

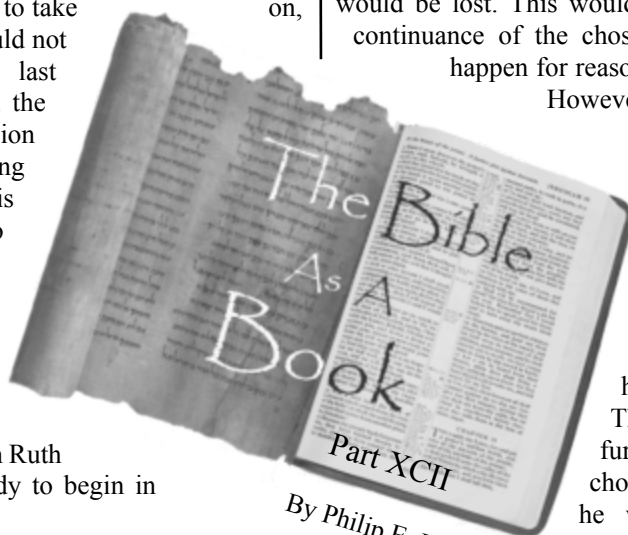


Shaqah



*“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*

Last time we continued our overview of the Book of Ruth and talked about how Boaz needed to go to the gate of the city to talk to a relative who was ahead of him in the line of those who should take over Elimelech's house since he and his sons had all passed away. We discussed how Boaz made sure this was all on the record by gathering elders to sit with them and witness the conversation. Boaz begins by talking about how the man needed to redeem Elimelech's land and if he didn't want to Boaz would need to. The man was more than ready to redeem the land but when Boaz brought up the subject of Ruth being the widow of one of Elimelech's sons and she would also be a responsibility the man needed to take on, he changes his mind saying he would not be able to do that. We ended last segment talking about how much the wording in the King James Version gives us as much of the true meaning of the specific words used in this conversation as we can get. We also talked about how much we need to be seeking the truth even in smaller matters and stories because the details are important to our Biblical perspective of the events we are reading. All that brought us through Ruth chapter 4 verse 6 and we are ready to begin in verse 7 this time.



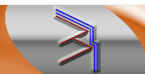
By Philip E. Busby

Verse 7 is where we begin a ceremony that was used to signify the refusal of a man to take his deceased relative's wife to raise up his house. In the Law the ceremony includes the wife of the deceased. The man of the family slated to take the deceased's wife was to do so, but if he refused the widow was suppose to act to make it known the man was refusing. Just as we have been discussing in this situation the point needed to go on the record that the woman was willing but the man was the one who refused to take her. Thus, she would go to the gate of the city just as Boaz had done and make this known to the elders. They, in turn, would send for the man, which brought him before them almost like a court hearing is handled today. They would ask him if what the woman said was true and he would be given a chance to put his answer on the official record.

This means if he was willing but the woman was attempting to block him and then just accuse him of refusing, the man would have a chance to tell his side of the story. However, if the man truly was refusing to do what the Law was asking of him this too would go on the official record, meaning the next in line would be able to take the widow, or depending on if there was anyone else, the widow was free to never remarry or marry someone who was not slated with the responsibility to raise up the house of her deceased husband.

This was serious because it meant a house in Israel would be lost. This would inhibit the growth as well as the continuance of the chosen nation which God intended to happen for reasons I'd love to fill this segment with.

However, I'll refrain. The fact the man's refusal was bitter for the widow is why the ceremony we are seeing a version of in Ruth takes place. There in front of the elders the woman was to take off one of the man's shoes and spit in his face. This was all harmless on a physical level but it was a humiliation for the man to endure. This made the ceremony itself a further incentive for a man of the chosen nation to do what the Law said he was to do. Not only was this humiliation in the moment something to endure but the man's house was also marked from then on as, "...The house of the him that hath his shoe loosed." Deuteronomy 25:10 This, of course, sounds a bit funny to us in English, but here again language fails to give us the true feeling. This is one of those times when we say, it loses something in the translation. That said, it's not just about the idea the words are wrong but the understanding of why this would be humiliating. In western cultures of today, as well as much of the past, there is still an instinct for men to care for family, and especially the children, of a sibling who has died. However, even that is a light thing in most people's minds as our culture is run afoul with so much divorce and remarrying that who's who within a family is complex, to say the least.



Thus, not only has western cultures, along with many others across the world, not believed in a rule, tradition, etc. that says a man should take his deceased brother's wife and raise up children in his name, it would actually be seen as, how shall I say it? In poor taste! That is to say, marrying the wife of your deceased brother is not something most men would want to do, and even if they did, it could be looked down on by many others within our society depending on various circumstances. That's not to say it doesn't happen but, at the very least, it's not most people's first thought as to what should happen. This is part of the reason we don't understand why this being said of a man's house would be looked at as a negative mark. On top of that it needs to be pointed out, once again, that God didn't ask all the people of the world to follow the Law He gave to Israel as a way to receive salvation. God also didn't ask it as even a show of who was/is righteous versus who was/is not. The Law was specific to the chosen nation and held certain requirements such as taking your brother's wife upon his death because such a thing would be important to the chosen nation in a way it's simply not to other people and groups of the world!

A large part of that truth rests on the fact the affects of the chosen nation on this world could have been far more potent had they continually remained a nation of people living on the promised land; following the Law of God; and growing to be larger with each passing generation! How different the world would be had that been the case! Needless to say, it would have been a tremendous blessing to the world, and that fact is why a law such as we are discussing here was in the Law God gave the chosen nation but just isn't important to others in the world no matter if they do or do not claim to walk in faith. Once again, I hit a subject that could have pages written on it. I grew up hearing Christians talk about "growing the kingdom of God" by seeing their Christian children married to each other and giving birth to more "Christian children." The problem is, that's not how it works. God could physically grow the chosen nation by children being born because the important thing for a member of the chosen nation was to exemplify the Law God had given them. However, doing such a thing did not require each member of the chosen nation to believe in the things the Law was trying to teach us all. I know people have a hard time seeing that point but that's connected to the fact Christians are falsely taught in some form or another the concept that following the Law was the path of salvation prior to the coming of The Messiah.

The truth is, how many people both of and not of the chosen nation make it to salvation is about faith and only about faith. That has been the case since God breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils and will remain the case up to and for the last human ever born! This is why I go back so much and talk about creation and the circumstances man was put in at that time. What I just said about the chosen nation is a representation of the way God created us in the first place. This shows us how much the chosen nation was formed not just to represent things of God for the time or the future of mankind but the entire way God has interacted with us from the start. Before "the fall" it didn't matter how many or how few people did or did not walk in faith. It did not matter to what degree people walked in faith. Of course, God hoped men would choose to walk in a relationship with Him. It was for this reason we were created. However, an important understanding of what God gave us at

the beginning is that man was free to live his life without concern for why he was created. Chew on that fact and it'll change your perspective on a whole number of things people have to say about God and the way He has dealt with us as humans. Humans were created to live their lives with amazing freedom. With access to The Tree of Life, man had no reason to fear death or ignoring God.

