

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 #128

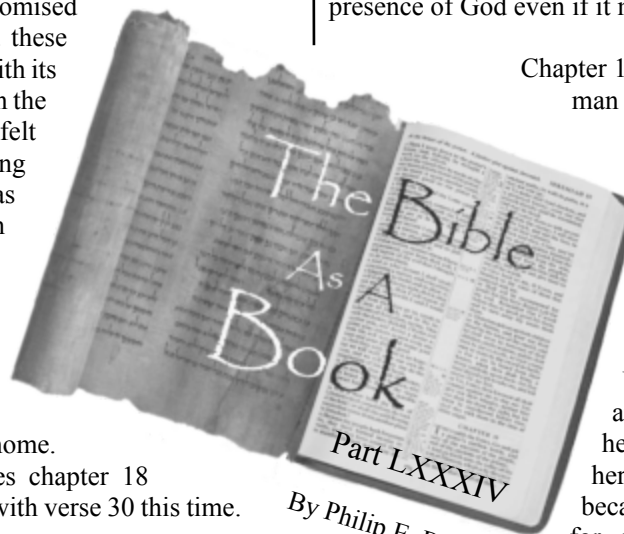
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As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, last time we talked about a man named Micah who had made in his house a temple and filled it with false gods. In this story there is every reason to believe this was done as a way to establish a religion that would worship God but was certainly not one based on the Law of God. In looking at that we talked about how far the nation of Israel had gotten from the Law of God that any part of the nation could do such a thing, much less believe it was acceptable. Along with that story we covered the story of how the tribe of Dan wanted more land to grow into because they had not fully driven the Canaanites out of the land the tribe had been given at the time of Joshua. For this they sent spies across the promised land to find something usable and these spies come across Micah's temple with its Levite priest. The spies found land in the far north of the promised land they felt could be taken and upon returning home, the piece of the tribe that was to go settle this land set out for it. On the way they too would come by Micah's temple and end up stealing his priest and all the elements of his temple to take with them. Micah would go after them but find out he was no match for their strength and return home. All this brought us through Judges chapter 18 verse 29 and we are ready to begin with verse 30 this time.

We didn't quite have the room to get to verse 30 last time, but it's basically the wrap up of the story we covered as it tells us those of the tribe of Dan got to their new land, easily defeated the people living on it, and settled there. Then they set up the image and elements of worship they had taken from Micah and the Levite priest, whose family is given in a little more detail here, along with his sons after him who continued to be priests to the tribe of Dan until the time of the Babylonian captivity. This tells us this piece of the tribe of Dan continued to ignore the tabernacle and later the temple in Jerusalem for a very long time! No doubt one of their excuses for using their own personal priest and false image is that they were so very far away from the tabernacle/temple. Distance and having to travel in order for the men of each family to show themselves at the

temple was part of what represented the original place God set up for man to meet with Him, which was the Garden of Eden. If man had not taken of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil he would have had access to the Tree of Life and if for no other reason humans would have wanted to return to take from it. All that being true the representation behind the truth the Tree of Life could have allowed man to live forever, is in the fact that to get to it one would return to the real source of life which is God Himself, Whose presence would have resided in a very tangible way in the Garden. Letting distance be your excuse for not going to the temple as the Law instructed was to symbolically say you had no interest in coming before the presence of God even if it means life eternal!



Chapter 19 begins the story of another Levite man who was journeying in that same central area of Israel as the Levite from the last story was in. Interestingly this Levite ends up taking a concubine, or wife used just to have children with, from the same city the last Levite man was from, and that's the city of Bethlehem. Unfortunately his wife had an affair at the very least, and after breaking her marriage vows she left to return to her father's house. This she likely did because the punishment under the Law for most adultery was/is death. She seemed to have escaped this but maybe partly due to that fact she did not stay with her husband. Four months would pass and her husband decided it was time to go see if he could get her to come home. Thus, he takes a couple of donkeys and a servant to go to her father's house. When he gets there his wife takes him in to her father and her father was very glad to meet the man. Due to this truth the father compels the man to stay with them for awhile, and we are told he stays for three days while they all had a very enjoyable time. On the morning of the fourth day the man intends to leave but his father-in-law wants him to eat something before he goes. The man agrees but it turns into more than just what we might call breakfast. Thus, at the behest of his father-in-law, the man ended up staying the night once again.

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The next day the man intended to go but again the father-in-law encourages him to stay and eat. This leads to much the same as the day before. Almost the entire day passes before the man decides it's time for him to get going. The Father-in-law once again tries to get him to stay the night considering how late in the day it had gotten, but the man is determined to break the cycle and get on his way. He would take his wife, servant, and donkeys, to make his way north and reach the area where Jerusalem would later be. At this time the city there was a Canaanite city belonging to the Jebusites. Of course, there should not have been such a city considering this area was taken by Israel at the time of Joshua but somehow the Jebusites had been allowed to remain to the point they still inhabited this place which at the time was known as Jebus. As the man passed by Jebus it was getting very late and the man's servant urges his master to stay in Jebus. The man flat refuses because it is a Jebusite city and he wants to stay in a place controlled by Israelites. To accomplish this they would press on north in an attempt to reach Gibeah or Ramah. They would make it only to Gibeah before the sun went down and so Gibeah is the place they would choose to stay the night. However, no one would invite them into their home for the night which was the tradition of the day and likely a big part of the reason the man wanted to get to a city belonging to Israel.

Thinking they would at least be safe in the city they find a place to settle down for the night in one of the streets. As they did this, an old man came in from the fields who was currently living in Gibeah but who was originally from the area along Mount Ephraim the man was headed back to. This means the old man was not one of the more native inhabitants of the city who were of the tribe of Benjamin. When the old man sees the man prepared to spend the night in the street he asks him where he was traveling and where had he been. The man tells the old man how he was from the area of Mount Ephraim and had been to Bethlehem but was now headed back home generally and to Shiloh where the tabernacle was at that time. He also adds that they were in the street because they had not been welcomed in by anyone of Gibeah but they had all they needed to eat, drink, and care for the pack animals there. The old man tells them in spite of that he wanted them to allow him to take care of their needs and stay with him. He certainly did not want them to stay in the street. The man willingly took the old man up on his offer and they go to his home where there is a place for the donkeys, water to wash their feet, and food to eat.

It was just as they were eating and getting comfortable for the night when the reason the old man did not want them to stay in the streets became obvious. Gibeah was a city inhabited by people of Israel but it was a very wicked place. A gang of evil men surrounded the house, pounded on the door, and demanded the old man bring his guest out to be abused by them. The old man goes out to them and begs them to leave the man alone if for no other reason than the fact he was a guest in the old man's home. The old man knows his plea alone won't cause the men to back off completely so he offers to give them his daughter and the man's concubine to abuse if they'll leave the Levite man alone. The men would not listen to the old man so the Levite brings his wife out to them and goes back inside. At the very least the men end up distracted by having her because they abuse her all night without demanding anything more. Just

before the morning light dawned they let the woman go and she is able to make it back to the door of the old man's house where she collapses. The man gets up that morning and prepares to leave, but as he opens the door he finds his wife laying there with her hands on the threshold. The man, thinking she's asleep, tries to wake her by telling her to get up because it was time to go but he would receive no answer of any kind from her.

