other reason than the fact it was extremely hard to have a king who would do such things. This is clearly shown in the stories of how Israel ends up with a king as well as the long line of kings God attempted to deal with and through as the nation's history moved forward. During the time of the kings we rarely see the nation following the Law any better than we see during or before the time of the judges. What these words are actually attempting to show us is how badly the nation had failed to even go in the direction humans so often go in when it comes to serving “higher powers,” and that is the love of a culturally universal religion!

As I point out all the time, humans love religion they can control and in spite of the fact the people had not totally forgotten God, they had forgotten, if not downright rejected, even the religious ways the Law gave the chosen nation to serve God. Instead, the people had went off having no cohesive religion whether it was in line with what the Law should have taught them or something entirely made up by individuals and/or groups of individuals. This is why it is mentioned that there was no king in the nation at that time. The chosen nation did not totally take on the religion of the Philistines who oppressed them at the time. This was more than likely something many individuals did, but it was not something the nation as a whole or even in a large group did. The people of Israel did not generally like the Philistines, and I'm sure that dislike was good motivation to remain culturally separate in the ways they could. Nothing in a culture is more defining and holds more sway than the religion a particular culture creates for themselves! Thus, Israel uses the idea of having their own God as a basis for their cultural identity and religion, but again, there is no agreed upon way to go about this. The importance of what I'm getting at here is best seen when looking at the fact Israel later on divides into two nations consisting of a Northern Kingdom and a Southern Kingdom.

The Southern Kingdom stays with God's Law. They do not have incredible success in comparison to the time we are looking at in Judges but there was more cohesiveness to how it was carried out, which was a good thing at times and a bad thing at other times. It was good when the king was attempting to follow God because that drove the entire nation's culture to a more Godly state. However, it was a bad thing when the king

did not desire God because he had the power to drive the culture away from God and His Law; making it hard for the people who wanted to do right to do so. This point is clearly seen in the Northern Kingdom. The kings in the North understood the threat was very real that the two nations would become one again at some point. This would not go so well for the king in the North because it would be clear the more original capital of the chosen nation was Jerusalem. This would also mean the king in Jerusalem would be the king the entire nation would turn to and the king of the North would become irrelevant. The best way to keep this from happening was to begin as quickly as possible to build a separate religion in the North which would intentionally be different from the South but contain most all the vital elements the South's religion contained. This would make it easier to transition the people of the North into the new religion and in turn the culture that would secure the king's position.

This idea eventually grew to the point the North would set down a more solid capital city with a temple of its own. In this way we see what is truly meant by the idea there was no king in Israel at the time of the Judges and every man did what was right in his own eyes. The reference is not the idea a king would maintain the righteous ways of God and therefore Israel needed one, but to help us understand why the people were not even adhering to some cultural norm led and maintained by centralized government. Without centralized government and the fact humans want what they want without having to yield to God's guidance, the religion the Law had given the nation was not something the people were willing to follow just because it was available to them. God's Law was a constant reminder of how we should yield to God in all things, and in spite of being a religion, that point was not appealing to fleshly-minded people. Without accepting the religion the Law would have given the nation, the nation had no centralized religious thought, standard, or influence and that left it open to individual interpretation as to what religious notions one wanted to adhere to.

This is what drove events such as the one this story in Judges chapter 17 covers. Micah did not stop with just having a silver idol to represent God Himself, he had a whole collection of idols and instruments meant to divine the will of God and/or the gods. The story begins by telling us about the idol Micah's mother had made, but the other idols could have been any number of false gods from other places as we see happen sometimes when false gods were brought into the temple in Jerusalem later on. That said, when that happened in later times it was mostly due to a king wanting to grow his political power by being inclusive about his religion and/or a way of saying, “My collection of gods is at least as big if not bigger than yours.” As was the fallacy of Solomon, sometimes it was driven by making political connections with other nations which often included both marrying a daughter of another king as well as allowing her to bring her culture's god(s) into the temple or have other temples made for the worship of these false gods. In the case of Micah, nothing about it is indicated as being political and/or international. Meaning he did not necessarily go out and collect gods from other people. That said, I think it was true Micah got some of his concepts for what other gods to have from standard world religious thought. What's interesting is

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment we covered Abraham's servant bringing Rebekah back to meet Isaac for the first time. In talking about that we discussed how the nature of God and the Godhead is really seen in this story as the servant for the first time calls Isaac his master instead of his master's son. He also gives his report directly to Isaac in spite of the fact Abraham was the one who had sent the servant. We went on to talk about how Isaac and Rebekah were not only joined in marriage but how this event really marked the passing of the torch from Abraham to Isaac as the head of the household which would go on to form the chosen nation. With this being true, Abraham was completely free to take another wife and in spite of his advanced age which made Isaac's birth a miracle, God would give Abraham six more sons through this new wife named Keturah. In this we talked about how God basically gave Abraham a second adult life which resulted in him gaining the blessings many probably expected to see in a person God had promised to make the father of many nations. All these sons would be given gifts by Abraham and sent away from Isaac, and from the description, they were apparently sent out of the heart of the promised land as well. Abraham was very clear on the fact the real point of his life and calling was to establish the chosen nation through which God would do great things in this world unto this very day! All that brought us into Genesis chapter 25 verse 6 and we will pick up with that verse again this time.

One detail we did not cover in discussing verse 6 last time is the fact Keturah is called a "concubine" in this verse, not a wife. Now, I have covered this idea in other study parts concerning kings, and when I have I've always pointed out that a concubine is a wife. However, the term is used to denote women who were used mostly for the purpose of giving the king more children, and sons in particular. This is just one of those odd thought patterns we see in humans and it mostly gets blamed on men. However, I have known more than a few women who love to have as many children as possible. The reasons might be a little different from male to female in some ways, but in the case of kings it was pretty clear the reason was for the king to put as much of his "seed" into the gene pool of his kingdom as possible. This all grew out of the fact the idea, kings came from people having leaders such as tribal leaders and tribal leaders grew out of the fact God set up the family with the husband as the head. God's pure and simple idea for leadership and responsibility for a group was taken up this ladder due to man's desire for centralized government, which in the first of the idea was clearly seen as a way to make a go at this life and world without God's leadership. It was a way to replace God being directly over the husband who was over his wife who together were over the children a man and woman can biologically create together.

