

Free - Take One



Shaqah

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*“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*

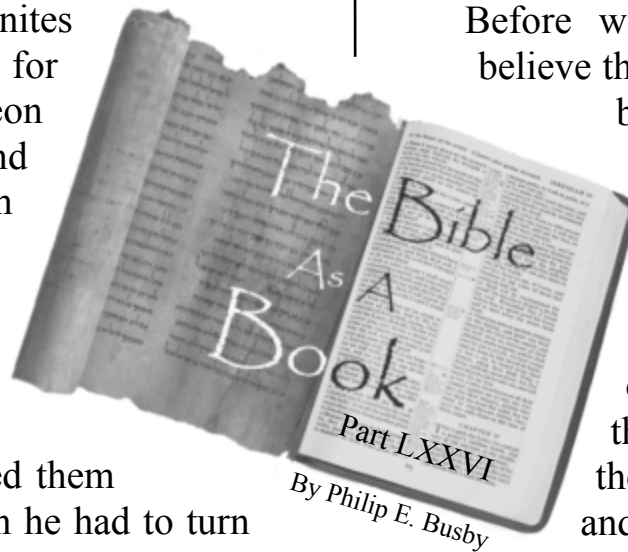
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As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, last time we covered the bulk of Gideon's work as a judge of Israel. We covered how he went forward against the Midianites with just 300 men and set them on the run. This resulted in battles taking place in various locations in Israel as the Midianites attempted to flee for home. As we saw Gideon pursuing them and calling for help from others in Israel we find he had to diplomatically handle some who were prideful and upset he had not called them in the first place. Then he had to turn around and deal with the fact others in Israel would not even help by providing food for his army. After the defeat of the Midianites we covered the fact the men wanted Gideon to become their king and begin a dynasty with his sons. Gideon wisely refused. However, he went home and set himself up much like a tribal king might be and the people left off going to the tabernacle, instead coming to Gideon for counsel and guidance. In the end of last segment we

covered Gideon's death and the fact what he had done resulted in Israel following yet another false religion which is what would lead to their need for yet another judge. All that brought us through Judges chapter 8, and we are ready to begin chapter 9 this time.



Before we start into chapter 9 I believe this would be a good time to bring a little chronological information into our overview. As talked about, Judges is the book which takes us from Israel living under the original system God set up through the Law to the time they would demand a king and finally be given one by God. As we touched on last

time, this is an important transition for the nation, because finally having an official national government would be huge in terms of seeing a shift from the perfection God intended to show the world through the chosen nation to God working through a human king. It is this transition that is so often overlooked and forgotten when we are studying the Bible. This has ramifications all the way from how we should see the Law

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to understanding the words and events of the New Testament. Saying that makes me want to go into an entire writing to explain in more detail how this is so true but it would require a whole other series of teaching to do such a thing. I also touch on this subject often in my writings which I hope has helped everyone get at least a fundamental grasp of the ways it effects how we should see what God wants to do versus what He is able to accomplish through humans who are constantly a stiffnecked people.

What we see after Gideon had led Israel to victory over the Midianites is how strong the desire for a king was in Israel. The people totally ignored the fact the Torah showed them in black and white God did not give them a king. (I Sam. 8:1-10) However, God had admitted He would start the nation in order to show His perfect will but knew in time the people would not accept the arrangement of not having a king. At the core of this truth is a violation of the tenth commandment out of what we call the Ten Commandments. (Ex. 20:17) The people coveted over the fact other nations had kings. (Deut. 17:14) Exactly what God said would happen, happened for exactly the reason He had warned it would happen. Israel, as a national group of people, did not want to prove God's perfect will. They wanted what other nations had and no doubt felt there was more than enough arguments to back the idea they were correct in thinking this way. The nation, in their minds, believed they had followed what God set out for them and it didn't seem to be working. Over and over the nation would be invaded by outside forces that would "take advantage" of the fact they had no king to

fear or at the very least who could lead Israel into battle to stop such invasions!

What I think even we often lose track of, which is proof we would fail in the same exact way for the same exact reason, is the fact this setup could have worked. Israel could have lived without a king. Even in the time they were complaining about being invaded over and over and needing men like Gideon to rise up and lead them, it was working. To some that might sound crazy. I've even seen Bible commentaries that will make the remark or something to the effect that Israel needed a king. No, Israel did not need a king! What they needed was to behave themselves and actually follow the Law! I repeat, at the time of the judges the system God put in place which did not give the nation a king was working. God was watching over the nation and He was/is more than able to fight their battles for them. Even through the use of judges we see God was The One Who saved the nation. That was made perfectly clear in the story of Gideon. For years the nation quaked in fear of the Midianites until they had robbed Israel of just about everything. Then along comes this guy who in the end faces the grasshopper in number Midianite army using only 300 men. Suddenly a nation that could do nothing to protect itself from these Midianites routed their entire army, killing their princes and kings!

This tells us one of only two things can be true. Either God gave Israel the victory they could not have won without Him or they were capable of accomplishing this all on their own this whole time. No matter which was the case, to God be the glory! God either delivered them flat out by

His own power or He was the catalyst for Israel overcoming their fear of the Midianites and getting the job done. So what's the truth? The truth is a mixture of both! In this battle against an enemy who was great if by no other measure but by the size of their army alone, Israel lost almost no men. The blood that flowed was that of the Midianites. If Israel could have defeated the Midianites with so little loss without the hand of God upon them, well I don't know how badly to say that speaks of them not knowing they could have taken care of Midian the first day they showed up on the horizon. If they were that fearful only God could have stirred them to battle and the courage to do the job. If it was not purely about courage and they needed God's help to do this with so little loss, then we see God gave them that help. The point is we don't look at things from the right perspective. If Israel needed God to do this, they were very blessed He was there and willing to help. If Israel did not need God's help to do this, they were very blessed He was there to show them they could do it. If they couldn't have done it with so few casualties, they were blessed God was there to give them nothing but those few. If they could have done it on their own with so few casualties, they were very blessed God was there to spur them forward when He did or who knows how far down the Midianites would have taken Israel before they tried it on their own and maybe found it was no longer true!

We can come at it from many different angles and God still receives the credit. So let's get the point some writers of

Bible commentaries and certainly many writers of history believe I'm skirting by saying all that. They would argue, if Israel had had a king he would have led them into battle and showed the nation what they could have done. To that I simply say, you're missing the real point behind covering all of what I just said. Israel had a King! The difference is that He was not an earthly king. Israel's King was God Himself and we just talked about what He did to save the nation! Of course, one could still ask the question, if God was their King in the way a human would have been their king why did He wait so long to save them, especially since He could have saved them flat out without them lifting a finger? I'm glad you asked because the answer is actually where I want to go with this. Remember what I said earlier about how humans think they have a good argument for Israel needing a king on the basis they kept getting invaded over and over? We need to get clear and stay clear at all moments in our thought pattern as to why Israel got invaded in the first place. The enemies came because God allowed them to come!

People are greedy, so you know they couldn't just sit back and watch Israel live their lives on a land so fertile and rich without wanting to take at least some part of it or what it produced. Any time Israel was not actively on the march there were people who desired to attack Israel and take something from them, if not totally rule over the nation, but they didn't. Gideon did not take the throne as king and yet Israel had peace for 40 years after the battle was

won. Other judges took actions that were far less visible on a power and strength scale of things others would fear, and Israel still enjoyed peace for a great deal of time after they took the actions God led them to take. The point is, God was protecting the nation until they fell into sin and turned from Him to the point He felt the only way to get their attention was to lift His hand of protection. God knew this would cause them to cry out for His help, and it worked. Now, before you go off thinking the times of peace were nothing more than a normal course of ebb and flow in human events and/or the fact others still feared a judge until their death, let's get to the real point. Every time Israel suffered something bad and cried for help, God helped them!