Realizing she had literally been abused so much she had died there he lifts up her body and places it on one of the donkeys. After finishing getting ready to go, the man would head for home. It should go without saying how appalling this was to have happened in any city of any people, but it really showed just how far down some of the people of the chosen nation had gone that this could happen in a city of Israelites. In many ways and levels this was the kind of abomination the Canaanites were responsible for and why God specifically destroyed cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah in the time of Abraham and allowed the children of Israel to destroy them to take their land at the time God brought Israel out of Egypt. How bad this was wasn't lost on the Levite man and to show Israel how far from God at least this one place had gotten, when he gets home he cuts his wife's body into twelve pieces and sends them out through the tribes of the nation so those who got the message of what had happened in Gibeah would witness some of the gruesomeness of the act firsthand. Fortunately, the nation was not so far gone that when they were confronted with this information the reaction was to point out that for all the things the nation had done wrong, nothing this heinous had happened in Israel since the time they left Egypt to come to the promised land.

The people would consider what this really meant and said about the nation as a whole, and in the end almost the entire nation from the far north to the far south along with those on the east of the Jordan River would gather themselves before the Lord in Mizpeh. This is the same place at least some of Israel had gathered before as they considered how to face a foreign enemy that was oppressing them. This time they would come to consider what to do about people who were part of their nation. The army this created was very large for an army of the time and it numbered 400,000 strong. The heads of the tribes would present themselves and ask to know the details of how such a horrible thing had taken place. The Levite man would stand up and tell of how he was just passing through, along with his wife, looking for a place to spend the night when he came to Gibeah. He tells how the men of the city surrounded the house where he was staying that night and would have killed him but instead they ended up abusing his wife until they killed her. He says that is why he sent pieces of her body throughout Israel. He wanted to know what the nation as a whole thought should be done about such a wicked place. The unanimous answer by all the people was that the army should prepare itself with supplies for war and go to destroy this city.

The army of Israel would send men all through the tribe of Benjamin to whom this city belonged and they would ask that the men of Gibeah be turned over for their wickedness so they could be put to death for their crimes. However, the men of Benjamin refused to turn over the men of Gibeah. It would appear that while the entire rest of the nation was stunned such

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment we covered the issue of Abraham's second wife being referred to as a concubine instead of a wife. We also talked about the sons Abraham had with Keturah and how, as well as why, these sons were given to Abraham by God. From there we got into Abraham's death and burial along with the fact Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father. In this we talked a lot about family and how the situation had really grown and changed since the time God had first given Abraham the calling to come to this land and the promise he would be the father of many nations. In the end of last segment we got into the verses that wrap up Ishmael's life and what he and his family became in this world. Discussing all we did last time really showed us how the way the Bible covers these events is clearing the way for moving very specifically into the life of Isaac. They wrap up the details of Abraham's life that were outside the storyline of showing us God's plan to bring about the chosen nation as well as Ishmael's life who, being a son of Abraham, was also outside that direct storyline. All this brought us through Genesis chapter 25 verse 16 and we are ready to begin with verse 17 this time.

Looking at verse 17 one can see we did not have the room in our last segment to get totally through the wrap up of Ishmael's life, and so we begin this time still talking about him. Verse 17 specifically tells us of his death and how old he was. Ishmael lived to be 137 years old, and if we once again compare that to the cap God set at the flood of 120 years, we see Ishmael lived 17 years past that mark. (Gen. 6:3) Thus, as we talked about last time we see God blessing Ishmael as a son of Abraham in giving him a great life span. This also speaks again to that fact God does such things to show us something which the physical would find appealing. It's a physical blessing in order to show us God is capable of fulfilling all His promises, not the least of which is God's promise of eternal life for those who walk in faith with Him! The other fact we see in this verse that is once again an example of something we talked about last time is that we are told Ishmael was gathered to his people. Now, when it comes to Ishmael as apposed to Abraham, his father did live in the land or at least was close enough that Ishmael could have been buried with his father. However, for the same reason God told Abraham to hearken to Sarah in the matter of sending Hagar and Ishmael away originally, this was not to happen. Ishmael was never rejected by his father and the fact we covered about him and Isaac coming together to bury Abraham seems to say Isaac held no ill will toward Ishmael. That aside, the burying place Abraham bought for Sarah which would also be the burying place for Abraham was there for those in the line of the chosen nation, not just the entire family of Abraham.

Just as Abraham was starting something new in the promised land and therefore was not gathered to his fathers but to his people, so too Ishmael was starting something new in being the father of all that would spring from him. This shows

us again the separation we are intended to see between Isaac, the son of promise, and Ishmael as well as the six sons of Keturah. God would bless them all because they were sons of Abraham, but over and over we see God separating out those in the line of the chosen nation. Abraham would be blessed on many physical levels and in many ways, but the true spiritual heritage God intended to bless Abraham with was to be the father of the chosen nation through whom God would give to the world His oracles. This is why we talk about the representation of The Trinity when we look at Abraham the father, Isaac the son, and the servant who represents The Holy Ghost. Ishmael was a son of Abraham, the six sons of Keturah were sons of Abraham but all of them went off, and like Abraham, started specific peoples of their own. Isaac as a son of Abraham was bound in the same covenant given to Abraham concerning the chosen nation. This is exactly what we see Jesus showing us He came to do. Jesus came telling us not about Himself but about The Father. The Holy Ghost would not come speaking of Himself but of what The Son (Jesus) came to show us. (John 16:12-15) The purpose of all three is totally bound together and Jesus did not bring the truth of The Trinity to us for the first time; It is shown in the Torah very specifically. One God, one purpose!

Now one last piece of information about Ishmael and his family comes in verse 18. We are told their original dwelling place was from Havilah to Shur. Shur is a more familiar place as it is mentioned as the extreme south end of the promised land in Genesis chapter 20. Not necessarily a place that was considered in the heart of the promised land but maybe best seen as just outside the south border of the promised land. In chapter 20 it is mentioned in reference to the fact Abraham lived further south than Kadesh but not so far south he was in Shur. It's almost as if this place marks the north end of the Arabian Peninsula in much the same way Kadesh seemed to mark the south end of the promised land. As Abraham dwelt in the region it was as if he was living within the path that runs between the promised land to the north; what would come to be known as the Arabian Peninsula to the south; Egypt to the west; and what would eventually be Edom to the east. Getting back to chapter 25 verse 18, Ishmael's descendants would spread out and take a large swath of the land that lays just on the other side of the Red Sea from Egypt. This is the reason this land would be known in later times as the Arabian Peninsula. As I always like to point out, God was surrounding the promised land with people that came from Abraham and his family. I say his family because, of course, the Ammonites and the Moabites came from Lot. However, the Edomites would come from Isaac's son Esau and those to the direct south of the promised land would be from Ishmael. All the area God sent the chosen nation through on their way to and into the promised land, including the extra journey around the south end of the Dead Sea, should have been passing through and next to people who already know The One True God.