No matter man's original intent, the idea that a tribal leader is the head of a group of related families clearly made

him like the father of the entire tribe. As more than one tribe grew together and the desire for more centralized government gained ground among certain people, kings would replace the individual tribal leaders or come to be the head of the tribal leaders depending on how it was chosen to be set up. This made it less clear that a king was like the head of a family but the concept was still there. In the way government is looked to for help, the king was to be the protector and ultimate provider. More often than not what comes of having more and more centralized government brings just the opposite. However, humans have a way of ignoring what's right in front of their face and instead live in the dream world that only resides in their heads. Thus, kings were looked to as the father of nations and as such had the right to spread their genetic material far and wide. The end result and thinking behind this was often thwarted by the next king to take the throne even if that man was the previous king's son. This because the new king would want to get rid of the challenges he might face in being replaced by one of his siblings, and the best way to do that was to kill all your brothers if not your sisters as well.

All those facts aside, it was a solid tradition that a king had a wife or maybe several women who were taken for love, political, or other purposes by the kings to be wives. Then there would be women taken by him, or in many cases given to him, who would be wives but their real reason for being around was not love or political gain as much as it was just to enlarge the king's house. Enlarge the house they would by just being the king's wife, but they would do more than that by often becoming mothers to numerous children for the king who also mostly served that purpose. That's why the son of a concubine rarely had a shot at becoming the next king! Again, these women were wives but they had a, dare I say, lower position within the king's house. Thus, they would be referred to as concubines. Now when it comes to Abraham's second wife Keturah, this explains in some ways why she is called a concubine, but we need to be clear on this point. Keturah, in more ways than any of the women considered concubines by kings, was a full wife to Abraham. Sarah had passed away and that left Abraham free to remarry. This also means he was still only the husband of one wife just as God intended it to be. That said, Keturah would never be Sarah in any of the ways she was important to God building the chosen nation. She was important to God blessing Abraham and making him the father of many nations, but in a way that means she was there to give Abraham more children which he would, due to God's plan, never have had with Sarah!

The definition might be finite but it should be kept in mind. It is why we are given chapter after chapter of Abraham's life leading up to this point, and then his entire life with Keturah is summed up in a couple three verses which go on to tell us about Abraham's death. That, in fact, brings us to verse 7 where we are told a fact we mostly covered at the end of last segment

due to our discussion about it being possible for Abraham to wait until after Sarah's death to marry Keturah and still have time to see grandchildren born of her children with him. Abraham lived to be 175 years old, which as we talked about before was a good ways past the 120 year cap God set at the flood long before Abraham's time. This in and of itself speaks to the miracle and blessing of God on Abraham's life but that said, it was in a physical way man looks for more so than what God would consider true. For all the blessings of comfort God gave Abraham he actually lived a stressful life on a lot of levels. He was moved from his home to a strange land. He lived a large portion of his life wondering how God was going to fulfill the promise he would be the father of a great nation. This is what caused him to have Ishmael through Hagar. After raising this son for a few years, Isaac was born and that led to Abraham having to face the heartbreak of sending Hagar and Ishmael away.

Those are just the high points of what Abraham went through and none of it is to say God gave him a bad life. It's only to point out that life in a world of sin can be hard enough when you're attempting to live for God and being asked to make sacrifices in this life in order to serve God can be a challenging thing as well; especially when we make mistakes of our own doing. All this is only to say, to live is to do the work of God and to die living in faith is gain! (Phil. 1:21) Thus, God giving the blessing to Abraham of living so long in this world is more for us seeing God's blessing just as so many things of Abraham's life was about letting us see symbols of God's blessings and nature. It's the part of the Torah many people do not get because it isn't taught correctly, and that's why the worst teaching is to teach God was somehow different in the Old Testament than what He shows us in the New. The only reason the new is new is because God gave us, in the Man Jesus Christ, just that much more of a way to see the truth. It's why Jesus told his disciples, at what Christians call the last supper, that from then on when they held Passover they'd do it in remembrance of what He was about to do. (Luke 22:19-20) If you did not understand God held the power to raise man from the dead, to save us from the sin death brings to us all, what more could God do than to demonstrate the fact He could face death Himself and simply get up and walk away, alive forever more?

Moving on to verse 8 we see the confirmation that Abraham died being full of years. He did not just live or exist but his life truly meant something in this world. This part is not to say he lived a life that meant something by man's standards but that his life meant something to the Kingdom of God. Oh to be used for the purposes of God! There simply is no higher calling or better fulfillment of one's life than for that to be said of them. This verse also tells us that Abraham was gathered to his people. This is a little different than we normally see for a description of a person's death in the Word of God. We often see the place of burial being told in more of a specific way, such as the tomb the person was buried in, or we are told the person's bones were gathered to their fathers. The bones being gathered to their fathers idea is often to describe a literal way burial was done in those days. In many tombs there was a shelf the person's body was laid on and under that shelf there was a hollow carved into the rock or built of stone which the bones would eventually be collected in when the time came to put the

next person's body on the shelf. This made the use of tombs, which were expensive to create, far more practical.

The other method that was employed was to use a stone box called an ossuary. Such boxes could be kept in a tomb or in some other place, but the point was the same. After the body had deteriorated to nothing more than dust and bones the bones could be collected into these boxes. If one was wealthy enough their bones might be put in a box all their own, but traditionally the idea was for your bones to be literally gathered into the same box as that of your father and maybe his father and so on. The description of one's bones being gathered to their fathers was both poetic as well as literal for the way a person was buried. That said, we don't see that wording here for Abraham. What we see is that he was gathered to his people, which is interesting considering Abraham was in a land where few to none of his relatives ever were, much less lived and died. His bones certainly would not be gathered to his fathers in the traditional way. This is why we see the words about his people. Abraham was building a new life and family group here in the promised land. His wife Sarah had died and he bought a place to bury her. This place would be used for generations to come as a burial place in the promised land long before anyone of this family held any of this land as truly their own. This place where Abraham and Sarah were buried would be the start of what would be, their people, as time went on!

Both verses 9 and 10 are mostly confirming information that the cave Abraham bought for Sarah was the same cave Abraham was buried in. The emphasis here has to do with both the fact we need to understand without a doubt that this place where God had called Abraham out of his home to come to was the place he then lived and died in, as well as was buried here! There was no turning back even to the point of returning the body to Mesopotamia. This stands in sharp contrast to the fact Jacob wanted to be sure in later times his body was brought back from Egypt to be buried here with his fathers, which of course were Abraham and Isaac. (Gen. 47:29-31, 50:1-14) This was also a very specific request made by Joseph. In spite of becoming very much an Egyptian insider and leader who no doubt would be honored in the traditional Egyptian way at his death, he made his children swear that they would take his body with them when a later generation left this land for the promised land. (Gen. 50:24-26, Ex. 13:17-19, Josh. 24:32) It was important these early generations set the example that they considered Canaan their only true home! In Joseph's case he was making it clear to the chosen family/nation he believed God would fulfill the promise to take them out of Egypt and give them the land of Canaan when the time was right!