All I've said in my teaching about God being free in that setup to step in and correct our actions in real time is true even if it had lasted for eternity. Untold numbers of people could have lived in this universe and had freedom like we cannot imagine. Sure God would have to keep us from violating each other's freedoms and individual rights but that wouldn't look that different from having a government authority doing such a thing, or would it? It would but only from the standpoint of God's ability to govern us being perfect and immediate which are both things human government cannot achieve for a number of reasons! The magnitude of what it means to say, all God asked of us was that we not take on the knowledge of good and evil the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil could give, is far greater than most of us have ever taken time to think about much less understand. The bottom line of the truth I so often attempt to point out in explaining this is that God did not create us with no choice but to serve Him or face death. Our own personal sin is why we suffer the wages of sin. (Rom. 6:23) Along with that is an understanding man's actions have muddied the water almost too badly to see, and that's the point even taking of The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil didn't change as much as we think it did.

We say it brought the truth of death into human existence, but maybe the better way to see it is in a light many people who call themselves Christians practically worship! That's in the light of salvation which means we can say, taking of the tree brought a need for salvation into human existence! There's another thought that should get a lot more attention in the teachings of what calls itself Christian. It's an important understanding and one so many people have so many problems in life due to the fact they don't have it. God is not the one who put us in a box; we did that all on our own. However, the only thing that really means is that now we need to find faith in order to have the salvation we originally would never have needed. We have a short period of time to choose, but God said at the time of determining He would send a flood to wipe out all of us, 120 years is the maximum amount anyone would ever need. (Gen. 6:3) There's another fact it'd be good to give a lot of thought to, but unfortunately for this writing we need to get all the way back to what's happening in the story of Ruth.

We don't see why saying a man's house is one whose shoe has been loosed is a humiliating thing because we don't have the perspective a member of the chosen nation was intended to have. Christians have no need to run around talking about building the Kingdom of God by Christians having more children because none of us know what choice each of those children will make when it comes to walking in faith and thus, truly being a part of the Kingdom of God! The chosen nation does have a reason to say they will build God's work on this earth by having more children because the nation is a physical representation of the truth and the holders of God's oracles.

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment we continued our look at the time Isaac goes to Gerar among the Philistines to look for food during famine in Canaan. Primarily we looked at the story that deals with the fact Isaac had told the Philistines, specifically the king, that Rebekah was his sister but left out the fact she was his wife. We discussed how that for all the similarities between this story and Abraham's there are distinct differences. One of the biggest is in the fact Abraham and Sarah had made it their normal thing to tell people as they traveled this strange land where they were not sure how much anyone feared The One True God. Whereas, Isaac and Rebekah did it for this incident among the Philistines. Of course, that also has to do with the other difference between the stories which is that Abraham and Sarah came to this land totally unknown by the inhabitants and vice versa. Isaac grew up in the land of Canaan and Rebekah being brought back from Mesopotamia had also lived in Canaan for some time as Isaac's wife. For all those differences meant to the way the story unfolded, the bottom line was that the king figured out Rebekah was Isaac's wife and confronted him with the matter before anything more serious came of it. The king's words to Isaac seem to show he had knowledge of what bad things could have come of it and the fact The God Isaac served would have punished them for it. Thus, the king declares that no one was to touch Isaac or Rebekah or they would suffer the punishment of death. All that brought us through Genesis chapter 26 verse 11 and we are ready to begin verse 12 this time.

Now, before we move forward it's worth noting, once again, that this incident had done the same thing for Isaac as it had for Abraham. It caused there to be a fear among the Philistines who were the people at the time that could have been a great hindrance to the forefathers of the chosen nation living on this land, especially down at the south end where they had as much as anywhere in the land "settled." Consider the words of the Philistine king in laying out his reaction to finding that Rebekah was Isaac's wife. His words show he was quite afraid something might have happened, like one of them having relations with Rebekah, and it scared the king so badly he proclaimed that anyone who touched Isaac or Rebekah would not just be punished but put to death! He wanted to be sure he and his people dealt fairly with Isaac and/or not at all. In either case, Isaac was free from fear of the Philistines disrupting his life and what God would lead him to do. This is likely more important than many students of the Bible stop to think about. Isaac showed he feared the Philistines or he wouldn't have tried to tell them Rebekah was just his sister in the first place. Tension between Isaac's house and the Philistines obviously existed or at least Isaac felt like they could come about with the smallest provocation. What happened due to Isaac's actions in the end shows how blessed Isaac was the king feared something bad being done to Isaac and Rebekah instead of attempting to do something negative to them.

What came out of this was an assurance that Isaac could travel the land in much the same way his father had, doing business and handling the affairs of his house without fear that while he was gone the Philistines might make a move against his house in his absence. This strengthened the order from God that Isaac was not to go down into Egypt and forget Canaan was his home. As much as this might seem like Isaac got a blessing out of doing the wrong thing, we need to see how much this gave God a chance to test Isaac, in a way. Through this incident God proved He really was with Isaac like He said He would be. It goes without saying that the incident could have gone very differently in all kinds of negative ways for Isaac but it did not, and only God can be given the credit for that fact. Maybe one of the things we should see most of all is that this wasn't just God taking care of the situation in the moment; as in directing the Philistine king to do one thing instead of what he might normally have done. In this story is a view of how God is out in front of us in ways we might not ever know and certainly fail to see on many occasions even when we have the information in hand to know. God had been working with the Philistines and their relationship to Abraham long before Isaac. If we go back to Abraham's words about not knowing if the people in Canaan feared God or not, we see the fact this was a concern. After all, God brought Abraham to this land because one day God would punish the people and give the land itself to the chosen nation. This is a point we ended with to some degree last time. God is for His chosen nation, no one can be against them and prosper in doing it. Those known as the Palestinians have seen this firsthand, as well as many Arab nations of the region. We can have all the political thoughts we want about fair and not fair when it comes to Israel constantly defeating their enemies, and in very devastating ways. However, this is what God brought Abraham to Canaan to do. The land belongs to the chosen nation, not others in this world. Even if it could be proven a people were direct descendants of Canaanites who lived on this land long, long ago, it wouldn't give them the right to possess it.

You can choose to believe that or not believe it, but it is a truth the Bible makes clear. Thus, I go back to the fact Abraham came into this land with legitimate reasons, to fear the people in it were already long gone when it comes to knowing, much less fearing, The One True God. God took the opportunity when Abraham went among the Philistines to put the fear of God in them. God also took other opportunities to show these people His power and certainly the fact He was on Abraham's side. These facts are why the Philistine king knew it'd be such a bad thing if one of them had attempted to take Rebekah. Isaac benefited from actions God took long before he was ever born! Thus, Isaac had not just the command of God that he stay in the land of Canaan but also an assurance God was there to protect him as he did. This shows us a core element we see throughout God's Word, which is that God leaves us with no excuse. When God came to Adam and Eve after they had

eaten of the fruit of the tree God told them not to, they immediately started making excuses for why they did what they did. (Gen. 3:8-13) Not to put too fine a point on it here, Adam said it was Eve's fault he had eaten. Eve said it was the serpent's fault she had taken the fruit in the first place. Right from the very first mistake humans made we showed the propensity to excuse ourselves and our actions, especially in ways and at times we feel we can blame someone or something else for our actions.