Sadly, we don't see that in the story of the exodus and it's because of the same reason we see Israel have so much trouble following God. Groups of people are groups of people. It's very difficult to get a group of people to serve God as one cohesive group. Also we should keep in mind this is not an issue of knowing or not knowing Who God is. It's a matter of people being willing to walk in faith or, at the very least, obey God on some level because they know He is God. Lot's sons should have known The One True God but there is little evidence that fact effected their choices in any positive way. This is seen in their relationship with Israel. If one does not pay attention to the fact the Ammonites and the Moabites are Lot's descendants and Lot was the nephew of Abraham who came with him when he left Mesopotamia, the stories of the Bible seem to make it clear these two nations were nothing but a thorn in Israel's side. The same can be said of the Edomites as even being reminded of the heritage they shared with Israel, they refused to let Israel simply pass through their land. (Num. 20:14-21) During the exodus there is little evidence Israel had any large incident with Ishmael's descendants but we see more of that conflict come much later on and in our modern day. All this speaks to the fact God can give people the best chance to know Him and serve Him but it is always up to us as individuals to choose to obey God and walk in faith. If we ignore Him it does us little good to simply know Him!

As we move on into verse 19 the first words appear to be headed in the same kind of, wrap up a man's life, direction the last few verses have given us about the six sons of Keturah, Abraham, and Ishmael. However, as we get deeper into the words that follow we find again that difference. Isaac's life, just like most all facts about Abraham's, is the story of the formation of the chosen nation. We talked a couple of segments back about how Isaac taking Rebekah into his mother's tent and making her his wife was the true passing of the torch from Abraham to Isaac when it comes to this story. Once we wrap up the details of the end of Abraham's life and the life of Ishmael, we are ready to go down the continuing story of the chosen nation. Thus, it's fitting here that the words point out exactly who Isaac is, which is the son of Abraham, and the age he was when he married Rebekah. It also makes a very detailed point about who Rebekah is, telling us again how she was the daughter of Bethuel who we can trace to being the son of Nahor the brother of Abraham. It points out again that Rebekah is the sister of Laban. This information puts us right back on track with the story of the chosen nation's formation as if we had not stepped aside to talk about the other details and instead went right on with Isaac's life following the verse that tells us how he married Rebekah. If we pay attention to such details instead of simply seeing them as repeat information, we can grasp how much the Word of God is not a hard book to follow. The biggest mistake most people make is in attempting to take It in such fractionalized pieces instead of trying to see the whole picture It puts together for us.

Verse 21 is where we know how important it is we understand God is leading all these events in order to create the symbolism He wants to show us. For it is in this verse we find Rebekah, like Sarah had been, was unable to have a child. Thus, we see Isaac asking God to help. In the King James Version the word "intreated" is used to describe what Isaac did, and this is

because what Isaac did was not just pray to God that his wife be able to have a child or in any way beg God for the ability. Isaac knew he had been a miracle child in his parent's old age. He no doubt understood how his parents had come to realize this was God's plan. Isaac certainly knew his life had inherited the purpose God had called his father out of his home to come to this land where they now lived. All this meant Isaac understood better than his father had the ability to that what was going to come was going to come only at the will of God. The only other path was to make the kinds of mistakes his parents had made in the matter of attempting to have a son and he did not want to do that! This is why we are not told Isaac prayed to God for his wife but intreated God for her. The word intreated is translated from means one both talks and listens. This tells us Isaac wanted to know God's will on the matter. Like his father he assumed God would not allow them to go childless. If He did that would mean no nation would come through Abraham and then Isaac. However, what Isaac did not know for sure was when or how God would move things forward. Thus, he was doing what the prophet instructed long before Isaiah ever lived.

Isaac was waiting upon the Lord to renew their strength. He was waiting for God to move so the path of the chosen nation would rise up with wings as eagles. (Isa. 40:31) The only way to get it right was not just to ask but to listen. When we talked about Abraham and Sarah having Isaac we talked about the fact that in spite of their age they had to keep trying to have a child. Isaac would be a miracle in the idea both of them were past their child bearing years but not in the idea God would simply cause Sarah to be with child through miraculous means. So too, here Isaac and Rebekah could not afford to give up on the idea of having a child but it needed to be in God's timing or it wasn't going to happen. By allowing Rebekah, who had been hand chosen by God to be Isaac's wife, to be unable to bear a child it was clear to Isaac he was not likely to be the father of a lot of children. As has been pointed out, Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah. If they did not start having children right away, it was a pretty obvious fact they were not going to have a lot of them or it was going to be in the latter stages of their lives. No matter the case, Isaac knew he had to seek The Lord and wait on God's timing. Along with that he had to be listening to God in order to get the answer he had been seeking!

This is a point so often missed by far too many of us. We ask The Lord for things or about things. We want to know the why and the how of so many things we face in life. The problem is not that we ask but that we want things to be in our timing and in our way. It should be obvious to us that if it was all going to serve God's plan and/or go in the way that was actually best for us, it has to happen according to God's will not ours or God could just leave us to our own devices. The real issue comes in the fact we don't actually walk in faith. Some would put that as, we don't walk in full faith but that's a misunderstanding of the fact faith is a relationship with God. We don't really have a relationship with God if everything is one-sided. It's not a real relationship with the truth that God is God either. It's as if something in our brains thinks we should get credit for the fact we recognized God as God because we recognize He is able to do things to "help" us. I put that help in quotes because a lot of what we ask for might or might not be

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LVIII

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 young emperor named Alexander was a refreshing change from the emperor before him while at the same time his lack of experience in leading the military would be his downfall. During his time as emperor Rome would face the barbarian threat coming across into Roman territory in a way that alarmed the citizens of Rome. Alexander would attempt to move the barbarians back to where they came from by sending the bulk of the Roman army to make a show of force. However, when that didn't work he attempted to bribe them to leave which did not set well with a Roman army already demoralized by the last war in spite of it ending in a victory. Thus, Alexander would be assassinated and we would move into the year 238 A.D. which is referred to by some as the, "Year of the Six Emperors." When the dust of that messy year settled, one very young man named Gordian III was left as the sole owner of the emperor title. However, his youth would mean others, not the least of which would be his new father-in-law who was head of the Praetorian Guard, would hold most of the true power.

We ended last time by talking about the fact Rome at this time faced several earthquakes throughout the empire and such things are often seen as bad omens and signs from the gods. This caused Gordian III to consult books Rome held which were very old and contained what was considered prophecies of sorts given by past oracles. This led to a discussion about how kings and the like look to other humans for their answers instead of God and why God gave the true oracles to exist among men to His chosen nation Israel. We want to stay in that line of thought as we begin this time talking about the fact, there was a temple in Rome known as the the temple of the god Janus. It was not a large nor spectacular temple but its purpose was to open its double doors or "gates" in times of war and to close them in times of peace. Best guess as to why this was done has something to do with the belief certain gods or forces would be trapped inside versus let out of the temple. The hope being that if the forces needed or used during war time were contained in the temple there would be no more war. Of course this theory was contradicted every time war came to the empire, and very often war came not because Rome was invaded by outside forces but because Rome tried to push outward and expand or there was rebellion from within. In any case, at the time of Gordian III, the empire was very much so under attack from the outside and the same enemy that had demoralized the Roman troops previously pushed back and took Mesopotamia this time around. When this happened it was obvious Rome had to respond, and due to that Gordian III would open the doors of the temple of Janus for the last recorded time. This basically symbolized the fact Rome

would never again see a peace great enough to justify closing them.