The other really interesting fact given to us in verse 9 is that it was not just Isaac who buried his father. Both Isaac and Ishmael come together to bury their father. I find this one of the most touching moments in the Word of God. It's a simple fact that passes by fast as you're reading the words and far too often we don't take the time to dwell on such small things as this. However, stop and think about what this means. The story has been focused on Abraham and Sarah raising Isaac, and Ishmael has been off in the south country presumably out of contact. This verse shows us a different story. Ishmael was not exiled from his family and by this point was in close enough contact

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LVII

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 rundown of the Roman emperors as we lead our way up to seeing how Rome eventually came to be considered a Christian empire. In doing this, we talked about how the emperor named Elagabalus had lost popularity with the Roman people and that included the military and upper class. Seeing this, his grandmother persuaded him to name his cousin Alexander to the position of Caesar and that made Alexander the heir to the throne. Alexander grew in popularity which angered Elagabalus who then attempted to get rid of Alexander. His schemes did not work, and his anger on this issue eventually led to his own assassination which put Alexander on the throne as emperor. This was all good news for Alexander, his mother and grandmother; as well as the empire as a whole in many ways. However, in spite of Alexander's early success in leading the empire he was not a military man, and when the war with Eranshahr came Alexander was not able to handle it well. The empire would be spared and restore most all its territory in the end but Alexander had lost the confidence of the military. Alexander's real problem was that one of the most significant moves against the empire was about to come and under these circumstances the empire would be ill equipped to face it!

The mutiny we talked about last time was put down and Alexander returned to Rome to celebrate his victory over Eranshahr in 232 A.D. However, as we talked about, the Roman army didn't really see that war as ending in victory. They had pushed the enemy back out of their territory but at a high cost! The army was demoralized and doubtful of their leader. Then in 234 A.D. the threat we have been talking about and leading up to finally came in a way that would be more than just an inconvenience to the empire. The barbarians in the North crossed the Rhine and Danube Rivers and they did it in such large numbers that news of the incursion quickly made it all the way back to Rome which greatly alarmed its citizens. As news of the damage the invasion was doing spread across the empire Alexander had no choice but to go to the front lines of this new war. Rome would bring a great amount of its military might to face this threat. However, since he had no real skill in commanding the army in the right way to fight it, Alexander hoped the barbarians would be convinced to retreat just at the sight of how large and powerful the Roman army seemed to be. This didn't work out so well and Alexander's mother wanted him to try and bribe the barbarians to buy time. That move would be the breaking point for Alexander's support among the military.

Offering a bribe to the enemy was like saying, we know we're not strong enough to defeat you but please don't hurt us. After the demoralizing losses the army had suffered in the last

war which was very fresh and raw in their minds, this move caused the military to feel Alexander had crossed the line of no return. It goes without saying that if the military felt it was time to look for a replacement for the emperor then his days were numbered. Historians disagree with exactly how Alexander was assassinated but they agree that both he and his mother were assassinated together. Since his mother was responsible for much of Alexander's choices it was deemed important that both be done away with in order to bring a new emperor to the throne. Unlike the assassination of his cousin, Alexander left no successor and it would have been amazing if the military had accepted that person had they existed. The empire was in crisis and the Severus Dynasty had failed them for the last time. The military was ready to see that dynasty come to an end and with Alexander's death it did!

Whatever problems this might have seemed to solve it's hard to say in the end if it did much more than ignite the time period history would come to call, "The Crisis of the Third Century." Of course the barbarians can be blamed for starting it in many ways but that aside, it was a terrible time for the leadership of the Roman Empire to be in question. By the time Alexander was assassinated there was already a man the military favored to rise to the throne, but such moves rarely seen great success. Unless the person is not only a great leader who can appease the military but one that also has qualities which eventually win over the people as well, they will be turned against more times than not by the people and/or the military. This is a hard thing to accomplish for anyone but when it comes at a critical juncture, such as Rome was at during this time, it's a wonder Rome did not collapse within just a few years after Alexander's death. Now, none of this is to say the man the military chose as their new emperor was a mistake, it's only to point out what we have been discussing this entire time. This 50 year period we are stepping into would not just be a crisis, it would change the nature of the Roman Empire and truly put it on the path to its ultimate collapse! Of course this study is about the history of the Jews but we got into this history of Rome to see how Europe came to be which would have significant impact on Jewish history of later times. What we are seeing in looking at Rome is the simple truth God put in place at the Tower of Babel. Man will never build a one world empire.

God confounding man's language at the Tower never stopped men from desiring to build a one world government as well as insisting it is the way the world would work best. However, the fact it will never work is seen clearly in what is going on in the Roman Empire during this crisis. The bottom line is men fail and they fail for many reasons. Some men are good leaders but can't see the bigger picture and/or enough of the picture to make the right choices. This is a simple truth man's arrogance did not allow him to see at the Tower, and it's why we humans still think a central government is the way to go in place

of looking to God for our direction. Far more often than not there is also the issue rulers are corrupt. In one form or another people tend to be selfish and when they are given great power they use that power not for the common good but for their own. One of the other major problems with human rule is that even if the leader himself has good intentions and/or ability to lead well, one man can't do it alone and there is always plenty of corruption to be found around people with great power.

All these things lead to overall corruption within any government structure and ultimately the deterioration of the nation, state, empire, etc. This is true even if some outside force doesn't take it down first. In the case of every major empire in the line of those represented by the beast in Revelation, outside forces, be they military or political, always played a role. This is the ultimate way the Tower of Babel effect keeps a one world government from forming. Man will never get to a point where one human government can truly rule the entire world, if for no other reason than the fact men will never agree on how to operate such a plan and that can happen even internally to an existing system. In this truth we should see the confounding of language did not cause this, it only amplified it. God created us with diversity built right in. It is also part of what having a free will can bring about. At the Tower man wanted to put all human free will under one central human authority. They wanted to harness what they saw as the power of unification and they wanted to do this in spite of who they had to dispose of or oppress to accomplish it. It was this oppression God saved us from by confounding our language and amplifying the fact we all can think very differently; have different personalities; and most of all, different desires for what we want to do with our lives. This means only force, including murder, can "unify" humanity under one human government. By confounding our language God showed that to us in a way that would not take place behind the closed doors of government oppression.