Of course, Adam and Eve had no real excuse to do what they did because God had simply told them not to do it. There was no ambiguity there. This is the case in every situation man fails God, but God goes the extra mile to make that truth more obvious to us than it might have already been. This is why I say this is a core element of God's nature or at least the way He deals with us as humans. What we see here in the story of Isaac's dealings with the Philistines is a micro example of why God formed the chosen nation to turn the world's attention to Him, when men of faith like Abraham were able to exist before and thus, without the Law and prophets. This is why for all the ways God has made it clear through the chosen nation and the oracles He entrusted to them, much later down the timeline God sent His only begotten Son to offer Himself as a sacrifice. (Rom. 3:1-2, John 3:16) As much as we tend to think of it ending there because we live in between the time of Jesus' first coming and what comes next, it does not. Jesus will return and not just for what Christians are taught to focus on. Jesus gathering of all those who have walked in faith with God from the past as well as transform those of faith who are still walking the earth is only a small part of accomplishing what we are talking about here. The fact we don't see that as Christians, or maybe I should say we aren't taught it, is because we just want to focus on salvation instead of the point of salvation. It's a large reason why many people who believe they are saved, never will be!

Jesus is coming back to this earth to rule and reign, not just for a thousand years but until that action is also bled dry to the point things get like they were in the days of Noah once again. (Matt. 24:36-39) The end result of that happening will look different than the days of Noah because the evil people in that age will have no excuse to say God doesn't exist. They will live in a time when God will be walking this earth, acting as God in ways Jesus never did when He came the first time. There will be no need for preachers like Noah telling people they have forgotten God exists because they will know He lives! Just as we see happening with the people of the chosen nation today, the people of the world will get a clear view of the fact opposing God and His ways is a means to a disastrous end. In spite of that, we are told when Satan is released from the bottomless pit he will go out and deceive the nations into believing that fact isn't true. (Rev. 20:1-8) With God so obviously here among us ruling the world, and by that point having done so for a thousand years, man will have no excuse to follow Satan's plan. So why will so many do it? They will do it because they are like people were in the days of Noah; because they are as people are showing themselves to be today! People have been, are, and will be at that time running to and fro not really paying attention to what's going on. It will be like the saying, those who forget history are destined to relive it.

People will have long forgotten how bad things had gotten before Jesus returned.

They won't believe or know the history that tells how good things got when Jesus came, and they won't appreciate the stability He has brought to the world. Humans will, once again, believe they can do it all better without Jesus and these people He seemingly brought with Him who never die. I could go on and on writing what would sound like a science fiction book about the thoughts people will have when it comes to those who were resurrected at Jesus' return. No matter the specific details of the things people will say, the bottomline will be the same. The story will go something to the tune of how humanity has become enslaved by this overlord and those he brought with him. There will be movements to rebel and take down this man in Jerusalem who has the audacity to believe He and He alone is the rightful ruler of the entire world. The one thing people will glean from history, or at least those wanting to push the propaganda used in those times, will be the idea that if you look back at the time we live in now humans believed more and more in democracy. Democracy is simply the idea the people rule themselves, and that basic thought will be very popular among those humans who desire power. It will be very easy to spread the idea democracy is our human right and we must reclaim it for future generations. Because things continually repeat, you can already hear the echos of that time in the future where the good will be called evil and the evil will be looked at as the good. (Isa. 5:20)

I could go on and on but the point we are looking at here is that God will go all the way to that kind of end, giving people a chance to see the right and reject the wrong. People just won't go for it in any truly long-term way. A subject I could write a lot on is how much the seeds for people being against Jesus when He returns are already being planted. Not the seeds that will cause people to come against Him immediately. We are already building to that and see it in our news cycle every day. I'm talking about the seeds of false belief that will flourish into the full-blown rebellion against Christ over a thousand years from the time He appears. Satan won't have to go out from the pit and come up with the excuses why people should want to remove Jesus as king. Those reasons will and on some level already do exist. All Satan will have to do is go out and convince people the time is right to make their move. "The time to act is now!" It's why Revelation refers to the fact Satan will go out among the nations for a "...little season" Revelation 20:3 God is continually going the extra mile to give our wrong choices no excuse to survive, but humans still want to use them in a hopeless attempt to gain what we want or, at least, believe we want and/or need.

Here in the verses of Genesis we are covering, God was using even a mistake both Abraham and Isaac made to squelch any excuse Isaac might think he had for saying, God told me not to go to Egypt and abandon the promised land of Canaan but I still think it's the right thing to do. We don't usually lay such things out in our own minds so bluntly and clearly but the point is there. This is why faith is the only way to the salvation we have yet to receive. We as humans are very young and foolish and as much as we like to get into the mode that says God is harsh on us when we sin, the truth is, God gave

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LXVI

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."

As we continue our look at the history that shows us how the Roman Empire came to be looked at as a Christian empire, last time we discussed the technical way the Roman Empire came out of what history calls the Crisis of the Third Century. This brought us through the lives of a few emperors most of whom had short-lived reigns no matter if they were or were not successful. The most important thing the time period we've been covering in the last few segments has shown us is how the empire came back together from once being split into three distinct pieces but how much the stage was already set for the empire to begin decentralizing. We saw this happen in a very large way toward the end of our last segment as we talked about how a man named Diocletian gained the throne in mid 285 A.D., Diocletian would confirm the total abandonment of the quest to enlarge the empire toward the east which had for once seen some success. He had more interest in what should be important to government in that he cared to really get things settled at home before he did any expansion of the empire he might or might not do or desire to do. Maybe that's giving him too much credit, but the point is Diocletian began the process of straightening out things that hadn't been working for so long by his acknowledging the truth one man was not enough to rule such a large territory!

As we talked about last time, the empire had long had a system of provinces with governors, but the system was always meant to be a very tight system which answered to Rome. How much leeway any particular governor had to do what he thought best for his province was totally dependent on how able Rome was to tell him what to do and how to do it. Such control could be interrupted by things like a rebellion in the empire; incursions by people like the Barbarians; the passing of the throne from one man to the next before an emperor had a chance to get a handle on things, and many other factors. This left each province with absolutely no control over who their governor was, and at times they had little to no instructions, and/or conflicting instructions from Rome. In all, it made the system somewhat useless and often times detrimental to the people just trying to live their lives. At the time an emperor had given others direct power to act, such as leaving a son to take care of one portion of the empire while he handled another, it was a time the empire was trying to deal with almost insurmountable incursions by outside forces or it was a time the emperor was off on an attempt to expand the empire. So these times were also little to no help in the everyday governing of the empire. Diocletian would be the first ruler since the empire came to be ruled by just one emperor to begin delegating power to others for the sake of actually administering the empire.

He would start by splitting the administration of the

empire into east/west divisions where he would administer the eastern part of the empire while a man named Maximian would administer the western half. Later Maximian gave power over about half of his portion of this division to a man named Constantius, and at that same exact time Diocletian did the same with his portion using a man named Galerius. This formed what is known as a Tetrarchy which comes from a Greek word meaning, "rule of four." As I mentioned last time, this was mostly an administration division of the empire and not a true division. However, when history tries to tell us the Roman Empire survived into the fifth century A.D., we need to take that with a grain of salt as students of the Bible. The earlier and true division of the empire into Rome and two others history calls empires was more than just a glitch; it was a sign of things to come! When history tells us Rome survived to see an end to the Crisis of the Third Century, we need to be clear decentralizing the government into two, and quickly thereafter four parts is what truly gives us the stability within the empire to say that. Such things mean nothing to most historians, but as Bible students it's a clear message God was correct, not just in that He confounded our language and caused us to separate as humans but that separation was a good thing!