Gordian III would go to the front of this war and Eranshahr would be pushed back across the Euphrates River. Wanting to push this enemy further back Gordian III would start planning an invasion but as he did, his father-in-law died for reasons that are not clear to history. Since his father-in-law was likely the real brains behind the plans to take the fight to Eranshahr and in running the Roman Empire as a whole, this left all plans and the empire in yet another less than stable condition. The power would once again come from the Praetorian Guard as a man named Philip, who being born in Syria was referred to as Philip the Arab, became the new Praetorian Prefect. He along with his brother hoped to rule the empire in much the same way Gordian III's father-in-law had. Gordian III still wanted to attack Eranshahr, and so the battle moved forward but did not end well for Gordian III. History debates exactly what happened as some say much like Alexander, his frustrated army assassinated him, but other historical accounts, one coming from the Eranshahr side, claim he was killed in battle near the town we know today as Fallujah, Iraq. What happened to his body is also not totally clear. Some believe it was eventually returned to Rome for the traditional proclaiming of the dead emperor as a god. Others believe it was buried near where he died.

No matter the truth of those details Philip would now rise to the position of emperor as one might expect by this point. However, he had apparently learned the importance of getting back to Rome and having the Senate confirm the position as he would seek and sign a peace treaty with Eranshahr so he could end the war and head for Rome. The peace treaty cost Rome a great deal, but it would seem most all the Roman territory regained during the war was retained by Rome. Philip would begin his march back to Rome, and upon arriving in Antioch he would name his brother the ruler of the eastern provinces. He would also give his brother-in-law rulership over two important provinces before arriving in Rome late in the summer of 244 A.D. There he was confirmed by the Senate and became the true ruler of the empire. He would go on to have his family named to high positions or deified no matter if it was warranted or not. However, the biggest problem Philip faced is that he spent a lot of money making peace with Eranshahr. Then he came back to Rome and made a great city of his hometown which he renamed Philippopolis. On top of that, the military payouts were already a great strain on Rome's coffers. Thus, Philip's big challenge not too long into his time as emperor was finances!

In an attempt to deal with this, Philip would severely raise taxes. He also stopped paying what amounted to appeasement money to the barbarians along the Danube. This had been done to keep the peace with them, but ignoring that risk Philip would stop. In 245 A.D. Philip would be forced to leave Rome due to the unrest all this would cause. A barbarian tribe

would move across the Danube and Philip would set up his headquarters in Philippopolis to face this threat. Philip would be very proud of himself as by the summer of 246 A.D. he felt he had chased the tribe back across the river and declared victory over them. However, around this same time, the king of Armenia chose to go against the Persian king and sought direct relations with Rome. He did this because he wished to bring back the glory of an independent empire. However, since Philip had made peace with the Persians this upset the king of Persia greatly and war broke out in the east bringing tensions and unrest back to Rome's eastern front.

In spite of all the financial trouble along with the war and strife, Philip would survive to put great money into the celebration of the city of Rome's one thousand year anniversary in the spring of 248 A.D. Great theater was performed for the occasion all throughout the city. Special coins were minted to commemorate the anniversary and over one thousand gladiators, along with several animals exotic to Rome, would be killed for entertainment in the Colosseum. During this time Philip would also name his son co-emperor as was so often done by emperors of this time. In spite of all the festivities trouble was still very much on the rise in the empire. Later in that same year two provinces to the east of modern day Italy, who were unhappy with the result of gaining peace with the barbarians to the north of them, rebelled against Rome and declared a new man emperor. This caused confusion which encouraged the barbarians to invade the rebelling provinces. Even further to the east another man rebelled against Rome over past events and what he saw as the excessive taxation of the eastern provinces. Two other men would also rebel, and all these men would proclaim themselves rulers and have coins minted with their images and names on them. This has a lot to do with why we even know some of them existed.

The empire was under attack from so many places and in so many ways it seemed things were really coming apart. In a move not really seen among Roman emperors Philip would go to the Senate and offer to resign. Amazingly the Senate would not accept his resignation and instead threw their full support behind Philip. One senator, a man named Decius, would be a very vocal supporter of Philip and so Philip would send Decius to the nearest rebelling provinces with the Roman army in order to put down the rebellion and push the barbarians back out of Roman territory once again. This would see success, but the Roman army responsible for it was not happy with the state of affairs and they would choose to declare Decius emperor in the spring of 249 A.D. Upon this declaration the army would set out for Rome to solidify their choice. As if things were not bad enough for Philip his financial issues caught up with him and he was forced to debase certain Roman coins, and about the same time riots broke out in Egypt. The riots would disrupt the food supply to Rome, specifically wheat, and all this would erode Philip's support. Decius appeared to want to negotiate and come to terms with Philip, but Philip with his army would meet Decius' forces near a city in upper Italy. Decius easily won that battle and Philip was either killed during the battle or he was assassinated by his own troops in an attempt to gain favor with Decius who would now take the throne. It is believed Philip's son met his end at this same time and in much the same way.

One last interesting fact about Philip is that a later

historian claimed Philip was the first "Christian Emperor." This idea is in debate as many argue other historians, as well as evidence on the coins of the day, give no indication Philip followed anything but the pagan religion official to the empire. However, this is yet another time we see at least a hint that Christianity as a religion was making a dent in the empire. Just as Alexander's mother arranged for him to learn the Christian religion we see Christianity becoming more and more something emperors, at the very least, felt they had to acknowledge. As we have discussed before, it is the religion we are talking about far more than the truth of the Gospel message. However, this idea Philip may have been a Christian shows it was not out of the realm of possibility and certainly would indicate he was not hostile toward Christians during his reign. Such things would serve to push Christianity forward as well as form it more and more into a popular religion that would be useful to man. The real point here is, by the time of Constantine we see the Christian religion was such a norm Constantine would be a fool not to attempt to harness its popularity as a way to stabilize a dying empire!

Following the death of Philip, Decius and his army would arrive at Rome. There the senate would confirm Decius as emperor and this really shows how little power the senate held. Making Decius emperor was his army's idea and it would seem the senate out of desperation for a man who could get things back on track almost had to force the duties of emperor on a reluctant Decius. It is important to note that Decius had extensive administrative knowledge and experience. His predecessors had almost none and this made Decius a valuable emperor which the empire needed if for no other reason than to take care of the many details of governing an empire that had been left unattended for so long. In the end this is what Decius would be known for. Decius would work with the senate to rebuild the power and stability of the state. This was not just so the government could hold all the power, but it was meant to restore the confidence of the Roman army and its people. He worked to restore pride in what it meant to be a Roman citizen which at this time was very important considering rebellion against the power of Rome as a central power of the empire had become common. It had become common not because people so much wanted to break off into smaller states of their own but because they were disappointed in the job the government they had become dependent on was doing.

This point is rather remarkable, but when you look at it you see a picture of people who believed in centralized government more so than we see at other points in history and with other empires. Rome had lasted so long and ruled over so many people, a great chunk of the world's population saw no other way to live than to live under the rule of a centralized power structure. They did not desire to break into smaller states because they wanted the empire to work. The problem was, in spite of this desire, it was not working just as God had shown at the Tower of Babel such a thing would not work. This stands as a great example of how much we like to hold tight to the traditions of men in spite of the evidence right in front of us which shows it's not working! The other aspect this shows us is the fact Rome would ultimately fall due to the slothful nature of its people. Since the time God placed a curse on the ground after man first sinned against Him, man has looked for a way to return to paradise. (Gen. 3:17-19) People want a place, a planet, where

everything is handed to them on a silver platter. Maybe it was good the people of Rome didn't want to fight to split off into smaller states, but the real reason for this was the simple fact they were too lazy to give up what they saw as the way to have a life of ease. Thus, the discontentment was not about issues of having their own culture or being forced into a Roman way of life but over the fact the promise of what an empire could give people was not coming to pass for individuals of the empire. They didn't want to walk away; they wanted to make it work somehow.