Now, Rome lasted a good long time as empires go so it had plenty of time to see all the different ways an empire can be corrupted and weakened from within. Still it never figured out how to deal with it in the end, and the end was certainly coming. The events that came next show us that clearly. In spite of all the reforms that would finally be made to stabilize the empire, the transition from what the empire was and what it came to be at its end is really seen during this time. The barbarians were pressing hard and this time around they would not be denied. Getting into what happened after Alexander was assassinated, the military had basically already chosen a man to replace Alexander with. This man would also set the tone for the kind of men who would rule the empire going forward. There had always been an upper class of people in the empire from whom emperors were to come. Not all the emperors we see were born into that class but for one reason or the other they gained status as part of that class at some point before becoming emperor. That would now change as men who were from far more common place roots could be chosen as emperor or come to gain that position by force.

The oddity we see in this is that on some levels this meant Rome was more of the republic it always aspired to be, for instead of emperors coming to the throne like kings do, even a common man could end up with the top seat in the empire. In spite of that truth most of the emperors who came next would

not last if for no other reason than the fact they never were accepted by the military, the senate, and the people who all got a say. More than once this lack of acceptance came because not all agreed the emperor came from a place which was proper for an emperor to be chosen from. This process we see beginning with the man the military chose to replace Alexander. The man's name was Gaius Julius Verus Maximinus, but commonly he was known as simply Thrax. Historians disagree as to this man's exact roots but only in detail. It is clear Thrax came from what was considered "low-birth," and was something very common before joining the Roman military. In short, Thrax only stood in a position to be considered for emperor due to the circumstances of how a new emperor at the time was chosen and the fact he had worked his way up through the ranks to become a commander of a Roman Legion. Thus, he would be the first of what some term, "Barracks Emperors" or simply, "Soldier Emperors." This was to say, men who rose to be emperors solely based on their position within the Roman military.

In a show of that corrupt way of thinking we discussed above, in spite of the crisis at hand, Thrax would begin his reign by attempting to secure his new found position. This he would do by eliminating those loyal to Alexander. That said, he might have been somewhat justified because two major plots against his life were thwarted before he could eliminate all those who supported the former emperor. In more positive news for the empire, Thrax did successfully defend the frontier against the latest barbarian invasion of the empire. However, the barbarians were a strong people as we've talked about before and his victories came with high casualty rates for his troops. Having secured the border temporarily Thrax setup camp without concern for making it to Rome. This may have been the move of a smart military man who cared about his troops rather than a politician who would have cared more about politically securing his position of emperor. However, I say that not to flatter Thrax's image but only to make the point, trouble for him was brewing in Rome. The senate was not happy at what they saw as a military revolt on many levels. In short, they had nothing to do with appointing Thrax emperor and that point alone angered them.

The senate was on the lookout for a replacement of Thrax and a good opportunity arose right at the start of 238 A.D. A rebellion broke out in the Province of Africa due to a treasury official's corrupt practices against the people. The people armed themselves to kill that official and named their own emperor, that being the Provincial Governor Marcus Antonius Gordianus Sempronianus, known simply as Gordian I. They also named his son Gordian II co-emperor. The senate would throw their support behind this pair and begin promoting them as the new emperors throughout the empire. Hearing of this Thrax would head for Rome with his army. However, the matter in Africa was not totally settled as the governor of the Province to the west disliked the Gordians and attacked them. Gordian II was killed in the fighting and upon hearing this his father committed suicide. This left the senate in a really bad position. They had put their allegiance behind two men who were now dead and Thrax well on his way to Rome. Thus, the senate would choose two of their own members, Pupienus and Balbinus, to become the new co-emperors of Rome. The problem was, these two men came from a class of people in Roman society which ruled in earlier

times and was by this time very unpopular with the people. The people showed their displeasure of these men by protesting and throwing sticks and stones at the new emperors' procession.

A further problem was that a faction within Rome favored the traditional idea of dynastic succession and they wanted Gordian I's grandson, Gordian III, to become emperor. All of this disagreement and tension brought severe fighting to the streets of Rome and Pupienus and Balbinus had no option but to name Gordian III Caesar. This was a pure political move to appease the people since they favored the Gordians over Pupienus and Balbinus. However, this move essentially made four different men emperor all at the same time. As Thrax continued through the winter weather to march his army toward Rome, the city of Aquileia which sets very close to the eastern border at the top of the nation we call Italy today, closed its gates on Thrax. This denied Thrax's army the supplies and shelter they needed. Thus, Thrax would lay siege to the city. This was a very unexpected delay and hardship for his army who grew very disquieted. On top of that they eventually began to suffer from starvation. By late spring of 238 A.D. the men had had enough and Thrax was assassinated by his own troops along with his son and his ministers. They would then surrender to the forces that had been dispatched to stop them. For "saving the empire from a public enemy" these troops would be pardoned and sent back to their provinces. The bodies of those they had assassinated would be beheaded and the heads of those killed were placed on poles which were carried to Rome by cavalrymen. This is the closest to the city of Rome Thrax would ever come during his slightly over three years as emperor.

Thrax's death would clear the way for Pupienus and Balbinus to be true co-emperors with Gordian III holding the title of Caesar, but the trouble wouldn't end there. Pupienus had led the forces that went out to stop Thrax, and in his absence the city of Rome had broke out in riots that resulted in a major fire which destroyed much of the city. With both of the emperors once again in what was left of the city the riots calmed but the underlying case(s) remained. Pupienus and Balbinus also never trusted each other and both lived in fear of assassination by the other. However, as co-emperors they actually had an advantage in that two enemies, Eranshahr in the east and the barbarian threat to the north, could each be confronted by one of the two emperors. As hard as this might have been to pull off considering how much the military was costing the empire by that point as well as how demoralized it was in spite of these payments, the two emperors apparently spent far more of their time fighting each other than they did accomplishing anything. The empire was truly in crisis, and finally the Praetorian Guard would settle things by brutally assassinating them both. This brought their short-lived reign of 99 days to a close and left Gordian III as sole emperor of a very troubled empire. In all, the year 238 A.D. saw six different men as emperor and that's why this year is some times referred to as the, "Year of Six Emperors."

Gordian III was only 13 years old when all this took place making him the youngest sole emperor to rule over a united Roman Empire. Due to his youth it would be advisors more so than he himself who would make the decisions on how to run the empire at this point. These advisors would be from the aristocratic families who would basically use the senate to

control the empire. As vulnerable as the emperor's throne had been it was now almost a side issue. In 240 A.D. a leader in the African Province would revolt and declare himself emperor but he would quickly be brought under control. In the next year Gordian III would be married to the daughter of the newly appointed leader of the Praetorian Guard, a man named Timesitheus. As if the position of Praetorian Prefect wasn't powerful enough Timesitheus was now the father-in-law of a man already too young to be emperor. It wouldn't take long for Timesitheus to become the de facto ruler of the empire.