It takes some pretty large arrogance to believe that could be said of any human king. One can dream that such a thing is possible, but if you want a king as other nations have kings you need to study your history a little and see how that works out for other nations. Israel of all nations had the example that with God on their side there wasn't a single king in Canaan they were not able to defeat. They didn't just come to Canaan to make some noise or carve out for themselves some small niche of land to live on. Israel came to take the entire land of Canaan; a land far too big for their initial size to use, and yet they took it! The other point of fact is that for all the great kings one might find in history, those who did seemly bring victory and prosperity to their nation at every turn, that is a short-lived thing. Human kings live and die. Some kings do good the whole time; some do good part of the time; some start bad and become good while others start

good and turn bad. One way or the other, the king dies and what will their successor do? There are no guarantees that any dynasty or system of choosing leaders is going to do good, especially all the time, in caring about the real needs of the people.

There are just a whole lot of questions to ask yourself, but if God is your King, this all goes away. He knows what we have need of before we even need it. Maybe more importantly He knows what we have need of even when we could never have figured out what we needed! To that add the fact it's not possible for Him to make a mistake and fail, nor will He ever pass away, and the fact you have a King unlike no other nation has a king becomes a blessing not a curse! No matter what you believe about God allowing bad things to happen to Israel at times, you can't legitimately deny He allowed it in the first place; He didn't just step in later on when it came to His attention they needed help. Even if that is your argument all it means is they should have called upon Him sooner rather than later. There's just no way to wiggle out of the argument God being Israel's King was working even without a human figurehead. We can say that with assurance today more than at the time Israel demanded a king, because all one has to do is go forward studying the history of Israel after they had an earthly king and you'll see they did not improve. In fact, they eventually did so bad that the nation split into two and both eventually fell. They would have fallen sooner than they did if it had all been left in the hands of those human kings, and Judah certainly would have never come back after something as drastic as the Babylonian captivity!

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we continued the story of Abraham's servant being in Mesopotamia to seek a wife for Isaac. In that part we covered only two verses because covering those two verses led us into a conversation about how the Word of God is set up in a way that allows It to be translated into different languages and still carry Its meaning into those languages. This, of course, only happens to its fullest when a translation is done with care for making sure the words are brought into the new language without interpretation. The fact too many so called translations are full of a great deal of interpretation instead of true translation has caused a lot of damage. In spite of that there are many things in God's Word that still leave main points intact. God has done so much to help each of us as individuals find and follow His ways there is no way to cover them all, but we can constantly see God's hand at work not just in the stories the Bible tells us but in the very way the Bible is constructed. What is certainly true is that no man could ever have written these words on their own! All that brought us through Genesis chapter 24 verse 30, and we are ready to begin in verse 31 this time.

Of course, with the introductory paragraph I began with this time we did not refresh where we are in the story itself. The part of the story we covered last time was the introduction of Rebekah's brother Laban and the fact he had not just heard his sister's words but seen the gifts Abraham's servant had given her. To repeat something I said

last time, Rebekah had not met the man of her dreams at the well. This because Isaac is not the one who came, but Abraham's servant! In spite of that fact the height of Laban's curiosity about this servant had to have some to do with the fact his sister acted as if she had met the man of her dreams. All this was orchestrated by The Holy Ghost, and before we move on with the story this is something we all need to understand. In this story we see The Holy Ghost working and moving upon men just as we see today and we will continue to see His work throughout this story. I'll admit it's true that in the custom of the day the idea of parents arranging a marriage was common if not totally the norm. What was also true is that as much as these marriages might leave out the feelings of the man, it almost always was done without consideration for the feelings of the female. Thus, we see many stories about women being given or offered as nothing more than part of a business dealing. Daughters were also given as rewards for valiant acts in battle; offered by the commander or even kings. We see that in stories such as David killing Goliath and Othniel taking Kirjath-sepher. (I Sam. 17:25, Josh. 15:16-17)

In this story we should see both the similarities as well as the contrast of these kinds of facts. It was true this marriage would be arranged in part because Abraham did not send Isaac himself. However, the contrast is that Rebekah was given a choice, as we will talk about deeper into the story.

Thus, Isaac is more of the one going into this marriage blind so to speak. That said, Rebekah did not meet Isaac until the choice had been made. What all this shows us is that while this marriage would not come about on the basis that Rebekah and Isaac met, fell in love and so forth, it certainly was not a total arranged marriage and/or one where the woman was simply given away! So how should we see this union we are watching come about? The answer to that is what I said about The Holy Ghost leading the way. Even on the representative level this servant represents The Holy Ghost as Abraham represents God The Father and Isaac God the Son. What this servant had said and done brought excitement to Rebekah's heart in spite of not meeting Isaac directly. That excitement was contagious which is why we see Laban immediately go out to the well to also meet this man! All this is showing both representation of Who God is as well as how He works.

The man representing The Holy Ghost has gone to prepare the bride for the man who represents God The Son. At the same time The Holy Ghost is literally bringing the right two people together (Isaac and Rebekah) needed to form the chosen nation. This truth shown to us so early on in God's Word is why Jesus told us it was necessary He go from this earth so The Holy Ghost could be sent. Jesus didn't say that because His physical work on this earth had opened a door which before that time had not been opened for The Holy Ghost to come. Jesus was letting us know that as long as He was here doing a physical work in the form of a man, He was, for lack of a better way to say it, inhibiting The Holy Ghost from doing the work He had always done here! This is important to understand, not just because it

does not often get taught, acknowledged, or thought about, but because many people do not know and/or have been taught that the coming of The Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost post Jesus ascension was His first real "coming" to this earth. I put coming in quotation marks there because many will acknowledge The Holy Ghost has been involved with human affairs at some level in the Old Testament but there is still this idea that it was not in the same ways or desires He has worked since the coming of The Messiah, and that's wrong.

I'll admit the speaking in tongues part was/is new to our time, but again that's not really because Jesus opened something new for us. The truth of the matter is that Jesus helped us grasp an understanding that made it possible. What is often forgotten, at least in a meaningful way, is that on that day of Pentecost when The Holy Ghost descended and we see the speaking in tongues come about, there was first the sound of a rushing mighty wind. Then there also appeared cloven tongues of fire on each of those who were filled. (Acts 2) In the Old Testament God's presence led the children of Israel through the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. What we are essentially talking about on all these occasions is God showing Himself through what one might call atmospheric manifestations. When Jesus came He was Emmanuel, meaning God with us. (Matt. 1:23) However, this loses something in our minds, if not the translation and/or understanding of the words in the original language itself! God is always and always has been a God Who has been with us, never left us, nor forsaken us. That's why I vehemently reject what people say when they believe something such as the sinner's

prayer is the first prayer God hears a person say. If God was not constantly with us on some level, none of us could be saved!