In so many ways this is what the study is all about. The chosen nation was persecuted in a large way and on a large scale because an empire existed, and clearly in the time of the Greek Empire that was a problem. After that, things settled and looked good for a time for God's chosen nation but it eventually came back to being the same sort of battles with the Romans. During the Roman rule this led to the chosen nation ceasing to be a nation of people on the promised land, leaving them to largely be a nation of people scattered to the four winds of the earth! This is meaningful because we see how much centralization of human government power is destructive to the individual freedoms of humans. This is a subject I've hit on hard and often because it is by far a main point of the chosen nation's existence. It is also something that with knowledge of history we can clearly see the Christian religion wants to ignore. Why? Because centralization of human power was the main goal of the Christian empire as a means to "save" the world. It's hard to admit God was right in blocking man's path to having a one world government when that's what you say will be the world's "salvation." This thought was carried furthest by what we know as Catholicism, but no matter how much or little success the religion has in actually being centralized, the belief lingers in the minds of most all those who "lead" the religion today.

Since the time of the Protestant movement's success of breaking away from the Catholic church such thoughts take on more of a form which promotes cooperation, but the pressure to all believe the same things is the only way to gain that. This is what has caused church leaders to debate almost constantly about what the minimal level of shared beliefs must be in order to be considered a Christian. Those groups who do not share the

minimum beliefs necessary are considered cults or cult like. This immediately spurs efforts within the church to stamp out such groups as a way to defend the purity of the Christian religion and the people it claims to serve. This is exactly what the Jewish religious establishment believed in and why it attempted to stamp out all the Christians from day one. It seems we never learn anything from the experiences of the chosen nation! To some this all seems a little complex, which was intentional on the part of evil men (with the help of Satan) because it makes it easy to exasperate individuals into saying, "Can't we all just get along?" "Isn't the church of Jesus Christ about love and how can we be that when we're always fighting each other?" At first glance these seem to be very valid arguments. The problem is, it's still true that those with faith in God can't just accept everything else that claims to be of God. That works perfectly fine when true believers apply the truth to their personal lives but in groups it becomes a form of mob rule. This is why the true church is not a religion but simple groups of individuals who are walking in true faith with God!

As I have said over and over in this and other studies, if God couldn't form a specific group of people to whom He gave literal written instructions for how to serve Him and see success, what makes us think we as humans can form such a thing? What kind of arrogance makes people believe something such as the church could replace what God established in the chosen nation? The answers are that we cannot form any such thing on any large scale, and the irony as to why that's true is most specifically because we are trying to form it. I'll come back to that thought here in a moment, but the second answer is we cannot replace the chosen nation and more importantly there is no need for any such thing to happen. God didn't form the chosen nation to save the world as much as He formed it to show us how much a religion cannot save the world. Only individuals willing to take the time to see the truth can choose to follow and walk in true faith. Groups of such believers can only form when there is enough people of like precious faith within proximity to each other that makes it possible to gather together. How large any such group ends up being is totally dependent on just how many are in any particular area, and that takes us back to what I said I'd come back to about us trying to build big. People would argue I'm forgetting and/or denying the power of evangelism. They say, evangelism is the goal of the church, our great commission! So, of course, growing large churches is what we're trying to do!

I look at what the Bible teaches us and look back at what calls itself the church and say, a focus on evangelism is one of the main downfalls of the church! Why would I say such a horrible anti-Christian thing? Because evangelism has become the churches excuse to diminish and forget true faith in God. There is no point in any of us claiming to serve God if we don't have faith. The church so misunderstands this fact at the core, we've forgotten what the word faith even means. This is another thing I hit on often because it's beyond ridiculous that a vast majority of people claiming Christianity can't give you the proper definition of faith. They may hit all around it talking about trusting God and putting your life in His hands which is another way of saying, trust God. They might come somewhat close in saying it's my walk with God, the reason I pray and read my Bible. However, in all these explanations we find a very one-way street. It's a very pagan street to be blunt, as we see it comes down to the simple idea God is a power and if we want

what He is able to provide we must appease Him. The debate over what the minimum requirements are to be considered a Christian is nothing short of that idea. It's the question of, what must we believe and/or teach and/or do to gain salvation and/or bring others to salvation? If we can figure out what the minimum values for those things are, we can define in writing what being a Christian is!

What we need to believe first and foremost is that God is God and not just some power. Open your Bible to Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 and begin reading. In doing so you'll find all the stories that explain to us why God formed a chosen nation. With that information in hand, read through the Law God gave that nation and find the written definition for how to determine who was part of the chosen nation. I go at it from this angle especially knowing that many Christians have been taught to believe following the Law was the mode of salvation in some form or another until Jesus came and wiped all that away by giving His life to save us. So the question is, can you find the definition of what it was to be part of the chosen nation? Most will point to some passage or group of passages that tells us you had to be a descendant of Abraham. Makes sense right? However, father Abraham, had many sons, many sons had father Abraham, is more than just a song we learn in Sunday school. It's a literal truth! One son through Hagar, one son through Sarah and six all but forgotten sons through a second wife named Keturah. What we mean when we say, a descendant of Abraham, is that one needed to be a descendant of Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob. Don't believe we need to be that technical about it? We certainly do need to be! After all, we're attempting to define what made a person part of the chosen nation which many believe led to salvation before Jesus wiped it all clean. If we believe in such ideas, this is important stuff!

This could go on for pages and pages but to try and be condensed about it I'll point out something most people forget; if they ever really saw it in the Law at all. It was easy even for someone born by blood into the chosen nation to be disassociated from the nation. It's all through the Law. Follow this, don't follow that, do this, don't do that and the nation was to separate out people who didn't do the right things! The more obvious thing that brings us to the point I'm trying to make is that there was a way to become a part of the nation when you were not bloodborne into it. That can specifically be pointed to as holding the Passover, but in a more correct way of thinking which holding the Passover is meant to lead us to understand is that an individual needed to be sold out to the following of the Law like a bloodborne individual of the chosen nation was suppose to be. Taking of Passover is used as a starting point because the first elements of the Law God gave Israel began with Passover as the means of finally being let go from Egypt and able to go out to become the nation God was building beginning with Abraham.

This is what leads people with a little more knowledge of the Bible to answer our question about the definition of being part of the chosen nation as being, the following of the Law. Now we have our first step of understanding the true matter at hand, but most don't take it further than that to get what the physical metaphor is actually showing us is the literal truth. The reason I can say that with confidence is found in the very fact people believe Jesus did away with the Law and replaced it with faith by coming and giving His life. We so often take what we want to

hear from what we read and not what is actually being said. The fact we can define who is a part of the chosen nation most properly by saying it is those individuals who follow the Law, is the physical representational key to asking the question of, what does it mean to follow the Law? This is why I can't really pin down my favorite verse in the Bible. I think it's so necessary to have it all, having a favorite is just too difficult to define; at least for me. I understand people have things they feel are inspiring and strikes them every time they read it, remember it, etc. and I don't have a problem with that. All I'm saying is that for me to have a favorite verse, it would have to be something that said it all.