In an interesting Biblical note it was at this time Rome was also struck with several major earthquakes. Some of these are said to have been so severe they opened the ground and swallowed entire cities along with those who lived there! This caused Gordian III to consult the Sibylline Books which were a collection of oracular utterances. In ancient times there were people believed to be very wise and knowledgeable even to the point they could tell the future. This was mostly credited with the idea they could speak to the gods; thus, becoming the oracles of the gods. The Sibylline Books were said to be written records of what such people had said, and they were purchased by the last king of Rome who reigned from 534 to 509 B.C. before the republic was formed. The tale of the purchase said there were originally several more volumes than the king ended up with but when he initially refused to pay the asking price for the books the woman selling them is said to have burned three of them only to ask the same price for the remaining six. When he refused again she burned three more and maintained her original price for the last three. The king would then consult with his own "oracle" who was a man whose job it was to study the events of the heavens (like the practice of astrology but more glorified in some aspects) in order to interpret the will of the gods.

This was typical pagan practice dating all the way back to the Tower of Babel. In fact it's why the tower itself was built. We talk so much and refer so much to the Tower of Babel we some times forget the people decided to build a city and a tower. (Gen. 11:4) The tower's purpose was to "reach heaven" which is interpreted by some Biblical teachers as meaning they thought they could literally build a tower so tall it would take them up to God Himself. I've heard this taught to such a degree of misunderstanding that the thought also goes on to teach that's the reason God chose to stop them. In truth there is no way to reach into heaven through physical means humans have available to them. This truth is also why Jack could never use his lantern to find his way back to earth through the outer darkness he faced in the story that gives us the Jack-o-lantern. Thus, God would not have stopped man because this tower was a threat to Him. God also would not have stopped man just because they thought they could accomplish such a thing. God stopped man because what we see in this Roman story is what they actually were creating the illusion could be done, and God wanted to make sure all men had the chance to find Him without being sold a worldwide belief system which taught certain people were the only ones who could touch the gods and therefore determine the course of human history.

So while the confounding of language left us with smaller groups of people all over the world believing in essentially the same thing, which was started at the Tower, at

least there has always been room for disagreement. This point is why the Roman king didn't want to pay the woman's price for the books. I mean, why would he? He had an oracle of his own; a man who looked into the "heavenly realms" and could advise the king as to the future and the will of the gods! It wasn't until the woman had burned six of the books that the king bothered to consult his own oracle on the matter and found out his oracle's advice was to pay the woman whatever she wanted post hast in order to obtain the remaining three books! Now, one might ask, why would a man capable of looking into the heavenly realms care about a collection of writings consisting of words spoken by other so called oracles, and one would be wise to ask such a thing. The answer is the same reason we see so many of the religions of the world able to co-exist. Not just in the idea they can all do their thing without killing each other over differences of opinion (which also does in fact happen quite often through human history) but they can actually intermingle their teachings, even their gods. As we have touched on before, there was great effort to sync the gods of the Romans with the gods of the Greeks which created the popular religious system of the Roman Empire as an entity. This is the simple practice of comparing and/or attributing power of one god to another in order to say, these gods are actually the same deity.

This is what we see the Greeks attempt to do to the Jews during the events that brought about the celebration of Hanukkah. The Greeks attempted to claim The One True God was equivalent if not the same deity as their man-made god Zeus. The Jews were the one people in the world who were solidly taught in the ways of God and that brought with it the fact Our God is One God not multiple gods or some parallel of a man-made god. (James 2:19) Even then there were plenty of Jews who went along with the Greeks believing it was the best course of action for one reason or another. However, those who believed God stood up to say no! With God's help they would eventually drive the Greeks from the temple and relight the temple lamps which would remain lit for eight days (the time it took for new oil to be produced). The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) would continue to be a celebration from then forward to commemorate the event. Now, you might be thinking I've totally lost track of the old woman with the books story, but I have not. Jews faced this religious challenge because God had given them an advantage. What was that? One of the very first things God gave the children of Israel was the Torah. In other words, God gave the chosen nation a set of writings which are referred to as oracles in Romans 3:2. God set up this entire system of a chosen nation who would hold the oracles of The One True God to counter the exact practices taught to man as the way to find wisdom at the Tower of Babel. This is why it was such a bad thing for the nation to ever take on the religions, teachings, and/or beliefs of other nations. Israel was to hold the ultimate oracles to exist on the planet; the ways of The Only True God of the universe and The Creator of all things!

Such a people should never need the oracles of other people and Israel did not. However, they were just human and fell on many occasions to the same compulsions that led people to desire the Tower of Babel after the flood. As I continue to repeat in my writings, man being given a free will by God was/is

not enough for most people. They want even more control over their world and universe than any one individual can obtain and they believe the way to get it is through collectivism. However, the real point of desiring such powers is so we can feel comfortable in rejecting The God Who created us so we may do as we please instead of as we should! We continue to believe there is a way around the truth that for us all to have a free will and live together we must be righteous as individual. If we do not act righteously bad things happen and the only way to know true righteousness is to learn it from our Creator! For many people that seems too restrictive but just going at it all on our own seems like an obvious failure shown by our own lack of success as humans. The flood God sent on the world made that truth very potent to those who lived just after it and that's why they invented for themselves an illusion of knowing such things as the future and the like through religious practices. Then when bad things happen which are anything from seemingly explainable to truly inexplicable, such as severe earthquakes all over our kingdom, nation, world, etc., we have something to look too for "answers."

The fact even this system leaves us with great feelings of uncertainty is why collectivism, even among religious systems, is so often accepted if not sought. This is why the Roman king's personal oracle wanted the king to pay any price to obtain the writings of other oracle utterances. The king's oracle knew he didn't have the truth the whole truth and some monopoly on the truth. If other so called oracles could assist him, if not totally guide him, he wanted all the help he could get and he cared not how much the king had to pay to get it. In truth he was greatly disturbed by the fact so many of the books had already been lost! Unlike Israel who were to know they had the real truth and needed no other than those things obtained through personal faith, the pagan is always looking for new and better revelations that can be added to their collection. This is what the Roman king obtained in buying the last three of the woman's books, and those writings would be cared for and maintained by the Roman religious system for centuries. As Israel would often do with God's Word, these oracle writings of Rome's would largely be ignored in favor of what the current leaders and/or religious practices wanted, taught, and believed. Then a major event would occur which would shake their trust in the current ways of thinking and they would go running to consult some old dusty writings of words spoken by nothing more than fortune tellers of days long past. This is a habit we have as humans; a nature if you will, and we often do this with God's Word ourselves. This is a great fallacy for knowledge of God's Word ahead of a crisis is what causes us to differentiate between a real crisis and just another event among men. It also brings us through crisis in ways those who ignore God's words don't have!