To qualify that statement let me point out that typical Christian doctrine itself teaches us it was necessary for Jesus to come and die for our sins in order to save us. Well, no matter how much technically the way that doctrine and people take that thought is right in its entirety is not important at the moment. It's an admission that God had to come and be with us on some level for us to be saved. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us! (Rom. 5:8) Every action God has taken from coming to Adam and Eve after they had taken of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, to Noah finding grace in the eyes of The Lord, to confounding our language at the Tower of Babel, to, need I go on? All these acts scream to us how much God is with us long before we pay attention to Him on so many levels it's impossible to know them all. Thus, when we say Jesus was "God with us," it is to say He was literally walking like we walk, living in the physical manner we live. This is what people want right? God showing Himself in some form they can see, touch, and feel. That was Jesus in all the ways even those who would not seek God in truth were able to do! Think about that. The only effort one had to put forth to tangibly contact God was to be physically within His proximity. This is what the woman with the issue of blood understood. She said, if I can just touch the hem of His garment, and when she did, was healed! (Matt. 9:20-22) However, who had the greater understanding of God, that woman or the Roman centurion who knew all Jesus had to do was will that his child be healed and it

happened? (Matt. 8:5-13)

The Holy Ghost has made His presence among us known in physical tangible ways but just not in human form. Pharaoh and his army were physically blocked as The Holy Ghost stood as a barrier between them and the children of Israel who were passing through the Red Sea. (Ex. 14) The fact Pharaoh, or at least his army, ran in after Israel just as soon as The Holy Ghost no longer stood in their way tells us Pharaoh didn't wait just because he was afraid for awhile of what stood in his way. No, Pharaoh literally could not get through! The Holy Ghost would appear for years of travel through the wilderness in this pillar form. Again, not God like us but God with us nonetheless. So I pose to you a question. If one is attempting to ascertain if there really is a God, by which form would you be more impressed; fire, wind, cloud or a man walking as any other man? God has done so much to convince us He is with us and we still fight it, deny it, and don't say we don't! Even now we are discussing the truth The Holy Ghost caused the church to speak in tongues in Acts chapter 2. Not an Old Testament thing but a New Testament thing. In spite of that truth far more churches/denominations believe tongues have ceased than those who believe they are still for us today!

Let me add to that the fact a vast majority of the churches which claim to believe in speaking in tongues don't allow the real thing to exist in their churches. Thus, in shorthand here are the facts. First, it is untrue that speaking in tongues was not possible prior to Jesus coming to this earth.

That point in and of itself is a big subject to teach on but the shorthand of just that is to say, if one understands the reason speaking in tongues is seen after Christ's coming, one can see why it wasn't something used prior to Christ's coming. Speaking in tongues is the evidence one has been baptized in The Holy Ghost. This is just like water baptism shows us in physical representation, and what is that one might ask? Water baptism represents the fact we have chosen, in our lives, to follow in Christ's footsteps. If we follow Him in life we also follow Him in death. If we follow Him in death, we follow Him in resurrection! (Rom. 6:8, Heb. 11:6) This is the hope the true believer holds and works to follow the right path to get to the right destination. The door has been freely opened by God but that doesn't mean it takes no effort to get off your seat and walk to and through the door! Jesus made clear to us once and for all how personal and up close our faith (relationship with God) is. We either get it or we don't at this point!

If that is clear in our mind we should also understand that just as we can be baptized in water to represent the choice we have made to live for God, we can seek to be baptized in The Holy Ghost. That is to say, literally in-filled with God's Spirit. Not just God among us, or God with us, but God in us! Was that not always possible? Yes, it was always possible. In Him (God) we live and breathe and have our very being or existence. (Acts 17:22-31) That's not just true now that Christ has appeared it's how we are told man became a living soul! (Gen. 2:7) Jesus said I go to prepare a place for you that where I am you may be also but I won't leave you alone. No, it's necessary I go so The Holy Ghost can return to give the opportunity in the here and now I do not

offer you. (John 14:1-3, 16:6-16) Jesus was physically among us, but because The Holy Ghost is spirit, He can literally be in us! This is why Paul so appropriately uses the representation God gave us in the Law to speak of this point. He said, don't you know your body is the "temple" of The Holy Ghost. (I Cor. 6:19-20) When we read about the temple in Jerusalem we find times when God's presence was very much there. The most obvious times were when the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the temple and God's presence drove the priest out because It was so strong. (I Kin. 8:1-11) Then there were times it was clear the temple could physically be there but God's presence was not, other than in the same way God is everywhere. Was this because God didn't want to be there? No, it was all determined by Israel's physical actions in obeying/following the Law. Was the nation a place that prepared to have God's presence among them? Was the priesthood accomplishing what they were told to accomplish in maintaining the things of the Law at the temple? Was the king desiring God to lead him?

It took a lot to maintain the temple as a place, not where God wanted to be, but where He could be! The Law represents to us the truth of what it means to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. Fear that we have let the world take us from our relationship with God; constant vigilance is needed to be sure we are not taking our faith for granted; not thinking, because we say we are a Christian, we are actually walking as Christ walked; living as He lived. We can be baptized in water but if our commitment to living with Christ slips away we still will not die with Him. We can be baptized in The Holy Ghost but if we are not committed to

What About God's Chosen People?

Part I

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

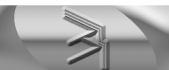
"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."

In our last segment, we began talking about the way the Romans saw the people who lived to the north of them and how their religions would not mix well with what the Greeks had given the empires. Through the Greeks the world got a very streamlined version of the Baal worship developed at the Tower of Babel. The problem was that it was a very prosperity version that carried the ideas of gods blessing you for doing good (or at least leaving you alone) too far for people of other lands to accept. The Romans had enjoyed a great deal of comfort and prosperity so it was easy to worship gods who were all about such things. On the flip side those to the north of the empire lived in harsh weather that did not allow for many luxuries, and when survival is what you struggle for your gods don't seem to be so generous. These kinds of cultural conflicts are what halted what had been seen as "human progress" during the empires and brought in an age many describe as dark. However, if we look at history one might be tempted to say the Romans were not truly Hellenistic by the time Rome began to crumble because they had become Christian. This point is what we actually ended last segment talking about. To understand why the future events of what largely seemed to be a world religiously dominated by Christianity did not go so well for the Jews, we need to see how even by Rome's end it was not true Christianity we are

seeing.

To get started this time it seems necessary to backtrack a bit on what we began talking about by the end of last segment, and that's the fact true Christianity leaves a void in the lives of pagans. This is not a reality but something many people felt and still feel today when they are led away from the formal religion of Christianity to attempt a real walk of faith. To understand this a little better I should point out humans were not created with any kind of instinct or emotion that would draw them to want ceremony to feel safe. There was no such need, of course, because man had access to the Tree of Life. There would be no death so what was there to feel safe from? This goes down to everyday living in a real way when we stop to think about the fact the ground was not yet cursed so food grew in plenty and even animals were not a threat to humans. Animals did not become any kind of threat to human life until after permission was given for man to eat them post the flood of Noah's day. (Gen. 9:1-3) Thus, man was safe in more ways than we can appreciate today. However, that all changed once man took of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God had said it would bring death and it did. Man would not have understood what true death was if he could have sustained his physical form indefinitely, so God took man away from the Tree of Life. (Gen. 3:22-24)

Even that was not enough to get man to understand the seriousness of his decision to



take the knowledge for himself, so God also cursed the ground and added pain to childbirth. Man was no longer safe and he needed to get that point and fast! Even in a world where people lived hundreds of years life could not afford to be lived ignoring God. Such a life would one day go out into eternity without God, and God was not willing that happen to anyone simply due to blindness to the plight sinful man faced. Thus, we see God takes many actions to guard people from this, but that's why I find it so important that we see what really happened at the Tower of Babel. By the time the flood had taken place and man began to populate once again, the understanding humanity was no longer safe was greatly understood! This was a good thing. Unfortunately, it was good in a way many people are totally oblivious to in our day, not the least of which are those who call themselves Christians. This is why it's obvious to those who know the Bible that we truly live in the days of Noah once again. The fact man always seems to work his way around to forgetting the danger he's in is why we are told they were marrying and giving in marriage right up to the day Noah entered the ark. (Matt. 24:36-39) They thought Noah was a crazy man and they were perfectly safe going on with their lives as if nothing was going to happen.