A core verse for that could be I John 4:8 because it all starts with the fact God is Love, but we need to understand that means God loves us and that's why He wants us to have faith, (a relationship with Him). So then faith is the substance of what we hope for and the evidence of what we have yet to see. (Heb. 11:1) While that explains the premise it's still not clear to most people how to be saved, and the church is mostly responsible for that confusion. Thus, we must go on to understand why God confounded our language, what led Him to put a chosen nation in the world and with them, why was The Messiah prophesied to come from the very start of it? Why did Abraham tell his son God would provide Himself a lamb? (Gen. 22:8) What led Abraham to say that or believe we needed one? To understand all the ends and outs of such things we must study to show ourselves approved unto God, a workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (II Tim 2:15) As a teacher of God's Word my favorite verse changes depending on what knowledge the person or people I'm trying to teach need or that God has led me to teach in a particular moment or incident. When it comes to this moment in talking about how we define who was part of the chosen nation as being those who follow the Law and along with that talking about how following the Law was only the symbol of what God wants from us not the literal actions God is looking for, my favorite verse(s) comes from Micah. "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Micah 6:6-9

Those words say so much! I love them because they come from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and are the acknowledging cry of an individual who is saying, I can and have displeased God with my actions but I can't please or appease God by actions alone. The understanding that even if my actions are an extreme version of following the Law God Himself gave, He won't be pleased because without faith it's impossible to please God! (Heb. 11:6) All our actions whether good or bad are meaningless if we don't want God. That brings us back to what I was saying. If even following God's Law in extreme ways cannot please Him without the underlying correct attitude and relationship, there is no way to write a creed or the like to identify who is a true person of faith and who is not. Has the

mission of the church been to teach the truth and say, whosoever hears these words and desires a real walk of faith with God come join us? Sadly, no. Has the mission been to say, come be a part of us if your interested in beginning and/or learning about a relationship with God? Again, no.

The so called evangelistic cry of the church has been how do we make the church attractive to the greatest number of people because being a part of the church is of foremost importance. We reject the lessons God showed us through the chosen nation and that's why we want to reject the nation and say Jesus wiped all that away. Almost more so than any member of the chosen nation ever believed, we think we can give the people of this world a formula that provides them a magical ticket of salvation. The rest is just window dressing that's up to us to define on the basis of what we think will attract the people of our day and age. This is the freedom we believe Jesus gained for us. The simplification of what was once an arduous process of Law following ceremony is now a much simpler sinner's prayer, or the like. That's why I say an emphasis on evangelism has ruined the church. Most who call themselves Christians don't know what true evangelism is. Most believe it's a call to salvation, but the Bible shows us we'll never be saved without faith. Instead of, "Who wants to be saved?" our call should be, "Who wants to know God?" To be blunt again, knowing God is more than salvation! The heart of the church's problem is that, that teaching is totally left out. It's left out because the message has been turned around. Christians think they're saving the lost by saying, salvation is the reason to come to God instead of, God is the reason you're going to want to be saved!

How different would our churches look if that wasn't the case? This is what Abraham believed when he walked that hill to sacrifice his son to God. God was more important than his own life. God was more important than the life of his son whom he would have gladly given his life to save. However, Abraham knew God had a plan for our existence. He knew those who have a relationship with God are so precious God will not allow death to be the end of His relationship with them! It's what the Law tells us right up front when God starts what we call the Ten Commandments with the command we have no other gods before Him! Have you ever stopped to think if you're putting your desire for salvation before God Himself? Has it ever dawned on you that doing so will be the reason you won't make it to heaven? As it relates to talking about how the church looks at evangelism, it might be more important to ask, have you ever heard a preacher or teacher of God's Word say that? I don't believe I'm going out on a limb to say I doubt most any Christian has and even if you have, has it been a core principle of the teaching or just a passing thought? From the songs we sing as Christians to the platitudes we love to spill out about our "faith," salvation is most clearly god to the Christian religion and it's the reason evangelism instead of living in true faith is seen as our great commission.

We just can't see how badly we interpret the words of Matthew 28:19 in spite of the fact the chosen nation made the same mistake over and over until it was such a large part of their belief system the truth of the Law was secondary to it. It's where the arrogance came from that allowed the religious leaders to admit they knew Jesus was "...from God..." at the very least and most likely The Messiah they had been waiting for, yet they

killed Him. (John 3:1-2) Jesus simply wasn't The Messiah they wanted. They would send Him back to God and wait for another. That might sound like a great reason to be anti-Semitic but then we should hear the words of Jesus Himself echoing through our head, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew 7:1-2 Don't be so quick to believe the mote in your own eye doesn't make what's in the chosen nation's eye look like a splinter! If for even a minute you understand what the Jews of Jesus' day did was wrong on astonishing levels of misunderstanding of the Word of God, one should realize how easy it is to do, and make it a life's goal to cleanse such things out of our own life! To be ever vigilant, staying in prayer without ceasing. (1 Thess. 5:17)

The motto of Christianity should be the words of Job who told the world, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him." Job 13:15 Job goes on to declare, "He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him." Job 13:16 See how the trust and desire for God came before any thought about salvation. Do you see how Job's relationship with God and the maintenance of that relationship came before his wealth, his friends, his children, his wife, and even his own life! Job was not a man who lived for salvation, he was the true definition of a man who lived to know the God Who created him. Job knew he had to maintain that determination in spite of what his wife and "friends" said because to turn on God in a time God wasn't giving him what he wanted or to blame all he was going through on God punishing him for sin Job knew he had not committed would make Job a hypocrite. Job would let nothing endanger his relationship with God, and to see that is to see Job spoke of salvation not from the standpoint of preserving his life but standing before God in all the purity he could muster even in the here and now. Think about that! In that understanding is the message the church is suppose to preach. It's the message God formed a chosen nation to show the world because so few seemed to be able to get it the way men like Noah, Job, Abraham and others we don't even know the names of - all got it without having the benefit of the Law!

That understanding, that passion, is what Jesus came to clarify because even with the examples and representations of the Law not only was the world still not getting it, the very people who were the holder of God's Law weren't getting it! This is the potency of the words at the first of the Gospel of John. Speaking of Jesus he says, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." John 1:11 They were too worried about the question, "How can a man be saved?" to take the time to know God. Thus, when God stood before them in human flesh they didn't know who He was and/or didn't care He was God because they only wanted God for what they could get out of Him. That should be a sobering thought when we consider whether we're putting the desire for salvation in the place of God as god in our lives. Thankfully for this world Jesus didn't come to die just for those who were born into the chosen nation or those who had chose to join the nation by taking on the full responsibility of the Law. This is why John goes on to say, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of

the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13

We can't save the world through a universal church because true believers aren't born of our fleshly humanistic ideas. Jesus was killed because He didn't fit what people wanted in this world and they didn't see it as important to their salvation because they had the Law. To them, God was obligated to save them. They had spilled rivers of blood with their sacrifices. They had poured out rivers of oil. The church that calls itself Christian believes the same type of things. We say we put God first but what we really put first is salvation, being a "Christian," going to church, and when the dust settles God's pretty far down the list. It's why it's so easy to debate what will get people saved and what defines who is a Christian (as if the truth isn't in the word itself). That's the goal, but even at that we don't want to do more than the bare minimum it takes to get salvation and be a Christian. I think one of the main things that makes people excited about Jesus is they believe He simplified the process for salvation so much compared to the process they think the Law laid out. "What a blessing it is that we don't have to spill the blood of animals to receive salvation any longer!" That might sound cynical, but think about it. Is He your God because He's your Saviour from death which is the result of your own sin, or is He your God because He's God and you'd want to know Him even if knowing Him was all your life came to mean in the end of this life?