This is a big reason why we see an ineffective senate by this time putting the emperor's power in the hands of a reluctant man. They were desperate for someone who could move the dream forward again or, at the very least, restore what had been lost. The advantage of having a man who was not obsessed with being king/emperor is that he attempted to restore the separation of powers by doing such things as attempting to re-establishing the position of Censor. This office held power over certain financial concerns of the empire and the morality of the people, along with tracking the people by taking what today we call a census. This meant the office of Censor was closer to the people and served to keep the government more in step with their wishes. It should come as no surprise this office had long ago been neglected if not totally done away with by previous emperors. Any power the office held would be something an emperor would want for himself or totally get rid of so they would not have to consult such an official before doing what they desired. If for no other reason, this office had faded away in the midst of an imperial government which felt it had greater concerns to deal with than the desires and needs of the people. Some believe it was at the behest of the senate that Decius moved to restore this office, but it makes perfect sense that such a man would desire to have it restored. All that aside, the senate had full right to choose the man they wanted for the job and they unanimously chose a man named Valerian. However, he would refuse to take the job and his reasons would seem to have been that he saw what an impossible job it might be by this point in Roman history.

Decius would move ahead in spite of this and attempt to restore the prestige and morality of the citizens of Rome by bringing back to the forefront the state religion. This was a turn back to the very old idea that government and religion go hand in hand and the best way to unify the people of the state is for them all to adhere to the same religion. This move on the emperor's part was not intended as a direct assault on any religion within the empire which was not the more official Roman religion, but he was attempting to put the Roman state religion back on a pedestal where he believed it would serve to return meaning to what it meant for the government to serve the people and the people to serve the government. It's the old, if we all pull together then happy we'll be, idea. This fact is clearly seen in the edict Decius put out across the empire. The edict said, all the people of the empire had until a certain date to offer a sacrifice for the emperor. The date does not appear to be the same for all places throughout the empire and, in truth, it was likely sent out to each province with the order all the people in that region had so long to get this done from the time the edict was received. This clearly shows us the idea was not to declare some grand event where all the people on a certain day would sacrifice to the Roman gods, but a way of saying to the people,

this is something that should regularly be done.

To those who have been following this study or who are just aware of past events, there should be a familiar ring to this idea. While the edict was not as forceful nor meant to crush a particular religion, this edict has a lot of the same effect as the command by the Greek ruler that all the people, specifically the Jews, had to sacrifice to the gods of the Greeks. The entire war that broke out over that issue and eventually led to the Jews retaking the temple to light the lights which created the celebration of Hanukkah, began because enforcers were sent out to make sure the people were offering the ordered sacrifice(s). When they came to the home of a certain elderly priest named Mattathias, he refused and killed the enforcers who had come to his home town. This man understood there is only One True God and he was not about to stand by while all the Jews were forced to sacrifice to false gods. In the case of Decius' edict there were not so much enforcers sent out to make sure the people were doing what they were told, but for the people to prove they had followed the edict their sacrifices had to be brought to the designated leaders of their area. Once the sacrifices and rituals that went along with it were performed, the individual would receive a certificate to recognize their compliance. I'm sure these certificates were intended to be a point of pride for the Roman people. They were a way for people to say, "I got my government issued certificate. Have you gotten yours?" One can just see the government ad campaign that would be ran in our modern time for such a thing.

Now to be clear, this sacrifice was not to the emperor because the Romans did not believe their rulers to be gods while alive. Being declared a deity of some sort was something commonly done for an emperor upon their death. Thus, these sacrifices were meant to be a way for the people to sacrifice to the Roman gods and/or past emperors asking them to guide the path of the current emperor as he led the empire. It was a true way of saying we are all in this together and the emperor's success is your success. Since there was nothing about this edict that attempted to tell people they had to acknowledge the Roman gods as the only gods, many people, including those claiming to be Christian, simply accomplished what they were told and received their certificates as good citizens of the empire. However, history records several prominent Christian leaders of the day refused to perform the sacrifice and were persecuted and killed for it. This means many other individual Christians met that same fate. Whether each of these individuals truly walked in faith or simply held firm to their religion, it shows how much Jesus didn't come to change anything other than to help humanity in this generation see what God has always been offering. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is One God. Jesus came declaring the same thing and thus, those who believe in Jesus simply believe what the Jews believed during the time of the Greeks. Our God is not one of many gods. He is not the top god among numerous gods of the world. He is The Only True God to exist in all that exists!

This will always put God's people, whether part of the chosen nation or just believers from across the world, at odds with humanistic beliefs. Those who believe in The One True God can co-exist with people who do not believe. However, if the unbelievers decide believers must acknowledge their gods as equal to God or at least acknowledge the existence of pagan gods

as gods, true believers will always stand in a place that might require the giving of their lives to serve the truth. This is what's clearly seen at this time in Roman history. In spite of the growing popularity of Christianity (as a religion or in truth), we see how quickly the tide can turn on any true believer just as we have witnessed it happen to many among the chosen nation and the nation as a whole. Decius may have never been out to attack true believers or any other religion of the world, but the result of persecution came to all true believers in God who lived in the Roman Empire nonetheless. That said, we see how much this was a true public relations type edict on the emperor's part as by the second year of his reign the persecution of Christians eased and Christians were by and large able to live peacefully in the empire once again.

Overall what we see in Decius' short time as emperor is an empire struggling to regain past glory, but this focus took the eyes of the Romans off the danger that really threatened to collapse the empire. By this time it had become common place for the barbarians to invade across into Roman territory. Like it or not, Rome was constantly at war with the barbarians who looked for any opportunity to strike. Decius, maybe somewhat unwittingly, had opened the door for such an opportunity in doing what he did in becoming emperor. When his troops declared him emperor the army under his command understood their declaration meant nothing if they didn't control Rome. Thus, believing they had settled the problem with the barbarians and the rebellion of that area, they packed up to march to Rome. Their plan worked from the standpoint Philip was killed and Decius did become emperor, but what about the territory they had abandoned? The truth about the barbarians Rome just didn't seem to get is something we have discussed before. These barbarians were not interested in the empire as an entity. Meaning they did not attack the Romans in an attempt to begin a new empire or to take over the empire for themselves. If they had desired such a thing they might have given up after several of the first pushes into Roman territories "failed," believing it was a hopeless cause. However, what the barbarians cared about and saw as valuable was land that could be used and resources that could be harvested. The only thing that mattered to them when it came to the truth this land and its resources belonged to Rome was the fact the Roman army would eventually show up in an attempt to push them back out of Roman territory.