The problem is not that man wants to be safe but that he seeks to find that safety without God. Of course, there is no real ability to go on to a better place upon death if we don't want God in our lives, but in spite of all God has done, man has found ways to give himself that secure feeling. That's all it is, a feeling, but that's enough for most people on most days. The "most days" is important to our conversation here because that's the point. There are a lot of people who can't hold

onto that feeling without something to keep propping them up. You'll have to forgive me for sounding harsh but there really is no other way to say this. People look to religion for that prop. Even a great number of people claiming to be Christians are doing nothing more than this when they go to church and/or do the things the church lays out or makes it seem are requirements for their salvation. In the church we see people of all different levels and the church attempts to accommodate this entire spectrum. This is why we see the serious church goes right alongside those who simply show up on Sunday morning to fulfill a religious requirement. We also have those who don't even come every week, and this goes all the way to those who feel it's only important to go on days such as Easter Sunday and maybe a couple others.

As I said, there is no way for this not to sound judgmental and harsh but let me point out I'm not judging any one individual or group, and maybe more importantly I should say this is not about putting everyone in a definable basket. Just the opposite is true. Many who go to church regularly are very sincere people and there are those all across the spectrum who do what they do for a number of reasons. So none of this is to judge anyone, it's just to make a point many Christians do not like to hear and/or don't understand is true. Simply put, the church is structured to accommodate what any religion attempts to accommodate. In fact, the Christian church almost accommodates it better than any other religion and that is seen the clearest when we look at what the Catholics wanted to do. As we've talked about before, the very name Catholic means universal and so we see they were attempting to be the universal church. What is more

important to understand is that because they believed all people should be Christians they were actually built to be the universal religion. The problem with this is that since the Tower of Babel there has been no way to make a universal religion. Add to that the fact we talked about last time, which is that living in faith is not about a religion, and you have a real problem! How do you even use a religion to show people how to follow and live something that is by its nature not a religion? The answer is that it's certainly not universally possible!

That's not to say a religion might not work to lead certain people to God but that's something Paul was covering in Romans 3:1-8 when he talked about unrighteousness working for God. If people find Christ through wrong means does that make their faith untrue? Of course not, but what we should understand is that the very fact this is true is because living for God is not a religion. You don't fail to be right with God because you didn't learn the proper procedures, ceremonies, etc. Learning to live right and striving to know God is not a ceremony, a formula, a doctrine - it's a way of life! All that said I'm sure there are plenty of Christians who would totally say they get that fact, but do we really? It's one thing to say it, it's another to live it. The question you need to ask yourself is, if I was left without a church to go to how would I feel? That is a question many would not really know the answer to until it happened to them, but I can tell you from my experience as a minister, it bothers people very much! Of course, one feels more vulnerable without others to lean on. It can feel very alone not to have others to fellowship with but that's not the full package of what bothers most people. The

truth shows up in a day like we live in now where so many churches have gotten so liberal the difference between them and the world is marginal at best. Still I have witnessed people, who believed very strict standards of living, not be able to find a church to go to that teaches what they believe, and almost without exception I have watched those people give in and begin attending churches they never would have considered before due to the church's liberal teachings and low standards.

We can argue all day about who is right and who is wrong when it comes to strict versus liberal and any number of other factors concerning what to teach and how to walk. However, that's not the point. The point is, the people I'm talking about truly believed it was a matter of heaven or hell to live the way they believed a Christian should live. To give in and attend a church that not only fails to teach those standards but in truth teaches why they are not necessary should be totally out of the question. I say that with even more emphasis if you're taking your children there! Even if you as an adult would never give up the way you hold to be true, will your children do the same? While on that point one also has to ask, if you are not going to meld into the church you're attending by dropping to their standards, what's the point in even you going, much less exposing your children to it? When I have had conversations with such people and asked them why they do what they do and go where they go, I get answers like, "It's nice to be associated," "I just can't live without a church home," and many such things along that line all the way up/down to, "You have to go somewhere!"

That last one really makes my point

here. The idea that an individual or a family, even a small group of people can't live for God without a church home is the point. I understand many would say they don't feel it's necessary but it's a good thing to the extent that if there is a Christian church of some kind to go to, you should be going there and supporting it if you claim to be a Christian. Again, I repeat there is no way to make my point without sounding harsh, but to be blunt, that is an incorrect way to think as a Christian. Why? Because it's a religious way of thinking! By thinking this way you are putting the religion of Christianity ahead of your faith! By being more concerned you need a church than you are about if that church can be or is helpful to your walk with God, you are thinking religiously not Biblical. I could write much more on this subject, but in an attempt to bring this all back to where I wanted to get us to as it relates to the way the Romans are looked at as Christian by the end of the empire's history, we have to look at why going to church is so important to people. The answer lies in what I said early on about security. Religion is designed to make people feel secure, and when people do not have a church to lean on they don't just feel lonely they feel insecure. The troubling thing about this is the fact we are not talking about pagans who want to make it into their particular version of "heaven." We are talking about people who claim to serve, follow, and have a relationship with The God Who created all things. If having that isn't enough, then nothing ever will be!

Now, I say all that to say this once more, the religion of Christianity, like it or not, was/is designed in the same way pagan religions are designed. That design is based on bringing the security the people after the

flood wanted without truly having to seek God for themselves. It's focused on not feeling like you're Noah; you don't have to go at it alone or just with your family. You're not Abraham who could go into a strange land, live among pagans and still exemplify what it is to walk in faith. You're not Job who could sit in the dust scrapping the boils/scabs from his skin having lost everything including his health and say to others who condemn you for falling to such a state, "God Himself can kill me and I'll still trust in Him!" (Job 13:15) The list goes on and on but when we look at the people of faith the Bible tells us about, we should not be impressed simply at what they accomplished in their walk with God but in how they accomplished it. Even Moses who led the children of Israel out of Egypt to receive the Law of God and become God's chosen nation to work through on this earth, very often felt alone. For all the stipulations the Law brought, for all the people that surrounded Moses, he often felt he was like a single parent caring for children, yet his faith was unbelievable. In Moses we have what might be the most candid look at a man's faith the Bible tells us about.

None of these people did what they did because they had religion. They didn't make it to be used of God because they attended the right church or had fellowship with the right people. Their stories don't tell us of individuals who knew God in a religious way at all but as those who had a true personal walk. Do we not realize that's what God wants of all of us? If you can have help and encouragement take it. If you can have fellowship with others of faith be thankful for it, but if you find yourself all alone remember the very basis of what you are suppose to be as a believer in God. That truth means you

are never alone! What we should be very careful about is that the ability to have fellowship does not take that truth from us. Sadly, for far more people than I can count, that is exactly what going to church has done. People who claim to be Christians do not maintain their faith by church, they often lose it to the false security a religion is meant to give. We crave that security more than we crave God Himself, and why have so many fallen into this trap? Because even in the time before those apostles who physically walked with Jesus on this earth went on to glory, the spirit of antichrist was already at work. (I Jn. 2:18) The beast in Revelation that had the appearance of a lamb but spoke with the voice of a dragon was already rising. (Rev. 13:11) Antichrist is not an individual nor will it ever be; it's a truth of man's religious thinking. It is that which has a form of godliness but denies the power of God. (II Tim. 3:5) The power that made men like Job, Abraham, Moses, Elijah and many more, able to stand on their own because they were never alone!