Might seem like we've come a long way from talking about decentralizing government power, but we haven't really come too far. The life man desires in the here and now is 99.9% a shroud meant to conceal the true reason we exist at all. Humanity wants to improve humanity for the good of humanity. That's why we believe in empires and the dream the world will one day be joined together in the peace and harmony of everyone believing the same thing. It might be clear as you sit empty and alone by yourself at times, maybe in the quiet of the evening staring up at the vastness of the stars in space, that your life is pretty small compared to it all. However, if we conglomerate together we can strive for the good of humanity and make that our reason to exist. It makes us feel like we are part of something bigger than ourselves. If your work for humanity goes on to effect generations to come, then you've earned a piece of immortality in spite of your smallness. Sadly, this is not just the thinking of those who live solely for this world but for those who claim to serve The One True God. Evangelism has become the Christian form of bettering humanity. My life meant something because I led someone else to salvation. The more someones you can lead to "salvation" the more you feel you've done and the more your life has purpose. That sounds noble and it seems heresy to speak against it but the truth is, your desire to know God is the only thing that gives your life purpose. If you don't understand that, it's only a happenstance you ever led/lead someone else to know Him! (Rom. 3)

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

us this place as a testing ground. We are allowed to make mistakes but we need to learn from them. God gives us the slack to go out and do any number of foolish things without coming down on us like a ton of bricks the minute we do something wrong. Just how God acts and how our mistakes turn out can very greatly depend on what God wants to accomplish in our lives. It's why we can say God doesn't force people to serve Him but there is power in praying for the lost. If we will release God to have His will on this earth as He has it in heaven, even in some of the smallest ways, God can act in ways we would never think to act. (Matt. 6:9-13) He can use our mistakes to show us how much He loves us and wants us to walk with Him. He can do it not just by clearly punishing us for it but also by giving us what might seem like blessings as we see here with Isaac. The only way to get the point is by allowing The Holy Ghost to direct us in the right paths and see the right perspective. He can only do that if we walk in a relationship with God (faith).

Isaac would go out from being among the Philistines unharmed, but what he really had was a new perspective on how much God was true and every man a liar. (Rom. 3:4) God was with him, leading him, guiding him, and protecting him even when Isaac wasn't perfect in his actions. God left Isaac with no excuse to go down to Egypt as his human thoughts might have directed him. This is why we immediately go from the king's words about giving capital punishment to anyone who dared touch Isaac or Rebekah to the fact Isaac went out and sowed seed to grow food. Not only does verse 12 show us Isaac stayed in the land but that he believed in God enough to put seed in the ground during a time the land was suffering famine. In case we have lost that fact from our thinking, that's why Isaac had gone among the Philistines to begin with. Nothing is said here about the famine being past or that the land started to bloom again. One minute Isaac is among the Philistines getting himself in trouble by both fearing men as well as depending on the system of men to provide food for his house. The next minute Isaac is out in the fields of this famine ravaged land planting crops and believing God will provide the increase! (I Cor. 3:7)

This is where we open our eyes and see how much God truly giving Isaac a blessing required Isaac to do the right things. He could have been saved from the Philistines but then gone out and sat in the dust while waiting to die of hunger, but he didn't. Isaac took the precious seed that had been stored up from the last harvest and risked putting it in the ground! He planted, he watered, he took care of his crop(s) but God and only God could bring the increase. Our walking in the right ways is a partnership with God in these ways. We can be so arrogant but then at the same time think ourselves so small. We say, I can't do anything, God is going to have to do it all, but that's not how the interaction of a relationship works. God has to do the things that are impossible for us to do but it's up to us to follow His leading in doing the things He wants us to do in the first place. Again, it speaks to the simplicity of faith. God put us in this universe so we could live our lives. That's been complicated in a thousand different ways by the wrong actions we have taken and the damage they have done. Thus, it's important we understand just blindly going forward doing what

we want to do is not right but sitting still when we know what God wants of us is also wrong. In faith we can hear God's voice and as our faith grows we can hear it more clearly, meaning we can face bigger things than we were once able to survive. I was recently reminded of the saying people, usually with bad intentions, like to use, "God doesn't put more on us than we can bear but I just wish He didn't trust me so much."

We might be tempted to say such things, or at the very least think them, but saying such a thing is like directly rejecting what faith is! We need to do what God wants us to do. At times it might seem more than we can bear, but most of the time it's really that we don't want to put in the work. We don't want to take the risk. It's a good thing not to act when we don't know it's what God wants but that too speaks to how much we need to seek Him. We need to hear, we need to overcome our doubt when we do hear, and we need to act in order to be the people God wants us to be. When we get into such subjects as Christians we are quick to get grandiose thoughts in our head about serving God and what we will accomplish in this world which will bring us rewards. However, God's ways for our life play themselves out in some of the smallest ways imaginable. Ways that will certainly go unnoticed by others and many times even by us. These times in the Bible we see things happen like we see in verse 12 are there to show us God is definitely acting to bless someone and if He can do it for them, He can do it for you. However, even for Isaac, planting seeds in the hope of a good harvest that will feed his household is about the most basic thing a man can do! Our modern world of going to big stores filled with all kinds of food to buy with the money we earn doing who knows what, blinds us from seeing what a simple trust in God this was for Isaac to do. God not only blessed Isaac with a good harvest, He blessed him with a harvest beyond his wildest expectations!

Now, verse 13 is where we see a truth that as with so many things can be read over and missed. It says Isaac waxed great. The word, "wax" is often used alongside the word "wane" today and only in reference to the moon cycle. However, its true meaning is very much there in the moon cycle for us to understand this word so it's not just a funny way of saying it because we read the King James Version of the English Bible. What's important about this word and hard to capture by using another word is the fact this was a process. Yes, Isaac inherited his father's wealth so he was already a rich man but being a rich man does not make a man great. This is true especially when a person inherits wealth and it can be a stumblingblock to a lot of children who do such a thing. So you're born with a privilege but with great privilege comes great responsibility. Having money can be wonderful but keeping money can be very hard. People can go through money without a thought in their head other than the idea they have money to spend. One day you turn around and it's all gone. People can also be stressed out about having money because they realize the responsibility it can come with and the work it can take to keep it. Money can be a tricky thing to have in any great amount. Most of us would love to try, but the truth of money is what causes some children set to inherit a great amount of it to refuse to take it or touch it. In some cases they will give it all away.