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

to know when his father had passed away. This means either Isaac knew how to contact him or he was around enough to know for himself his father was near death. I believe the second of those two is more correct, but no matter which is, he was in contact and that's so very nice to know. It truly broke Abraham's heart to have to send he and his mother away, but the point of that was just to satisfy the fact Isaac needed to be raised like an only child. The optics of that was as important or more so than the fact Isaac would not be raised with an older brother in the house. However, now that time had passed. They were all adults and I can only imagine Abraham's joy in getting to see his son or hear news of him any chance he got. Isaac and Ishmael had the right understanding and relationship to come together and bury their father as the family they physically were.

The interesting facts don't end there either. We are told in verse 11 that God blessed Isaac greatly which confirms the blessing put on Abraham now resided on Isaac. However, he would not live in the same area as his father. When we talked about him meeting Rebekah we talked about him coming up from the south. This is because south of where Abraham lived is where Isaac had chosen to live, and this likely had to do with him already having so much to take care of in being the one in charge of the daily operations of maintaining such a large house and holdings as he and his father had been blessed with. The interesting part of this is that the name of the well given in this verse as the place where Isaac lived is "Lahai-roi." The other way this well is referred to is "Beer-lahai-roi," as in Beersheba. The wilderness of Beersheba is where Hagar wandered after leaving Abraham's house. This means, this place could very well be the place and well where Hagar had given up hope and sat down to die a ways away from where she left her son Ishmael. Then the angel of God tells her God would take care of her and make a great nation out of her son. She then looks up and sees a well of water and goes to get water to bring life back to her and her son.

The name of this well where Isaac lived means, "The well of the living one who sees me" and that's exactly what God had shown Hagar. God saw her and gave her a blessing when she thought all was lost and God had left her. Now, Hagar was some 70 miles south of where Abraham was living at the time, but now here we see Isaac very close if not in the same place tending to the work of the household. It would seem God had blessed Abraham and Isaac over those years to the point they covered this entire area and God had blessed what was in the days of Isaac's childhood, a dry and thirsty land, making it into a place usable for flocks. It was such a good place by this point Isaac had chosen to live there, and that says a lot! The fact Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury Abraham might speak to how very close the two men now lived in proximity to each other. This would not speak to the idea that they were intermingling their households but being close to family would be great protection from outside forces. Not to mention just annoying situations that might come up as both Abraham and Isaac faced in being so close to the Philistines.

Verse 12 shifts gears from Isaac to Ishmael very directly, but instead of getting any kind of longer story about the life of Ishmael we get a small rundown about his sons and

a good idea of what they became. This wrapping up of Ishmael's life does not mean he was so much older than Isaac and/or he died young while Isaac was just starting his family. The idea here is to show us the wrap up of Abraham's life. The last major event of Abraham's life was sending the servant to retrieve a wife for Isaac. That's speaking from the standpoint of his life as God's plan was using it, and that's why directly following that event we get a few short verses telling us Abraham got remarried and had six sons who grew up; had children of their own; and were sent away from Isaac by Abraham. Then we get a couple three verses telling us how old Abraham was when he died and how his two oldest sons came together to bury him. That is followed by a verse that directly tells us Isaac was the son the blessing that was on Abraham was passed to. To wrap up the last piece of Abraham's life we are told what came of his eldest son Ishmael and we find he was given his own blessings from God.

A blessing on Ishmael such as we see here goes right along with what we talked about in looking at Abraham having six sons with Keturah. Having many sons and being blessed with children in general is a blessing most people would see as something wonderful. However, this is a physical view and as I have said before most all physical blessings are nothing more than confirmation God is true and with us. Humans look for these signs and find it's very hard to trust and follow God if they don't feel they're seeing them or enough of them. God would like us not to be so stuck on such things which is why Jesus told us not to lay up treasures for ourselves here on this earth but to put our treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is there your heart will be too. (Matt. 6:19-21) When it comes to men such as Abraham and those in his family, God gave them earthly blessings not because that's what God is about but because those looking at the stories need to see how God was at work. It was/is showing the things of God in ways fleshly minded people could/can grasp. That is what God is constantly doing and we see the bulk of it in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). If God can reach us by showing His Nature in ways we can understand in the flesh, there's a chance we will turn to Him and know Him in spirit. This is a hard thing because humans want fleshly things so badly even many of those who claim to have turned to God in the spirit never get over wanting fleshly things from God. The worst part of this thought pattern is that we want to use whether we get them or not as a gauge for how well or how bad we are doing in serving God.

If we can see past such fleshly minded things we can see God blessed Ishmael just as He told Hagar He would. (Gen. 21:12-21) This shows us God keeps His promises which has more importance to understanding when God says He can provide us with eternal life in a place sin will no longer be, we understand He is able to do that as well. That is why we have such an interesting fact in the rundown of Ishmael's children and that's the point he had twelve sons. The nation of Israel would also be made up of twelve tribes. This shows us Ishmael's sons were no coincidence but the direct blessings of God. One of the first things we are told as we enter these verses about Ishmael is that he was a son of Abraham. A son through Hagar and not Sarah which is the important key, but a son of Abraham nonetheless. Ishmael was not in line to be the father of the chosen nation, but as a son of Abraham he was entitled

to the general blessing put on Abraham. God would show He fulfilled His promise to Hagar by giving Ishmael the same number of sons the children of Israel consisted of. This did not make Ishmael's decedents equal to Isaac's in the aspect of what God intended to accomplish through them for no nation is equal on that level, but Abraham had also pleaded with God to use Ishmael as his heir. At that time God told Abraham no but that Ishmael would be blessed in spite of that fact. In seeing the number of his sons equal to that of the chosen nation's tribes we clearly see God kept His promise to both Abraham and Hagar!

The other interesting point in these verses is that we are not just told Ishmael had twelve sons, but we are given their names. This makes them all the more real to us who read this story so far in the future and it's the foundation for how to trace who they became in this world. This in spite of whether man has kept any further records of their own or not which would allow such a thing. It's an example of how the Bible is true history but at the same time is not meant to be an entire history book of all humanity. It remains focused on the goal God wanted to show us while at the same time giving us ways to place the stories within the framework of other historical records man might keep. This is why I find it interesting that some people try to debunk the Bible's stories as being untrue by claiming they don't line up with what we know. The truth is, the Bible has been trusted for far longer than many of us today can grasp, and for exactly the opposite reason. People who were close enough to the history knew the Bible lined up and exactly where it fit in the larger human history. It's not God's fault, it's our fault as humans that we have done such a poor job maintaining our own history. This we have done all the while claiming fleshly continuance as our big goal and accomplishment. I find that most ironic!