This is what John was warning us about. A religion that called itself Christian but was designed after the way man forms all religion. It was done to make people feel comfortable and secure. It was a religion that those who taught true faith above all did not offer nor could they offer it because the just shall live by faith not by religion of any kind. (Rom. 1:17) It actually did not begin with those who were called Catholic of later centuries. It began right after the Gospel went out and began to make a difference in the world. People saw a power in true Christianity, in people with real faith, and they wanted to bottle it, brand it, market it. It was fresh, new, inviting, and like the sorcerer who wanted the apostles' power to help people receive The Holy Ghost, people wish

to buy it. (Acts 8:5-25) There were also many who saw the handwriting on the wall, so to speak. In the early days of Christianity, Christians were seen as a huge threat to the established religion of the Romans. One can't appreciate this as much as one should unless we see how much of the authority men of power from Nimrod forward derived their power to rule from the gods! The Jewish religious leadership saw Jesus as a threat because Jesus came unto His own and He was God. (John 1:11) On the other side, the gentiles did not immediately see this "threat." This is why Pilate did not see anything wrong in what Jesus had done or was. However, Pilate was totally willing to dispose of Jesus rather than protect Him once he took Jesus out before the thronging crowd who called for Barabbas and told Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Later, like the silversmith in Acts chapter 19, the gentiles would quickly see Jesus as a threat as well. It wasn't that Jesus still walked physically among them, it was that this simple carpenter's message caused a real change in people's lives. It caused them not to want the religious items the silversmith made his living crafting. They changed habits of all kinds, like no longer going to the temples of the gods to bring offerings. The entire religious system was under direct assault by the Gospel message and the gentile culture at large would never be the same! This had to be stopped, but how? The answer eventually became apparent; no force on earth could stop it! Thus, they took a different road. If you can't beat them, join them. The problem was if you don't want a relationship with God there is no way to join true Christians. This is what John was talking about when he said, we know they were not of us or they would have stayed with us. (I Jn. 2:19) He didn't say that to a church like we

have now where the main concern is that we don't teach anything that might offend someone or scare them off; a church that feels the right thing is to make themselves as appealing to the world as possible in order to keep people in the pews. No, John said this to a church who believed if you couldn't stand the heat of the true presence of God then you have no choice but to leave the kitchen!

And so those who couldn't or wouldn't stand to walk in true faith went out from the church to form a religion of their own. It didn't happen all at once. It didn't happen as one large group. It was the spirit of antichrist working all throughout the world. As the true church grew and spread there were always such people who would go out from the church to form their own religion, branded as Christianity. Unlike so many pagan religions it would have the appearance of a lamb; it would have a form of godliness; but it would always deny true faith because it had no true desire for God. It was this we see rise in the time of the Romans, and it's why by the time we get to the fall of the empire many can say the empire had become a "Christian empire." However, there was nothing truly of Christ in it. The empire went from being one that threw Christians into the Roman Colosseum for sport to watch as they were eaten by lions to being one where the emperor himself claimed to be a Christian. From one that flayed the skin off true believers and tortured them in many unspeakable ways, to one that almost demanded everyone proclaim Christianity. The Christian religion became the opportunity the devil had waited for since the Tower of Babel. It had potential to be the new universal religion but there was one major threat to that, and if you can't guess what it was, you haven't been paying attention. It was

God's chosen nation!

The Book of Revelation lays it out for us. It says the woman (Israel) brought forth a man child (The Messiah) and the dragon was just waiting to devour Him. However, the child was caught up to God and His throne and the woman fled into the wilderness. So we see the dragon did not succeed nor did the war in heaven go well for him as he was cast to the earth. (Rev. 12) We hear proclaimed the fact God had truly won but the dragon would go after those on the earth who lived for God. These true believers would not overcome the dragon as a group but as individuals who continued to proclaim the Gospel and how it changed their lives. They would do this in spite of the fact the dragon would pick off every one of them he could. They were lovers of God rather than lovers of this world, and if proclaiming the truth of God cost them their lives, then they died for all the right reasons! However, the woman who had brought forth the child also did not cease to be a threat to the dragon. She was a powerful symbol of God's work on this earth. Picking off a true believer here and there was something the dragon gladly did but he couldn't allow the world to think highly of the woman. Thus, he began to persecute her hoping it would only be a matter of time until the world would help him totally destroy her. However, once again, Satan's plans were thwarted. The woman was given great wings to fly away into hiding. This is the part of the Jewish history we have been covering. Israel as a nation on their own land would fall making the chosen nation less visible but by no means did this end the nation!

The dragon understood this better than anyone so he sends out a flood to kill her.

This begins to get into the part of history we have not yet made it to. You see, the nation being scattered meant they were not concentrated in any one place for Satan to devastate them. He would have to use something far more broad in its destruction; something that could go out across the world and flush them out to be killed. The beast that had the appearance of a lamb would play no small part in this effort, and it's why we see what calls itself the Christian church riddled with a history of anti-semitism. Sadly, even today much of what attracts Christians to support Jews and the nation of Israel is driven by self interest. This is why we see the words of God to Abraham used so much when the subject comes up. (Gen. 12:3) It is believed there is a magical formula in those words about those who bless Israel will be blessed. The fact there is little in this world that actually loves the things of God is why Revelation does not say the church rose up to defend the chosen nation or that "good people" of some sort did. It says when this flood took place the "earth" helped the woman. (Rev. 12:16) The flood the dragon sent out was not just destructive to the chosen nation, it cared not who else got in its way. Satan has plenty of humans who will do his bidding whether gladly or unwittingly, but he by no means has humanity eating out of the palm of his hand. The world had something to gain by putting a stop to this flood and so the world responded to swallow up the flood. It began as a war to end all wars that didn't turn out to end anything, which the world figured out when "World War II" began. This is when the flood's intent became more obvious in what history calls the Holocaust!