The problem for Rome was not just the attrition of having to time and time again push the barbarians back but that any particular tribe of these barbarian people would be happy to come into Roman territory and live with no concern for the fact the Roman Empire existed as an entity. This meant, any land or resources the barbarians could cross over and lay their hands on was valuable and worth the fighting that might result. There was something to be gained by invading Roman territory even if they were by and large pushed back to their territory, and that's why they even agreeing to retreat at times and did not consider it a true defeat. They would simply look for their next opportunity and do it all over again. When Decius' army pulled out of the provinces they had just freed from the barbarians in order to march to Rome, the barbarians saw a new opportunity to cross into Roman territory and take more of what they wanted. Thus, Decius' reign

would end in much the same place it began. The barbarians would return and the Roman army would go out to meet them. At first they would appear to have sent the barbarians into retreat, but if that's what it was it was only so they could reorganize and surprise the Roman army shortly there after by attacking their camp. The Roman army would be scattered and the barbarians would claim the spoils of war.

This time, they would also attack the city of Philippopolis and take it. This is when a brief but telling event took place. The governor of Thrace, a man named Titus, would declare himself emperor under the protection of the barbarians. This would be a very minor event in that this man was killed shortly after his declaration, but it's interesting to see at this time how a Roman governor saw an opportunity to take the throne of the empire while using the barbarians as his military force/protection. This is a hint of what would come later and on a much larger scale as the Romans eventually began using barbarian forces to protect Rome from other barbarians. The question is, how far into doing such things could the Romans go before they ceased to be a people with control over their empire? In any case, Decius would be forced to take a large piece of the Roman army back to face these barbarians. Looking back it is believed this time the force of the Roman army might have been great enough to simply push the barbarians back but the Romans were out maneuvered during the fighting. The barbarian king was clever and he knew the terrain well. He would divide his forces into three groups and place one in hiding behind a swamp. It is recorded that early on in the fighting Decius' son was killed by an arrow and Decius attempted to use this to motivate his troops by telling them "Let no one mourn. The death of one soldier is not a great loss to the Republic."

Decius was sold out to the idea the Roman Empire as a whole was worth giving one's life for. He was a true believer in the idea the Roman Empire represented. In a way this is what makes his death at the hands of the barbarians quite poetic for it would be the concept Rome represented which the barbarians would later stand in the ashes of and revere so greatly. In any case, Decius' biggest mistake might have been that he was not satisfied with pushing the barbarians back to their territory but he was determined to recover the spoils the barbarians had taken from Rome. Just as it would appear the barbarian king planned, the battle would come to the swamp and there the Roman army would be not just defeated but annihilated. It is said that many of the bodies of those slain were never recovered as they were trampled into the mud of the swamp and that would become their grave. No one knows for certain but that would seem to be the final resting place of Decius. This was in the summer of 251 A.D. and in a symbol of how far the empire had fallen, Decius is seen as the first Roman emperor to die in battle against a totally foreign enemy.

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.*

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helpful if God just did what we asked and in our timing. No, the only way for us to have a relationship that's faith is to understand it's a two-way communication with God that acknowledges God knows better than we do and if we want what serves God's Kingdom or helps us we have to be listening when He gives the answer(s)!

This is what Isaac was clearly doing, and it's another example of how there is so much depth in the Bible we miss if we attempt to just water it down to the most pedestrian language so it takes as little effort as possible on our part to "understand" it. That won't work in any language and it certainly won't work in English! That thought brings us to the simple fact that even in this one verse we go from the point Rebekah was barren, then through the fact Isaac sought God about it, then to the fact Rebekah did in fact conceive. If we read that in some watered-down version of English it would appear to mean just the opposite of what we are being told. It could easily be interpreted that all this is covered in one verse because Isaac knew he had to have at least one son in order for the chosen nation to have a chance of being formed. Thus, he asks God for help in the fact he and Rebekah could not seem to have children and God answered that prayer. I know at first glance or if I was to say this in a discussion with people, many would say that's not how they think, but actions always speak louder than words. As amazing as I find it to be in our world of today with all its troubles and turmoil, there has actually been surveys done which show the prosperity doctrine is on the rise. I have said many times I'm not sure how many people believe this doctrine in title and to the extreme it has been taught in the past. However, I have also stated the dangerous residual of the teaching remains fully alive and well. That really seems clear as at this point a less radical version is being accepted, even in name, among most of the churches.

This is sad because again, what we need is to do as Isaac did. We need to understand verses in the Bible such as these are not teaching us someone such as Isaac knew what needed to be done, asked for it and received it. Only God knew what needed to be done and when it needed to be done along with how it needed to happen. Only God could show Isaac and Rebekah all the right things in the right timing and they needed to be listening to God to receive that, not expect it to happen when they proclaimed it. Only because Isaac was listening was it a simple matter of moving from accepting the physical facts, to waiting on The Lord, to seeing His will come to pass in their lives. It doesn't mean it all happened really fast; it means it happened correctly and Isaac and Rebekah did not have an Ishmael kind of situation to deal with in their lives! Now another fact we find out very quickly is that Rebekah not only is with child but she is going to have more than one. There are many people who believe it was far more common for people of the past to have multiple births and if true that explains all the more how Abraham had six sons with Keturah at the end of his life. However, both Ishmael and Isaac were single births with two different women and later on Jacob has no multiples with any of the four women he had sons with; at least not that we are told of.

In any case, we know Rebekah had twins inside her.

The problem was that even inside the womb they fought with each other, and that point is made to us before anything more specific is said about her even having twins inside. It is an important point to understand that from the start these two children were so different from one another they couldn't even get along inside the womb. This concerned Rebekah and that's what we see in the next words. She had to stop and wonder if this was really God's will, why was there such turmoil involved? That said, she did the correct thing in that she too sought The Lord on the matter. This was excellent because only God could have caused Rebekah to understand how that could be. It's not a wrong thought to wonder why or if something can even be of God when things we don't relate to God are happening in the situation. It's much better than not wondering for that's what causes so many to want to give up the idea of there being things God wants and expects from us and just meld into the idea God is love so all things should be accepted. We also don't understand how having no acceptance of certain things from the standpoint of saying I will not allow those things in my life is far different than hating the people who do them. It's really sad how much those facts have been intentionally distorted for the sake of "winning" an argument down through time.

People who want certain things love to close down the conversation with the idea you're hateful for just disagreeing. It's not hateful to disagree. As believers we have to stand our ground on the Word of God and continue to do as Rebekah did in going to The Lord for assurance we understand what we believe is true. If we really have faith in God the mistakes will only get fewer and the ground we stand on will get firmer. It's never about hating other people for God truly is love and nothing can separate any individual from His love. (Rom. 8:35-39) However, that does not mean all people go to the place God created for those who want what He created humanity to be. That simply does not make any sense to a lot of people, but that's why God allows us this temporal life where we all get to make our choices even if those choices include rejecting everything God has and wants for our lives. The choice is simply ours to make. What Rebekah shows us is that there is a reason to seek God for the answers because there are answers. As we already covered, we don't always get them when we want and we don't always like the answer but if we truly accept God as God and not just some power in the universe for us to harness, we must believe there are reasons. We just may not always be ready to understand them. Thus, only fully trusting God can help us ever see our way to those points where we can and will grasp the right answer(s) instead of simply believing everything humans choose to do should be accepted because we aren't allowed to judge other people.