Verse 16 tells us these are Ishmael's sons according to their towns and castles. It then goes on to tell us they were twelve princes over their nations. Of all the verses in the KJV of the Bible, this one is in the running for being very much the king's English the most of them all! However, it comes out very well and those who speak English should understand it with no problem. The point of these verses is to reach into the future and give us a glimpse of what came about. Thus, these are the sons of Ishmael who each became such great family groups it's described as a town. In past times before people made a regular habit of moving all over the place most people didn't move out of the town they were born in, and if they did it was not far away. In what we today call "primitive" cultures family groups stayed tight together and that's how tribal groups were formed. However these are individual family groupings for the most part and not what we describe as nations. The idea of towns is telling us these twelve sons did not just grow into one large nation but they did become family groups big enough to be identified as a people of their own right. From towns they became what Europeans might look at as feudal states. The point of that is not to say they were governed in the same way but it was similar in the aspect there was a stronghold in an area meant to stand guard over the every growing family group it belonged to. This made for more of what Europeans would call a kingdom, and that's why we see the use of the word castle

here.

In the end of this process we see the sons being declared princes and this goes right along the same lines in that these sons may not have lived long enough to see their family group grow into a nation all its own but they each did! That's the fact that is important for us to get, and the wording does very well at conveying it to an English or European thought pattern. Now, some might wonder why the words don't use tribes and nation like it does in other places but we are to be clear on the idea that unlike the chosen nation which consisted of twelve tribes, the family of Ishmael did not remain a cohesive group. Each of these twelve sons may have become very large groups of people we would consider a nation in its own right but they did not come together to create one nation of Ishmael or some other name that might denote such a thing. The children of Ishmael have been throughout history a very nomadic people who, just as Hagar was told, did their own thing in spite of the world around them. They are not a people to so easily take up what is called popular culture of the day and morph to fit into it. We see this to this very day. As much turmoil as the world would like to attribute to this fact they have served in many ways like a furthering of the Tower of Babel effect. They as a people have refused to simply give in to the one world idea because it's not their idea of what the world should look like.

You can blame this on religion or any number of factors you want but that's not the point. The point is they exist in this world and make for a very big sticking point in man's plans to form a unified world. If that seems like God using a bad thing to accomplish good, one must keep in mind God has not forced any of us into a mold. God has only worked to preserve the uniqueness He built humanity to have as individuals and He amplified that fact by the confounding of our language. This should have caused humanity to see the truth and abandon any idea of forcing everyone under one centralized government. That did not happen, but the amplification itself was enough to keep us from all agreeing on what that government should look like. Thus, the results are the same and that's what we are seeing in the descendants of Ishmael. We can look at Abraham and Sarah making a mistake in not trusting God for a son and that being the reason Ishmael was ever born. We can see Abraham heartbroken that he had to send Ishmael away and God would not use him to form the chosen nation. Then we can look at how God physically made Ishmael a great people in spite of all those facts. However, to only see that would be a mistake! God may not have used Ishmael to form the chosen nation but Ishmael's nature and the nature of the people who came from him have worked into God's plan in more ways than we can see on a human level. Again, it's not really about the physical we always focus on, but it's about the more meaningful eternal spiritual things God wants to accomplish in this world for the sake of every individual no matter what nation, tribe, or family they come from.

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

that, if this is what he did, while attempting to still say he was following (in his mind) the Laws of God and/or just God, his pantheon of gods might not have been structured too much differently than the standard Catholic pantheon.

That is to say, his other idols might have been to represent other people already in the nation's history. Instead of Mary the mother of Jesus, he could have had Sarah the wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac. A statue to represent Moses would have been an obvious choice in such a collection. Instead of saints he could have had people like Joshua, and any number of the judges we have already studied. All these things would create a pantheon of false gods very appealing to the general population of Israel! In fact, it was probably a very good thing there was no king in Israel to pickup on what Micah was choosing to do or it might have brought the downfall of the nation even faster than we see all the mistakes of later kings do. The thought of what Micah had made is chilling in how popular it might have become and how fast that might have happened. In seeing what we see as we go forward in this story, we witness proof of the attraction of Micah's ideas. As we see his collection and idea stolen and taken to the extreme north of the nation, we might be witnessing one of the greatest blessings God gave the nation at the time of the judges. Micah lived in a very centralized position of the nation. It was as central as Shiloh where the tabernacle stood at this time and maybe more so than Jerusalem where the temple would later be built. The bottom line is, there is a very good reason this story got included in the history Judges covers, and it was not solely to add some interesting detail to the story of how the tribe of Dan ended up with land in the far north of the promised land.

Getting back to where we are in the story at this point, just keep in mind Micah was not doing all he did like a politician would have, yet it would gain power and prestige in his area. He was becoming the religious center of his town if not his region! This is seen in the fact he made all the elements of a standard religion; an ephod, a teraphim, and even named one of his sons a priest. He was setting up his house to be the "temple" of that area. As the story shifts Micah feels he has been truly blessed of God because there is a certain Levite who was from Bethlehem-judah which is to say, from the Bethlehem we are most familiar with. This young man left his home to find a new place to dwell and ended up coming to the area where Micah had his "temple" which was along the base of Mount Ephraim. Since this Levite was looking for a new place to live and Micah was interested in religious things that mirrored things in the Law, it was easy for the Levite to end up with Micah. After finding out the Levite was looking for a place Micah offered him a yearly sum of money, clothes to wear, and food to eat if the Levite would stay and become a personal priest to Micah, and the Levite agrees.

The wording here in the English says Micah wanted him to be a "father" and a priest, at least if you're reading the King James Version. This is easy to understand from a very Catholic standpoint in that priests are normally addressed as "father," and the Pope is literally the position of being father of the church as a whole. The entire thing is an interesting look at how men like religion they can control. Micah had already

"ordained" his son a priest. There is no grounds for this in the Law, and Micah understood the Law to some degree or one wouldn't have thought he'd be so excited to get a man from the tribe of Levi to be his priest when he got the chance. None of that stopped him. Thus, this young Levite would now be a father to Micah in that he was the religious leader while at the same time we are told the Levite becomes like a son to the man as he lives in his house. These are the contradictions we have in our religious mind, and they are contradictions that do not exist in God's Law because God is The One True God and everything about calling Him "Father" makes perfect sense, because God is also in no way subordinate to us. Men both want and don't want this to be true about God and that's why they create gods of their own making.