The end of Revelation chapter 12 leaves us with a picture of the day we now live. The dragon was very angry and did not

give up his attempt to destroy the things of God on this earth. War truly did not decide who was right, only who was left. So the battle rages on between the dragon and both those who live under God's Law as well as those who hold the testimony of The Messiah! Again, it does not refer to the church but individuals and the chosen nation. It is the "remnant" of the woman's seed, both the natural branches as well as those grafted in; the children by blood and the children by adoption. (Rom. 11) Whatever is still left of God's people the dragon will fight to the end to wipe out and The Holy Ghost Who now is with us does as Jesus did, He allows this to continue. However, one day The Holy Ghost and Jesus will once again trade roles of working in/on this earth. When that day comes the dragon is the one who will be destroyed and the truth of Who Jesus is will be plainly seen by this world, like it or not. (John 16, II Thes. 2:1-10) What will also be clearly seen is what is righteous and what is wicked. It is in this state of clarity we will enter the time of Satan being locked away in the bottomless pit for a thousand years as Jesus reigns on this earth as King! (Rev. 20)

All this is jumping ahead from where I intended to go in this segment but it flows so well to give a picture of where we have been and where we are as well as where we are headed, I couldn't resist. What we want to see in the history we are studying is how the Roman Empire did not really become Christian but the epitome of the religion that calls itself Christian. It would and until the return of Christ will be difficult to find and see the true church from in among the beast that looks like a lamb in appearance only. As I stated before, this did not begin with what we call the Catholic church today and know from the history of the middle ages. It began

before the fall of the Roman Empire and before the Roman Empire came to be known as a Christian Empire. It may sound confusing and it may be hard to see but that's because Satan seeks to deceive all of us in the same way he had deceived the religious leader of the chosen nation. Knowing the truth can be hard but we must seek to be children of God and not of some religion. If we do that we will not have so much of the trouble we see the Jewish religious leaders have in John chapter 8. At one point Jesus tells them plainly that their trouble was that they were not the children of God as they should be but they had become the children of Satan. They had become that because, unlike their earthly father Abraham, they listened to Satan so much and sought their own glory so much, they could not understand Jesus' words much less be glad He was among them. That chapter ends with the religious leaders being so angry at Jesus they lost their minds for a time and would have killed Jesus right there if He had not slipped away from them.

I say it over and over, what God did through the chosen nation is not show us a people who failed and were rejected by God; a people who would be replaced by the church. What we are shown is an example of what Satan attempts to do in this world. Satan does not care so much about the people that do not want God in their lives. He can, as it suits him, give them simple pleasures to keep them locked away from God. Where the real threat comes in for Satan and his desires, lay in those who serve God. This is what we see in the words of Satan in the opening dialog of the Book of Job. It was Satan's insinuation that God should just give up on humanity as a failed experiment. His argument was that

no human truly served God any longer. To this God asks Satan if he has considered Job, and Satan's counter to that was the idea Job was an anomaly which only existed because God blessed him. The base of Satan's argument was that Job was no different than any of the people Satan had easily gotten to fall away from God. God allowed Job to go through his tremendous trial not to show Satan he was wrong but more so to show all of us Satan is wrong!

What many who claim to teach Christianity today will tell you in a nutshell is that if you serve God He will bless you. Some even go so far as to say He's obligated to do so. The church is organized more so in our day than ever before to make this appear to be true in every way it can. However, God made it clear that true believers in Him do not serve Him because He blesses them. Thus, they will serve God even in the midst of what clearly seems to be a life of tribulation. They will do so because they understand God is everything and this life is nothing in comparison to true faith. So the question is not if you can or can not find a church; an acceptable church; or even a good church to go to at all. The question is, does your faith give you the security to know you're right with God or are you looking to men, ceremony, a religion, etc. for that assurance?

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. 8

maintaining the temple, The Spirit cannot stay in us. It's always our choice and how well we maintain it on an on going basis and how much we don't, is totally in our hands. Since the days of the Old Testament we've seen the fire, wind, and cloud, but there is nothing more personal to an individual's life than to yield to the Spirit of God to such an extent we allow Him to use a physical part of us for His glory! Experiencing what it's like to allow God to take control of the most unruly piece of our body (our tongue) to the extent we speak words we don't even know, well that's something that cannot be explained in words. However, I repeat it is a most personal experience with God, and that's why John told us the one who came after him (Jesus) would not simply baptize us with water. He would not just give us a means to an end such as going on to a better place. In the here and now Jesus wanted to show us how to open ourselves to God's Spirit, allowing Him to set us on fire with God's presence like few to none have ever experienced in this world! (Luke 3:16)

The real question is, do we get what God wants? Sadly far too many want to go to heaven or some better place. They want to know physical death is not the end, but the only reason for it not to be the end is to be with God. Without Him there is no point in living on and on. With Him it matters not if we live here or in the place Jesus went to prepare for us. God wants to be among us, with us, and in us. He wants a close and intimate relationship like you can experience with no human. He is our Creator, the breath of life within us; not just on some religious go to church level but on a real every day, moment by moment way! God wants it, that much He has made

obvious beyond belief. Even coming in the flesh and shedding blood to convince us. So it's up to us and always has been. That's why we see in Rebekah a woman who knew God. We are not privy to details of her faith but it shows as obvious in the story we are covering here. She was so excited to meet this man who wanted to take her on in God's will to a place she had never known before. She runs back to her family and her excitement got her brother so excited he wastes no time getting to the well to see this servant of Abraham's for himself! This is the work of The Holy Ghost. No matter what surrounds us, it's exciting to our personal lives, to live with God!

As we actually move on in the story and look at verse 31 we see what Laban had to say to the servant. He doesn't say, "Hi how are you?" "What's your name?" "I'm Laban, the brother of the girl you just met" or any such normal conversational things. Laban totally trusts his sister's account and emotions that this man is someone they should welcome into their home. In a phrase that confirms Laban's enthusiasm for taking this man in, Laban tells the servant to come into the house. In fact, Laban asks the servant why he just stood there instead of following Rebekah in the first place. This sort of language is not meant to be totally literal as in the man should have taken Rebekah's word for it that he was welcome but to emphasis just how welcome he really was! Again, all this shows excitement and the amazing part for the servant had to be the fact God had not just answered his prayer by revealing the right woman to him, God had already prepared this entire family to receive him! One can argue that he represented long lost family, so to speak, or at least a connection to Abraham, but it's

more than that. Let's not forget the gifts this servant gave Rebekah and the fact it is specified Laban saw them too. The excitement and welcoming the servant received is almost that of people who have long anticipated this very occurrence. This is the kind of out in front of us work God can do and which we know The Holy Ghost brings about.

In verse 32 we see the servant come into the house and receive what one would expect from people who had said what they had said and generally welcomed someone with such open arms. No small part of this is the fact there was room and supplies to take care of his camels just as Rebekah said they could be. However, there is another fact that shows up at the end of the verse which we have not been told before. When it says the man got water to wash his feet, there was also water to wash the feet of the men who were with him! There were men with him? When we are told of the preparations the servant made to take this trip it is specified he took ten camels, but it doesn't even mention there were other servants taken much less how many there were. Even in this verse we are not told a number but only that there were men with him from which we can extrapolate there was more than one. After this these other servants of Abraham are mentioned a couple more times, but never are we told anything more detailed than the fact they came on this journey with Abraham's head servant. Why are they not mentioned prior to this point in the story but spoke of as being there here and after? The answer to that goes back to the way God's Word is beautifully put together and the fact I've been hitting on as a main point of the

story which is the representation of the Trinity.

In order to emphasize this head servant was more than a leader of a group who divvied out tasks to subordinates, we see him on this journey all by himself. Even now it is not emphasized that these men are here; they're barely mentioned. This because, we are meant to get the point this servant was doing the work not just heading an expedition. We are meant to see him as the sole individual responsible for carrying out the task he had been given by Abraham. We get the clear picture not just of how he represents The Holy Ghost here but also how The Holy Ghost operates. God wants us to be clear He still is and always has been, shall we say, hands on, in human affairs. There again lies another misconception not given by the Old Testament but amazingly interpreted or argued by many who claim to know and teach God's Word. It's the basis, or at least a piece of it, for why it's so easy for people to go all the way to thinking The God of the Old Testament is somehow very different if not a totally different God than what we see in the New! Holding onto that thought let me pose the question some may be wondering about which is, do these other servants represent something in this story? The answer is yes, and it's why they are left so nondescript. These men represent what people often think of as being the work of God in the Old Testament but believe we see so little of in the New. These men represent God's angels.