What Rebekah is told is again something that God was using as a symbol of spiritual truths. She is told there are two nations in her womb. We see the words here also describing them as two manner of people that will be separated out of her. This has so much meaning it's not really possible to grasp all at once, but we find ourselves at another point where needing to meditate on the Word of God is a truth we should heed. (Ps. 1) We need to apply what we experience in our own lives and what we see around us to what the Bible is telling us. If we will do that, we find how much the Bible is not about mysticism but

about life as it exists. It is also not about life others have lived that today or because of who we are we can't really relate to. It's about life at its most basic. What God was using the pregnancy and subsequent birth of Isaac and Rebekah's sons to show us is that simple truth we've already covered in this segment. There are the people who strive to know God and His ways and then there are those who do not. The strive part is of particular importance and we see that in the fact these two sons would be Jacob and Esau. Jacob was the one striving to know God and His ways but depending on how one looks at it, we might not see Jacob as the most virtuous of the two. Jacob would be a man who would make so many mistakes in his life. He is in truth a very hard turn from the righteous man we see in Abraham and his father Isaac who learned a thing or two about being righteous even from his father Abraham's mistakes.

Jacob was a man who really struggled with himself, life, and God in so many ways Esau could not have cared less about. However, what we learn from these two men is that real virtue does not lay in being the one who is the most correct or righteous. Real virtue is found in that deep desire one feels to know God. This is why Paul simply frames Abraham's life in the New Testament by saying, "...Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Romans 4:3 At times I like to rephrase that a bit and say, it was counted unto him in place of righteousness. We as, for lack of a better term, New Testament believers or Christians talk so much about the idea Jesus died for our sin and His blood is what saves us, we forget or never understand what that means. We just don't put the Scriptures together. God loved us so much that in spite of it not being necessary for Him to gain the power to save us, He gave His only begotten Son. (John 3:16) Why? Because if through Him (Jesus) we could see the way to salvation when we couldn't see it in the ways men like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob saw it, then there is a chance we will make the choice to have faith in God which leads to salvation! Jesus' shed blood symbolizes a love of God for us too deep for us to grasp the fullness of! That love, that reaching out to us while we were yet sinners, is what opens the door of salvation. (Rom. 5:8) That did not just become true when Jesus came and gave His life. Jesus came and gave His life so we might see it's always been true!

In the end of it all, it's not about who is the most righteous because if it came down to that none of us would be worthy of salvation. That's why we have to have God's forgiveness, His grace. (Eph. 2:8-10) That means, as much as God wants us to be righteous and ultimately holy, He's not looking at us to show Him we are that as a criteria for who to save. God is looking for the people who want what He was offering from the very start. People who want to walk with Him in the cool of the evening. People who desire to run to Him, especially when they've made mistakes, instead of trying to hide from Him. God is looking for people who will say, I don't know what pure righteousness is but I know God created me and He knows! That's why God is also not looking at how fast we progress. God is looking at the heart's desire within us. Is our heart's desire to know God no matter what the cost or is it to have the most of what we want in this life? You can be a

really good person, especially by the world's standards, but not be interested in God. In fact, some people so believe they are good people it becomes their excuse not to bother knowing God. Such people are often the ones saying things like, "I don't believe God would send good people to hell."

Because they don't know God and have never desired to know, they say such things with no understanding about what heaven is and what it's meant for. They cannot see how their desires do not line up with what heaven will be and the fact there is no place for them there. There are a lot of things that happen which are out of our control. Such things can cause us to think at times there is no such thing as a free will. At times it can feel very much like our life is written in a book somewhere and we have no choice but to follow the storyline laid out for us. However, even if that was in fact true, it wouldn't effect the truth God gave us a free will because when it comes to what God has granted us that has to do with a relationship with Him. Whether we believe our path in this life is set to be easy or hard, healthy or filled with sickness, to be rich or poor, contented or always seeming to be us against the world, none of that matters to the fact we can choose to live with God or we can reject what He's offering! A very deep understanding of this point is what compelled Paul to say he had come to understand whatever circumstance he found himself in therewith to be content. (Phili. 4:11)

Success with God is in the desire that drives us to strive to know Him, not in how successful we are in moving ahead in righteousness at any given pace. This is the representation we are entering into by this point in the stories we are told. Two separate peoples were represented in Rebekah's womb. Within both of those groups there can be great diversity, but what causes the strife to be there between the two groups is that one deep desire or lack thereof. You see, for those who want to know God there will always be the challenge of overcoming those who do not. This truth doesn't make any sense at its core because if everyone of us have been given the same chance to know and follow God why should those who do not choose Him want to stop those who do? The answer to this could take pages to write about but at its base is the truth those who do not want to know God feel a guilt; a guilt that is only made worse by seeing those who do serve God. Just as living in this world with the separation from God sin causes makes the life of the believer more difficult, those things of God that believers hold and bring into this world get in the way of those who reject God. The two desires (the desire to know God and the desire to reject God) are like oil and water, and that's an understatement! (James 4:4) However, that's why God has worked so hard to be sure His name and ways are never lost from this earth where men hold so much control over what happens. No matter which camp each of us belong to and no matter how few or many belong to one side versus the other, every single person needs to know the choice to have God or not have God is totally up to them in spite of everything else going on in this life!

Until next time, Shalom!

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a thing could even happen in the nation, the tribe of Benjamin thought it more important to protect their own. The tribe would gather its army at Gibeah consisting of 26,000 men, 700 specifically of that city, to go out and fight against the rest of Israel. They had even chosen 700 men who at times had the advantage because they were left-handed and could use a sling with their left-hand. All that being true, Benjamin was greatly outnumbered by the 400,000 men the rest of Israel's army consisted of.

Israel would go up to the tabernacle to ask God who should lead this fight against Benjamin, and God would answer that the tribe of Judah should take the lead. Knowing they had heard from The Lord they go out to attack Gibeah. In spite of how greatly they outnumbered Benjamin they would still organize their army in the proper way to go against the city. Thus, they were prepared and ready to attack yet the army of Benjamin would come out of the city to attack them. At the end of this first battle the men of Benjamin had killed 22,000 of the men of Israel. The army would reorganize and be back in position to attack like they were the first time but the people of Israel would be concerned that going against another tribe in Israel might not be something The Lord approved of. Maybe they had misunderstood when they had sought God before. They would seek God the rest of that day asking if it was right for them to go against Benjamin and God would answer yes, going against Benjamin was the right thing to do. The army of Israel would approach the city the second day and Benjamin would once again come out against them. This time Benjamin would kill another 18,000 men of Israel's army bringing Israel's total loss to 40,000 men!

Stunned by this the people of Israel went up to the tabernacle once again and fasted until evening seeking God to try and understand what was happening. The rightful man to be High Priest, a descendant of Aaron, was still there at the tabernacle serving during this time and the Ark of the Covenant was still in its rightful place. For all Israel had been through by this point in their history the tabernacle and its elements remained intact and available for the nation to come as they were suppose to in order to seek God. Yet they had been defeated two days in a row by a far smaller army consisting of the very city they were trying to destroy due to its wickedness and the tribe that was putting their tribe above the Law of God among the nation. Israel could not understand how this could happen but what they did not consider was that while it was true the wickedness of Gibeah represented a greater evil than they had ever seen among the nation, none of the nation was really serving God as they were suppose to. The nation had come to ask God who should lead them and God had answered. They had asked after the first defeat if it was right for them to go against a tribe of their brothers and God had answered it was right. What the nation had not really done was repent before God! They had not followed a simple concept Jesus laid out as He was here with us on this earth, which was that one should get the beam out of their own eye before they attempted to get the splinter out of their brother's eye. (Matt. 7:1-5)

The city of Gibeah's wickedness was truly great but it was one small city among an entire nation. It was truly a splinter

by comparison. The tribe of Benjamin foolishly chose to defend the city in spite of its evil, but Benjamin was the smallest tribe in the nation making it a splinter among all the tribes. The nation was large and its sins may not have cumulatively reached the level of evil Gibeah had but the very fact the tribe of Benjamin chose to defend one of their cities begs the question, how many of the tribes in Israel would have done the same if the shoe was on their foot? Even if they were not willing to defend one of their cities against the rest of the nation, would they be willing to go and destroy the wickedness from among their tribe themselves? It was not just about who was wicked and how great their wickedness had grown, this was about the fact the nation as a whole had fallen so far that a city, any city, among the nation could contain such people. The evil men of Gibeah represented a result of the nation as a whole's failure to serve God. What good would it do if the nation was allowed to destroy one city in Israel or even one tribe if their ways were not going to change? God wanted to take the opportunity to show them how badly they had neglected His ways and how in doing so, He was not their magical force for good when they finally chose to do something about one blight in a nation sick with sin.