The story goes on to show us Micah's happiness would not be extremely long-lived as we are told the tribe of Dan decided it was time they obtain more land to live on. In these studies we have touched on the fact Dan had a separate holding of land in the far north of the promised land, and this is the story that shows us how and when that came about. Dan had not truly taken all the land that was given to the tribe in the original division of the promised land, and in living in a border area with the Philistines the Philistines were no doubt pressing in on them hard. This left the Danites needing more land and feeling they were unable to take what was theirs from the Philistines and/or other Canaanites now in league with and thus protected by the Philistines. In truth, this would have been a wonderful time to turn their hearts to The Lord and give God an opportunity to show He was still with the nation if they'd only look to Him! Instead the Danites put together a small party of five men to go out through the promised land which was mostly held by Israel, in search of a place that wasn't being used which they might expand into. This is what brought them to the territory of Ephraim and specifically to the house of Micah where they were apparently welcomed to stay. In staying there they hear the Levite going about his job and something was distinct enough about the way he was offering blessing or speaking in general that they recognized what he was. This causes the men to go in and ask what exactly the Levite was doing there. The Levite shows/tells them about all the religious instruments he has at his disposal and explains how Micah had made him his priest. Satisfied they had found a priest of God they ask him to consult God about whether they would have success on their mission or not. There is no indication the priest actually takes the time to seek God in any way and as if he is use to just handing out blessings as a habit, he tells the men to go in peace because God was going ahead of them to prepare their way for success.

The men of Dan leave there to continue their mission, and going east into the Jordan River valley they turn north and go all the way to the far northern end of the promised land which Israel covered. In doing this they come to the city of Laish which is a city sometimes called Leshem. It is also often referred to as Dan in the Bible due to the story we are covering here. At this time Laish is a city of the Zidonians. It's hard to say why these Zidonians had been left in the rich valley during the original conquest of the land, but we know Israel did a poor job in driving out all the Canaanites for many different reasons including pure slothfulness in the work. In any case, these Zidonians were far separated from the main national group of

Zidonians. The words also tell us they did not have business with any other people. All this means they were a long way from home so to speak, and they had no other group of people who for economic or political reasons would be compelled to come to their rescue. The second part is important because the Philistines were the people the Danites did not believe they could drive out of their own land and thus were the reason they had come looking for land in other areas to begin with. If these Zidonians had been in league on some level with another powerful foe the Danites would not have wanted to touch them. As it was, they were alone and also living without worry for defenses. They likely did not think after all this time of living close/among Israel and having no trouble there was anything to worry about at this point.

The five spies would return to their tribe and report that they had found this place which lay within the very fertile valley of the extreme upper Jordan River. It was land they felt they could prosper on and they wanted to set out immediately to go and take it for their own. Six hundred men would arm themselves to accomplish the task of taking this city and surrounding area. They would travel and come to the city that lay at the point where the territories of Dan, Judah, and Benjamin met. This was the city of Kirjath-jearim and it's a familiar place. This is one of the cities that sent ambassadors to Joshua when Israel was in the midst of taking the promised land initially, and they fooled Israel into thinking they were from a land far away when in fact they were not far from where Israel camped at that very moment. (Josh. 9) It is not easy to say what the status of the original Canaanites of Kirjath-jearim was by this point in Judges, but it shows us this entire area had some problems with not having been completely cleared of Canaanites from the start. This likely has some to do with why the Zidonians of Laish in the far North thought of themselves as safe. They did not have the same kind of treaty with Israel those in Kirjath-jearim originally had but it was not unusual for Canaanites to be living among Israel without threat from Israel.

As the Danites left Kirjath-jearim they moved north and east along the base of Mount Ephraim which brought them once again to the place where Micah lived. Here, the five original spies pointed out that there was an entire temple setup in Micah's house with all the religious instruments one would expect and a priest as well. They ask their fellow soldiers to consider what they'd like to do as they so conveniently pass by this place already suited up and ready to go into battle. It is common in history to see armies take advantage of the fact they are armed for war and people/places they pass by are vulnerable to them in spite of not being the intended target. This situation was no exception and it didn't matter to the Danites that they could be fighting against another tribe of Israel if they did something that started a war in this area. They would specifically go to Micah's house and greet the Levite priest who would go out to the men of the Danite army at the gate of that place. He did this likely to offer his blessing over them before they went into battle. As this took place, the five original spies, knowing exactly what they were after, went in to take the religious instruments. When the priest found out they had taken these things out of the house he asks them what they were

doing. They tell him to be quiet and make no fuss about it. Then they make the suggestion he could go with them and be their priest and "father." They ask him what made more sense, the idea of being a priest to just one man or to be a priest of an entire family within Israel!

The priest takes their offer to heart and sees this as a great opportunity for himself. Thus, he takes the religious instruments they had seized from the house and finding safety in their midst goes with them. As the Danites are leaving this place we see the first indication in the wording that they had actually brought their families and households with them. They did not just intend to take Laish and then call for their families to come settle the area. They believed the spies about how it would not be hard to take this place and brought their families with them to settle the area immediately after taking the city. As they leave Micah's house they put their families in front of them. This is an odd thing for an army to do because usually you put the vulnerable part of your group in the rear so the fighting men are ready to defend against attack as they head toward whatever danger they are going into. In this case the Danites held so little fear of being attacked by the Zidonians that lay ahead, it was more prudent to protect their families from the attack of Micah which would come from behind them if it came. They had taken something valuable from not just Micah but from all the people of his area who used his house as a place of worship. It was only logical to believe they'd want it all back!

Of course, the people of the area were upset about this as we are told after the Danites had made it a fair distance away the men gather together to pursue the Danites just as the Danite army suspected they would. That truth aside, as Micah's group come upon the Danites the Danites turn to ask Micah what problem could he have that would cause him to come after them like he did? Micah responds by pointing out they very well knew what they had taken and that he would be upset about it. The Danites do not acknowledge what they had done in any way. Instead they simply tell Micah he should shut his mouth and go on his way before his accusations caused anger among the army; anger which would cause them to attack him and kill him along with all the men who came with him. After sending this warning, the Danites simply turn and head on their way as if the matter is settled. Micah considers what to do next but ultimately determines the Danites are far too powerful a group for him to take on. Micah must concede defeat in the matter so he turns to go home empty-handed.

We then are given confirmation that the priest and all of Micah's religious instruments were still with the Danites as they head to Laish where just as the spies had told them the Zidonians were living without a care in the world. The Danite army would attack the city, killing its inhabitants and ultimately burn the city with fire. Also as expected, no one would come to help the Zidonians so the Danites took the city and surrounding area with ease and built a new city they could call Dan after the name of their tribe's father.

Let's stay in God's Word!