In essence we call angels, angels because it's a way of calling them what is represented to us here in this story. They are

simply servants of God. In a very unheralded way they do the work of God. Thus, there are only a couple reasons we think of angels as so predominate in the Old Testament more so than the New. First, we don't have a long history recorded for us for our time. Thus, the many times angels have worked among us are not in black and white to read as many are in the Hebrew Bible. Second, there are times we interpret some incidents of seeing God at work and assume we are seeing angels. Examples are when the men came to Abraham to tell him he would have a son about a year from that time. (Gen. 18) These men are often assumed to be angels and that's mostly right because the ones that go on to Sodom and Gomorrah to lead Lot and his family to safety are angels. However, one man stayed and talked to Abraham. Who was that man? That was God. From what we now know about the nature of God I believe it's pretty clear it was Jesus because Jesus is the part of the Trinity that the physical part of us is a mirror of. This truth is why Jesus is The One Who came and physically walked with us as a man. This is why it's a bit easier for people to accept the idea that when Daniel's three friends were thrown into the fiery furnace and three men become four as the king looks in to see what became of them, that fourth man was Jesus. (Dan. 3)

Now, one who has never thought about this before might ask, if Jesus worked on this earth before the time of His birth through Mary in the New Testament, why was that event such a big deal? The answer is given to us in John 1:14. There we are told Jesus was the "only begotten" of The Father. The word begotten is a good one in English if we understand its definition, for it means, "brought into existence as if by a parent."

This word means more than the word "born." As we fight in our day about the issue of killing children while still in their mother's womb (abortion) and shake our heads at the fact such a thing is accepted for any reason, we see this difference. Children in the womb are not born as yet. However, they are begotten! They did not exist until actions were taken that put the right elements together for a new individual life to begin. From conception on the only way you can argue the child is not yet an individual is the argument they are dependent on their mother in a greater way than they will be after they are born. However, this is nothing more than the truth of offspring. The normal course of all physical life is that offspring become less and less dependent on their parents as they grow. Conception is the moment a child is begotten and as such the moment their life begins!

John also says Jesus was begotten by The Father. He was brought into existence by The Father, and the angel tells Mary in Luke 1:31 that Jesus would be conceived in her womb. I like to point out conception by man's will does not take place in the womb. Then we are told in Matthew chapter 1 that Jesus was placed in her womb by The Holy Ghost. This means Jesus' physical elements to be human were created, then The Holy Ghost physically placed Him in Mary's womb. All this is why Jesus was born of a virgin. She, as a woman, was needed to care for Jesus from that starting point of physical life until birth. Joseph would quickly be brought into the picture to give Jesus the family nucleus God intended all children to have. Getting back to the point of what John says about Jesus being the only begotten, the original word we get begotten from is why we see the word "only" used in English. The

original word for begotten comes from two roots, one which means, singular, solo, only. The other root can be used in all kinds of lateral ways. By lateral I mean all meaning the same thing but a way to describe different objects. In English we can simply say, to bring into existence, but physical things are brought into existence in different ways. For that we often use the word "create." That's a very general word in English, or it has become one. However, there's a difference between the fact God "created" the universe, meaning all that physically exists, and the fact we can create an artifact using those things in existence.

We can only assemble something that did not exist before. In the case of The Father begetting Jesus it is to say, Jesus was alone in an even greater way than Adam was before Eve! Even Adam was physically assembled from the dust of this earth which already existed. Thus, we are all part of the elements created in Genesis 1:1. Jesus, on the other hand, is not physically part of this universe. The elements He was physically conceived as were only at that time and all by themselves brought into existence by God. He was created to be physically the same exact things we are on a physical level, but this is the only time God ever did such an act. Jesus was totally unique. What all this means to our discussion is that Jesus was able to physically appear as a human before that conception just like The Holy Ghost can physically appear as fire and cloud. The big difference which we see is that the other appearances are as temporary as God wills them to be. The Holy Ghost fluently changed from a pillar of cloud during the day to a pillar of fire at night.

Jesus could physically be here appearing as a man one moment and vanish the next, not to go anywhere necessarily, but to simply not be physical as this universe is physical. Once Jesus was conceived in the way the Bible is telling us by using the word begotten He was literally locked into a physical form that would live a physical life just as we all do.

God Himself has always done the work but He will use tools, and that's what angels are. No matter how much they have ever appeared physically they were/are not God and never what Jesus became in being born as a man. The other servants of Abraham's house that came with this head servant are the representation of that. They are tools for the head servant to use as he chooses. They are unnamed and unnumbered because it is not important we know. They also go unmentioned for a great deal of the story so we do not lose focus of the fact this head servant was the individual doing the work only he could do just as The Holy Ghost does work among men only He can do. Angels can, have been, and will be used of God on this earth, but just as these men they are tools God uses in His work. This is why we are told by both angels themselves as well as by instruction from God that we should not worship them but God alone. (Rev. 19:10, Col. 2:18)

Until next time, Shalom!

All that said and argued, Israel wanted Gideon to be their king, and when he refused it didn't deter them from continuing to want and seek it. That's a perfect segue back to our verse by verse overview especially considering what happens next, but I promised some chronological perspective here and that has to do with the subject of a king in Israel as well. It's always hard to fit in these chronological notes and I have not interrupted the overview to do so, but maybe that's for the best. Maybe by now we can look back on some of what we've covered in the overview and have a better grasp of what is happening overall than if a simple mention of things had been made as they passed during each story. At this point two things are important to keep in mind. First, we have seen the cycle many times of Israel sinning, being oppressed by an enemy, Israel crying to God, and God sending them a judge to lead them back to freedom and peace. Second, Israel is getting closer and closer to the time they will be given a king. Are we midway at this point? That depends on how you look at it. If you want to count chapters, we are very close. If you want to count judges, we're there. Gideon was number 6 and there are 14 judges including Samuel. If you want to talk about more detailed stories of what the judges did, I'd say we are well past halfway. Most of the judges that are left we get very little of their story and a whole lot of just a couple more.

Chronologically speaking it is also hard to say. If you go back to our overview of this book you'll remember the discussion about how much time the book covers

depends on what you want to say is its beginning. If you include the overlapping with Joshua information given at the first you come up with a lot longer time period than if you start at the first stories about an actual judge and go to the last judge the book covers (which is not Samuel because his story does not start until I Samuel). If you do that, we are about two-thirds of the way through by the time we get to the end of Gideon's life. What all this means in connection with what I've spent most of this segment talking about is that we are getting close enough to the close of the time of the judges that events pertaining to the first kings are chronologically overlapping judges by this point. The first event of great interest is the fact during the time of the judges there was a great famine in the land of Israel. We are not given details about this but it no doubt had a lot to do with the same sinfulness which caused Israel to suffer the oppression of enemies we see the judges delivering them from. God had promised Israel that if they followed His Law they not only would stay on their land but it would prosper. In turn, it only stands to reason that if they turned from God and headed toward a point when God would remove them from the land, long before that the land would stop prospering and things such as famines would take place.