God would instruct them to fight the third day and this time He would deliver the city into their hands. This time Israel would change tactics a bit by sending men to go in closer to the city and hide all around it. The rest of the army would organize themselves against the city as they had done twice before. On the third day Benjamin no doubt confident they could win once again went out to meet the army of Israel and just like the other times they would be successful as the army of Israel appeared to flee before them. As they did Benjamin would kill about thirty men during fighting in the open field and on the road to Shiloh. Benjamin would be convinced they could totally win this war as the men of Israel intentionally retreated to the point they could regroup at a place that yet again symbolized the sin of Israel as it was a grove of palm trees for the worship of Baal. However, this would take the men of Benjamin far enough away from Gibeah that the 10,000 men of Israel hid around the city could rise up and go in to destroy it. The sign they were to give to the rest of the army of Israel was that if successful they would set the city on fire. This they did, and the army of Benjamin had no idea they were having anything but success until they turned and saw the smoke rising from their city.

This would cause them to turn their backs on Israel unsure what to do. They now understood the army of Israel was in front of them and behind them having already destroyed the city they were trying to defend. They would turn to the east and run for the wilderness but Israel would catch up with them and take advantage of Benjamin's disarray. They would catch Benjamin from two sides not far from Gibeah and there kill 18,000. The remaining army of Benjamin would attempt to make it to a cave in one of the high hills where people had been known to hold out against a siege by an enemy, but as they went Israel would kill another 5,000 of them. Benjamin would retreat toward Gidom which is east of Bethel, but on the way Israel would kill another 2,000 of the army. In all, the numbers we are given tell us Benjamin only lost about 100 men in the prior two days of fighting, for on this third day alone Benjamin lost 25,000 men bringing the total loss to 25,100 men of war out of an already very small tribe. Whatever the loss in battle only 600

of Benjamin made it to the cave where they would hide for four months. In that time the army of Israel would go through the tribe's territory killing the people of Benjamin as well as the animals and setting fire to the cities. Generally they destroyed the tribe of Benjamin almost to the point the tribe was all but eliminated as a people from among the nation!

Now, when the nation had come together at Mizpeh to consider what had happened and what to do about it, the tribes took an oath that none of them would give their daughters to the men of the tribe of Benjamin to be their wives. The tribe already being a small tribe as it was, needed women from other tribes worse than any other tribe in the nation. This alone might have ended the tribe of Benjamin. Now a significant number of the tribe's young men had been killed in the fighting making the odds of this tribe's survival even worse! As the battle went well for Israel's army the rest of the nation would return to the tabernacle and weep before The Lord over the fact Israel would be missing a whole tribe when this was all said and done. The next day they would build a specific altar to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings to The Lord in mass. They had finally come to realize this was not just about the evil of one city or tribe but the entire nation needed to repent before The Lord. They also would consider what to do about the fact this war had not ended in the destruction of one city but almost an entire tribe.

They would seek to rectify this situation because they repented, or in other words turned back from the anger that made them originally not care about a tribe being lost. It's almost as if in the heat of the moment of considering the evil that had been done in Gibeah it had not occurred to them that the result would be the lose of an entire tribe. As they considered this the question came to light that they had yet to deal with the oath they had sworn as the call went out to come to Mizpeh. At that time they had sworn that anyone, meaning any family group, city, etc. that did not come up to Mizpeh would be put to death. It was considered a serious matter for some group to ignore a call to action. It was as if the people of such a group were saying, we don't care about what the rest of the nation cares about or we won't give our young men to the battle should there be one. Keep in mind the nation had come together to decide what to do about Gibeah and while it might have been clear there would be fighting of some kind, not coming to Mizpeh meant not being willing to even bother to be part of the discussion.

As they looked over the record of who had come to Mizpeh they found there to be no representative from the city of Jabesh-gilead. It was decided that twelve thousand men, the bravest and honorable men who could be sent, would go with the instructions that they were to kill the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead for not coming to Mizpeh. Men, women, children, everyone! The only exception would be the women who were still virgins. The men would do as they were instructed and in the end they found and returned to Shiloh with four hundred young virgins from Jabesh-gilead. They would call the tribe of Benjamin, specifically the six hundred men who had escaped to the cave at Rimmon and they would come. Israel would give the virgins of Jabesh-gilead to them to take as wives but that left

two hundred of them still lacking wives. With so few men of Benjamin remaining leaving two hundred of the tribe's men without wives was not acceptable.

As they considered what to do further they remembered there was a feast coming up where a great number of Israelites would come up to the area of Shiloh where the tabernacle stood and the people would gather to celebrate this feast in the fields to the east of the main road that led between Bethel to Shechem. At such a feast the daughters of Israel would go out to dance and traditionally this was done in groups. Those talking to the men of Benjamin tell the remaining two hundred left without wives to go and hide in the vineyards of that area and when the young woman go out to dance they could surprise them and each man could catch for himself a woman to be his wife. The idea was that the men of Benjamin were already outlaws of a sort. Kidnapping these woman would be no real addition to their "crimes," so to speak. Thus, when the fathers of the women taken came to the elders of Israel to report their daughters had been taken and ask what was to be done about it, the elders would point out the obvious fact that the Law of God had not been broken by their daughters being with men of Benjamin; they were still men of Israel. They too as fathers and families of Israel would not be held accountable for giving wives to men of Benjamin and in doing so break the oath of Mizpeh. The simple truth was that they never gave their daughters, their daughters were stolen from them. This would appear to put the entire wrong of the situation squarely on the shoulders of the men of Benjamin but at the same time, it gave all the young men proper wives from among the nation.

The Book of Judges ends by telling us these men of Benjamin did as they had been instructed in getting the wives they needed. After this they would set out across their tribe's territory to rebuild their cities, their families, and their tribe as a whole. The details of this entire story from start to finish are enough to make one sick over the terrible things that were done. The wickedness was unspeakable and the solution to almost every problem that was encountered was at best questionable, if not totally wrong! This was not how God had instructed His chosen nation to live and certainly they were not being the symbol of God's righteousness they were intended to be to the world. These last two stories of the Book of Judges show us not a judge who delivered Israel from an oppressive enemy but a nation in great internal strife. This is the conditions that would take us to the last judge God would give Israel. This is also why the book ends with the same words we have heard several times in these last stories, and that's the fact there was at this time no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Let's stay in God's Word!