This is why the fact Isaac inherited his father's wealth is yes, part of the story but only part. Isaac had a life to live of his own and he had to live it knowing that wealth was something God had blessed him with so the promises to Abraham could move forward. Through process of time Isaac become much more than just the rich man who inherited his daddy's fortune. Isaac showed himself to be a great man of his own right. If we really pay attention to the structure of the verse we can also glean the truth this happened outside the eyes of the world. To understand this a bit better just think of how often the son of kings failed to be great like maybe their father was. You can be born into the right circumstances to become a king one day, but the only way for a king's son to grow up to be a great king in his own right is to put in the years it takes to become the man he needs to be. This is the kind of process we are talking about with Isaac. His father Abraham had been a great man of faith. Isaac would inherit all that meant in this world including the promise that through him the chosen nation would come and bless the world. Now it was time for Isaac to do something with that inheritance which is a way of saying, he needed to be a great man of faith himself!

This is something we touched on in an indirect way recently in talking about how God couldn't build a nation of people who were all people of faith. That would be impossible to do unless God reached in and took away the personal freedoms of the individual to make their own choices. Thus, as something I've talked about often we should be able to shorthand this a bit and say, obviously God wasn't going to do that, but this is also why people leaving the nation was talked about far more than any stipulations that would allow an individual to become a part of it. The chosen nation would be blessed because it is the promise of God to men like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These promises were made so there could be a chosen nation in the world to hold the truths of God and His ways and give the world a focal point for seeing God's direct actions in this world's affairs. This is why Jesus was born into the chosen nation in spite of their flaws and He will return to the chosen nation, when He comes back. However, before any of that could be true, men like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to be men of great faith. They had to be vessels God could use to get things started in a direction that would make The One True God the heritage and inheritance of the chosen nation no matter what future generations and specifically individuals of the nation chose to do.

Isaac would wax his way to greatness not just ride on the coattails of someone else, even if that someone else was his father Abraham. He would do it out of the direct sight of the world, and what that means is that Isaac did nothing of what he did as a way to gain stature in this world for himself. He did what he did with a single focus, and that focus was on furthering what God wanted to bring about in his life and through his life. This speaks so much to the mistake so many called into the ministry and even those who just attempt to live a life of faith make. We so often think of our lives as being something that just has to have meaning we, and others, can see. Even when we are willing to say things like we should wait

on The Lord and be patient because God is working something great He just hasn't revealed as yet. We still stumble often and many times big because while we wait we fail to do what the words of this verse tell us Isaac did and/or we are so looking for the great reveal that is to come we can't do the work of now! This is such a big issue in the lives of those proclaiming Christianity I just can't stress it enough. The truth is, when it comes to God none of us know how much our being who God wants us to be has to do with the right now and how much of it has to do with the future even far, far past our lifetime!

This verse makes me think about how Isaac is almost the overlooked forefather of the chosen nation. I've talked about this before but let's hit on it again here. Some of this has to do with the fact Isaac just made so few mistakes. It's really just that simple. In so many ways and coming off one of the very few mistakes it seems Isaac ever made, verse 13 is the epitome of Isaac's life! Simply put, Isaac did the right thing in doing the work for the work's sake. Think about that when we talk about walking in faith and the fact whatever God might have in store or is using our lives to build might be outside our lifetime. This is what I say often but so many times I don't think people really get it because maybe there isn't a good way to say it. However, living a life that will lead, yes lead to salvation, is about walking in faith for faith's sake. It's about wanting to know God because you want to know God. If it's about wanting to know God because you want salvation it's probably going nowhere. We weren't created to be saved, we were created to have faith. The fact we need salvation is something we don't deserve because we should have never needed it, and even if we had the chance Adam and Eve had, the Bible makes it clear we would have made mistakes just as bad.

We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. (Rom. 3:23) That's just a fact we have to live with for eternity. As we say, the ship has sailed; we've made our bed and now we have to lie in it. All such things are applicable but it doesn't change the fact, faith is what we were created for. Over and over again I say it in a hundred different ways but we either get that or we are lost. It should be shouted from every pulpit in every church around this world on a constant basis, but sadly it's not the focus in our day. Salvation is our focus with the hope we can somehow go on to have what we want out of our existence. The simple truth is that there is no reason for God to extend our existence past this life unless we are like Isaac who waxed great in his faith with God. We also need to do the next step the verse tells us Isaac did and that's move forward! He didn't stumble or get caught up on things that only matter to this world. He walked in faith for faith's sake until he became very great and that's speaking to being what God wanted him to be, not just in and for this world but in every way shape and form God wanted for Isaac's existence!

Until next time, Shalom!

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(Rom. 3:1-2) They can all live in great faith or they can choose not to and the nation still has value as long as they choose to follow the Law. What we see as God regathers the chosen nation to the promised land, as He said He would do in these last days before Jesus returns, is that the nation has value even if a large part of them do not even follow the Law. Even as a more secular nation God can and is using them for His purposes and in ways something like the church could not accomplish. You can believe that or not but it's all so very true and playing out before our eyes, I don't know how you couldn't!

Because the chosen nation has a reason to say there is continual value in the nation growing so the nation can survive and become more visible to the world, it should be a disgrace to say you will not take your deceased brother's wife and raise up children in his name. It should be shameful to you to be seen as a house that does not care enough about the continual existence and growth of the chosen nation to do such a thing. You may or may not care about the true things of God but the culture the Law was meant to build into the chosen nation said you were violating tradition in about the worst way one could. This is why the Law says the widow was to pull off such a man's shoe and spit in his face, and to do it in a formal setting such as Boaz had done at the gate of the city. We clearly see why spitting in his face is a humiliation, but it shouldn't be hard to see how the entire idea a woman was allowed to do such a thing as taking a man's shoe should have been a humiliation as well. Even in our world today a lot of people know what is being said when talking about a woman being kept "barefoot and pregnant." The saying is meant to denote, she doesn't need shoes because she isn't going anywhere like her husband is in a large way because it's her job to stay at home giving her husband more children. Especially if this was true it's all the more reason a man does need to be industrious. He needs to get up in the morning, get dressed, and get out into the world to support his family. This means he needs his shoes, both of his shoes!

Taking a shoe was perfect because while it was a humiliation it was not truly harmful but was physically painful in a temporary way. The man would have to hobble his way home wearing only one shoe or take his remaining shoe off and walk home in his bare feet. How painful this was depended on how much the man was used to walking in his bare feet. Another factor is that, shoes have almost always been a status symbol in society. One of the reasons this is true is that traditionally having shoes has been expensive! Today we may or may not have access to cheaper goods which include shoes, but the more money you have to spend on shoes says something about the money you have and thus, something about your success, status, etc. This is a truth easy for most everyone in the world to understand, and that's why the Law stipulates the widow gets to take one of his shoes. The man is left with one shoe as a reminder she has the other one and the woman has his shoe as evidence he refused to follow the Law of God concerning his brother's house. As we turn directly back to the story in Ruth, we see it was not Ruth who came to the gate to confront the relative of her late husband. The reason for this goes back to what we've covered over and over about there not really being any obligation to follow the Law when it came to Elimelech's house since he had left the nation before he died.

Ruth was also not a bloodborne member of the chosen nation. In our own thinking we should also consider how little the chosen nation was really following the Law at this time as that is witnessed throughout the Book of Judges! The circumstances were less than perfectly in line with God's intent for the nation, and this is where we can give the relative of Boaz a little credit. He could have made an issue out of the two facts we just covered concerning Elimelech's house and Ruth. He could have argued that redeeming the land was something he would do but he wasn't obligated to take Ruth. He did no such thing and that small fact is important to keep in mind. The man simply acquiesces to the fact he couldn't really afford to take Ruth due to personal concerns and he moves forward telling Boaz to accomplish the Law in his place. Upon stating that the man gives up his shoe in spite of Ruth not being there to take it from him and spit in his face. The Law was not followed to the letter but the traditional thoughts the Law was intended to infuse into such a situation was accomplished.