This is what happens after the judge Ehud had died, Israel had once again turned from God and Jabin the king of Canaan was oppressing Israel. This also makes perfect sense from the standpoint that outside enemies would not be as drawn to have a land that wasn't doing so well, maybe even clearly on its way to an all out famine, but an internal enemy would still have motive

to rise up. There was no more internal force than that of a Canaanite people who had not only survived to rise again but have a full governmental setup including a king. I don't mean to suggest this was a large people or the government anything fancy, only that they were well organized Canaanites with a leader. Other remaining remnant Canaanites on the land might have also come to join this king, especially as he rose to great enough power to possibly take back the land from Israel! In any case, a land headed for famine, or in one, would not be part of their question of attack Israel or leave them alone, unless they saw it as making Israel just that much more of an easy target. That would surely add to their motive to act, and one way or the other they attacked. However, it would seem the all-out famine did not take place until some point within the 20 years Jabin was oppressing Israel before the judges Deborah and Barak rose up to put the Canaanites back in their place.

Now what's important about this famine and how do we know one happened at all? The answer is that it was within this framework the story in the book we'll cover next takes place, and that's the Book of Ruth. We are told right at the first of the book that there was a famine in Israel during the time of the judges. This famine is what spurred a man from Bethlehem named Elimelech to leave the land in search of better conditions. This led him, his wife, and their two sons to Moab. While there, Elimelech would die leaving his wife Naomi and two sons on their own. The two sons would take wives from the daughters of Moab. One was named Orpah and the other

Ruth. Some years passed and the two sons also died. This leaves their mother Naomi with no family other than the two daughters-in-law. Naomi had heard rumors that crops were improving in Israel and no doubt the last thing she wished to do was die in Moab as well, so she packed up to go home. Her two daughters-in-law follow her in this, but as they are leaving Naomi tells them they should go back among their own people much as she was doing by returning to Israel. This they did not want to do but Naomi insists that she could give them no hope of a life. She likely would be dependent on family back home and, of course, she was too old to bear more sons that could take them as wives. On top of that, they should think of how old they would be by then. Thus, she wants them to go back where they could find family that might care for them and give them a future.

For Orpah this is the logical thing to do, and so she kisses Naomi goodbye and heads for home. However, Ruth would have nothing to do with leaving Naomi. She was determined that wherever Naomi went that's where she wanted to be, and whatever came of Naomi that was the future she wanted to share in. In a beautiful statement that shows how much Ruth deserved to become a part of the chosen nation and the piece of history she became, Ruth even specifies that the God Naomi served she wanted as her God. (Ruth 1:16) So Naomi and Ruth would go to Bethlehem. The people there would recognize Naomi but she would warn them about how badly it had all went; attributing it to God having turned His hand against her. Oh, if only she

could have known how all things work together for good for those who love The Lord and are called according to His purpose! (Rom. 8:28) Ruth would desire to go out to the field of one of Naomi's late husband's relatives in order to glean for food. She hoped the man would not cast her out being family, and it was suppose to be the law in Israel that gleaning of crops was to be allowed by the poor. (Lev. 19:9-10) Naomi would agree it was a good idea, and to make a long story short it turned out to be a great idea!

The owner of the field was a man named Boaz and he would very much so favor Ruth. Naomi would guide Ruth in the customs of Israel and basically offering herself to him as the next of kin to the husband she had lost. Naomi had apparently also made it clear to Boaz that her husband's land would need to be sold. Boaz would go to the city gate and consult with the elders to find out if the relative that was more appropriately in line to buy the land would do so before someone not of the family or even not of Israel did. This the man was willing to do, but raising up children in your brother's name by marrying his wife if he died without a son was also part of God's Law. (Lev. 25:25, Num. 27:6-11, Deut. 25:5-10) When Boaz told him it also came with the obligation to take Ruth in order to do this, the man felt that was not a challenge he could afford to take on. In a show of how serious Boaz was about wanting to take Ruth he makes sure all the witnesses are in place and the custom was fulfilled to solidify the man was passing on his rights to both the land and Ruth to him. Boaz would marry Ruth and The Lord would quickly give her the blessing of conceiving a child

with Boaz. She would give birth to a son and her joy would be more for Naomi than for herself because after all they had went through and suffered, the family would live on after all!

Why is all this important? Because Naomi's neighbors would give this child a name. They would call him Obed and he was born just around the time Barak and Deborah were sent by God to free Israel from the Canaanite king. Obed would be the father of Jesse and, of course, Jesse is the man Samuel is sent to after the first king in Israel failed to serve God. Why was he sent? To anoint the next king of Israel! That wouldn't be Jesse but one of his sons whose name was David. Now, as I just pointed out David would be the second king of Israel which means there was a man much older than David who would serve as king before David. That, of course, was Saul who was appointed to be king of Israel by God and anointed by Samuel. This event brought an end to the period of the judges. However, the last true judge (Samuel) would get the opportunity to anoint the second king of Israel (David) while David was still a young boy. This means just as Saul was appointed specifically by God, so too was David, and there are echoes in that story to other events in the Bible such as after Cain killed Abel and then went out from the presence of God. Adam and Eve would have a third son named Seth whom Eve said was a replacement from God for Abel. We don't know much more about Seth than that, but it wasn't until the birth of his son, named Enos, that we are told for the first time after the fall of man into sin, "...then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." Genesis 4:26

To try and line up even more chronology after what Barak and Deborah did in defeating the Canaanite king completely, Israel was free from oppression and had peace for 40 years. It was after this that Israel went astray from God once more and an enemy (Midian) oppressed Israel 7 years before God sent a prophet to make clear He was able to deliver them, but they suffered because they had done exactly what He told them not to. Then God calls Gideon to go to battle against the Midianites, and that's the story we have been covering in these last couple segments. The problem was that the man who would not be king started what became a religion to Israel, and as we ended last segment talking about the baal Israel ended up worshiping does not appear to be one of the typical false gods. At times we are told Israel turned to serve the gods of Moab, Midian and/or others, but that was not the case with this baal worship. What the name indicates is that Israel turned to worship God's Law as a god. I'll be the first to admit I believe God told Israel if they followed the Law He gave them they would be blessed, and this God would do even if their following was not done in sincere worship of Him as God. However, worshiping the Law as a god is a whole other thing!

What appears to have happened is that it was at this time the tabernacle began to be ignored in a way it had not been no matter how bad Israel had gotten before. In the people going to Gideon and, after his death this baal-berith which seemingly was worship of the very Law that gave them the tabernacle, they ironically forgot about the

tabernacle. Sounds a little like what the “church” did in building the Vatican. That aside, this would get worse in Israel as the years passed and not begin to turn around until David cared enough to bring what by then had become an almost lost Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem as part of preparations to build the temple. (II Sam. 6) If you're familiar with the stories of the Bible at all you know when Samuel was born we are told hearing from God had become rare and there was no open vision during that time; meaning no prophets or anyone who knew how to let God speak through them. (I Sam. 3:1) None of this was brought about overnight, it was a long cycle of neglect and growing forgetfulness of the true Law of God, the Torah as a whole, and the tabernacle. All this appears to have begun around the end of Gideon's life, but what also took place was God preparing for the day the next steps would be taken to bring the nation back around. The time of judges would continue but be aware, individuals whom God would use in later years began their lives during this time period. David's grandfather Obed is already a man by this time, and another figure we should be familiar with is the priest under whose care Samuel was raised at the tabernacle. His name was Eli, and he was born in Gideon's closing years. By the time Gideon passed away, Eli was likely a man old enough to be serving as a priest at the tabernacle and very much aware of the actions of the latter judges.

Let's stay in God's Word!