Thus, Boaz would turn to the elders along with the other witnesses and make his official declaration that he was taking on the responsibility of Elimelech's house, and that included the houses of Elimelech's two deceased sons, Chilion and Mahlon. He would take on the responsibility that only Naomi could and had been carrying between her last son's death and that moment. When it came to the land and possessions of the family Boaz could take it all and move it forward. However, when it came to children, Chilion's name was lost because his widow had not done what Ruth had in coming to this land and joining the chosen nation. So Boaz declares all he is able to declare, and that's the truth he would take Ruth as his wife to raise up children who would inherit all he was taking in three men's names. Now, when we just read the records of the family, Mahlon's name is not one that really comes to mind because Ruth is from then on looked at as the wife of Boaz and the bearer of his children. However, this is God's blessing on Boaz for being the man of faith he was. The Law's intent was created by God's Words and if God wanted the future records to give the credit to Boaz, that's how it should be!

The elders and people there witnessing Boaz's declaration all responded that yes, they were witnesses; they agreed what was being done was right and true. In a far more happy tone of tradition the blessing on Boaz and Ruth was proclaimed here and it solidifies all I've said about God's Laws and His way of forming this nation being tradition to the people of the chosen nation. They proclaim the blessing that Ruth would be unto Boaz as Rachel and Leah had been unto Jacob (Israel) in building his house which was truly the foundation of the chosen nation. Along with that is the blessing that they would, as we might put it today, be worthy of and make the community they were a part of proud to call them members. Very specifically they would convey the blessing that what Boaz and Ruth became would be "famous" in Bethlehem, and how true did that turn out to be? Christians and others sing every year at Christmas about how angels came to Bethlehem to declare the birth of the most important man to ever be born on this earth. That man was born to parents who came from Boaz and Ruth's direct family line. What amazing things God works out through the people who truly serve him! Being in the direct family lineage of The Messiah was a blessing any member

of the chosen nation who cared about the ways of God could only dream of. Who would have believed a Moabite woman such as Ruth would share in that blessing!

The blessing on Boaz and Ruth proclaimed by the elders and witnesses that day is also interesting at its end when they make mention of Pharez being the son of Tamar and Judah. In some ways this brings us full circle to what I said in the introduction to the Book of Ruth about the book's importance in that it showed how God used a Moabite woman within the direct line of The Messiah. God always has been so much more about who has faith not just who is of the right human bloodline. Ruth was a woman of faith who loved God's ways so much she joined the chosen nation and in doing so God used her in a very special way! That's what makes it interesting the blessing the people are declaring includes mention of a person much further back in the nation who was also used to form the line of The Messiah. Of course, most people wouldn't know who Pharez was without it being at least pointed out to them, but we all know who Judah is when talking about the sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel. In short, Pharez is important because he's the son of Judah through whose family line The Messiah would come, but coupled with that is the way this son was born. It's really one of those most intriguing stories in all the early history of the chosen nation.

The person the blessing mentions who is of most interest is Tamar who is Pharez's mother. Tamar is a lot like Ruth in that she was not part of the bloodline of the chosen nation. That said, Tamar is so early on the only wives we know who could be considered part of the chosen nation and/or it's bloodline were Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. All four of these woman came from the original family roots of Abraham in Mesopotamia, but Jacob's sons had to get their wives from somewhere, and we find that exactly where they got them from was not as restricted as it was for Isaac and Jacob. Isaac wasn't even suppose to go back to Mesopotamia to get a wife so Abraham sends his servant to find and bring back Rebekah. Getting a wife from there was still important at the time of Jacob and Esau which we see in the fact Esau took a wife from among the Canaanites and it greatly displeased his father and mother. (Gen. 26:34-35) By Judah's generation we find the genetic markers were set well enough they could take wives of other people besides the original family in Mesopotamia and that's exactly what Judah did. We are told in Genesis 38 that Judah goes out and finds a Canaanite woman to take as his wife and her name was Shuah. She would give Judah three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. As was often the custom in those days, at some point Judah chose a wife for his first-born son Er. From the story it seems clear that Er was old enough to have a wife and we'll hit that detail here in a second.

The wife Judah chose for Er was Tamar, and while we know little to nothing about her, that tells us something. If Tamar had been the daughter of one of Judah's brothers surely that information would have been given, but it's not. Thus, it's more than reasonable to believe Tamar was like Judah's wife, a Canaanite woman. The problem was, in spite of being the generation which would truly start to build the chosen nation,

Er was a wicked man in the sight of God. He was so wicked God killed him. This is an example of something God would likely not have done if a man was the same kind of wickedness but of a different nation. God was protecting the chosen nation from the beginning (from people who were wicked) and this kind of extra scrutiny by God should have been expected of the family, at least early on. In any case Judah is seen following, by tradition or his own decision making, the same practice prescribed by the Law which we talked about above. Judah tells his next oldest son Onan to go in to Tamar and raise up children in his brother's name. Onan would go in to Tamar but when the moment came he would not go through with what was necessary for her to conceive. Onan did this because he specifically did not want to have a child in his brother's name. He'd been better served not to go in to Tamar in the first place because God would take his life for doing what he did!

Judah instructs Tamar to remain unmarried and go back to live with her family until Shelah was old enough to take her as his wife. The indication was that Judah would get a chance to perhaps raise him better than Er and Onan had been. Tamar would follow these instructions to the letter, and in time Shelah did grow up but Judah never sent for Tamar to be joined with him. Judah's wife would also pass away solidifying the fact Judah would have no more sons by her. Tamar was seemingly forgotten, but one day Judah came back to the region where he married his wife and Tamar is told about it. She casts off the symbols of being a widow and instead dresses up with a veil and nice clothing. She would sit in a place along the way she knew Judah would come and surely with his wife's death he would be lonely enough to "notice her." That Judah did and he physically joined with her thinking she was a harlot. Before she allowed him to she asked what he would pay her with and Judah promised her a young goat. Tamar wouldn't act on a promise alone and asked Judah to back it up by giving her his signet (likely a ring), bracelets, and staff. Judah would later send the young goat to pay her and get back his stuff but there was no harlot known to be in that area. About three months would pass and Judah would find out Tamar was pregnant. Because he believed she had violated what he told her, he commanded she be burned alive!

When he went to carry out this punishment on his daughter-in-law she told him the man who owned the signet, bracelets, and staff she showed him was the man whose child she carried. Judah immediately recognized the items as his and was forced to admit Tamar had been more righteous than he had been because he had lied to her in saying she would be married to Shelah one day. Tamar would carry what turned out to be twins to term and give birth. Pharez's brother would poke his hand out first and be marked by the nurse as being "the oldest" but Pharez would actually be the first out and as such, the true first born. Out of Tamar and Judah's actions would come a founding member of the tribe of Judah and the son in the direct bloodline of The Messiah! (Matt. 1:1-16)

Let's stay in God's Word!

