

What About God's Chosen People? Part XVIII



By Philip E. Busby

Question #21 - *“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 covered the specific historical events that gave us Hanukkah. In doing so, we covered a lot of history concerning the Greek empire's affairs, and those of the Jewish people. We ended last time by coming to the historical point in Jewish history where the Maccabees held the political power as well as the position of High Priest. Their standing in these positions was confirmed by the Jewish people and through them what became known as the Hasmonean Dynasty began in 141 B.C. As we come to this point of looking at history for the purpose of confirming the Jews are God's chosen nation and continue to be right up to this day, it is important we see two facts about the structure of the nation.

We will start by going back, once again, to emphasize a point in the establishment of the nation; and that point is the nation was not originally set up to have an earthly king. The fact they came to have one is something God had said they would desire; and just as God had said, the nation did continue to insist until the day came an earthly king was established over the nation. Last time, we touched on the fact that during the Greek period the Greek kings insisted on having the power to appoint or remove the High Priest in Jerusalem. Now, it doesn't take a Bible scholar to pick out the fact this was a violation of God's

Law, not just in how the Law established who should be High Priest, but the more important point that only God can truly appoint the High Priest! However, since Israel was not suppose to have a king, the High Priest was the closest thing the Law established for Israel having a central leader, in spite of the fact he was not a secular ruler. The only reason the High Priest was as much a secular leader as he was is due to the the fact he administered the laws God had already given, and these laws did include a certain amount of everyday society elements. The real truth was that it was up to the nation to follow God's Law, and come to the High Priest with matters the Law said he was to judge or receive God's instructions for.

This point should make it more clear why we see in the nation's history a time of judges after Moses and Joshua had led the nation to and into the promised land. This came about because the people, as a nation, started to slip away from God's Law. These judges were more - shall we say - proactive enforcers and/or protectors of the nation in order to carry out God's will for the nation, in spite of the people's failings. The last of these judges would be Samuel, and there is no doubt Samuel was called by God into the priesthood. (I Sam. 3:1-18) The fact Samuel was a priest and judge is very prophetic, as he would be the last judge! During Samuel's time a king would be established in Israel, and God would make it clear to Samuel the people were not rejecting Samuel, but rejecting God as their true King. If we keep this altogether in our mind, we should see how God was working within the free will of man to bring them back to His perfect plan. The simple rundown is, there was only suppose to be a High Priest, but when the people did not avail themselves of what God offered to them, judges were sent. However, judges were only temporary leadership to point the people back to the original system. This is why the judges did not run in a line of succession like a dynasty or the like, and there were even gaps of many years in between most of the judges.

When the people insisted there be a king, which would traditionally establish a father to son type setup, God did not allow them to pick who they wanted, but told them who the man would be. God would use the last judge, a priest directly called of God, to anoint this new king. The man who would be king was named Saul. He was a good man who turned out to be an example of how power can turn even the most humble person into a bad leader. When that happened, God sent Samuel to anoint a man from an entirely different family to take his place. The man Samuel would anoint was, at the time not a man, but only a boy, named David! (I Sam. 16:1-13) As you would suspect, even after God being the one Who appointed a king at all, there was still great disagreement after Saul's death over allowing David to take the throne

over all Israel, because the people expected a man from Saul's family to become king. In all this, God emphasizes again that the nation having a king was and is never truly in their hands, but only by God's command. This, as with the judges, points back to the fact God set up a system to begin with, and that system was never abandon by God no matter how much the nation might stray from it.

Our point here is, a king in Israel might be what man desires and looks to, but God is always working the original plan that individuals are responsible to come to Him through the High Priest. Thus, a king was, from a truly Biblical perspective, never more than a tool to turn the people back to the original system. This is why God used David to restore the power and territory of the nation, even in ways it never was accomplished during or shortly after the time of Joshua. Because of this, God would not grant David's wish to be the one who would build the first temple to replace the movable structure of the tabernacle. God would leave that work to David's son Solomon, and King Solomon would indeed be used of God to put the Law back to its original representational action like it had not been since probably the time of Moses!

After Solomon, the nation would divide, but the great evil of the northern kingdom was not having a separate king from the line of David, because God had ordained even this king along with the split of the nation into North and South. (I Kin. 11:26-40) The great evil was that the northern kingdom was never to have it's own religion but continue to serve God, coming to the temple in Jerusalem. It was the power hungry nature of man that feared this would lead to the nation being rejoined and the Northern king(s) losing their throne which caused them to establish and carry on a pagan religion to keep things as separated as they could. This evil is why the North, as a kingdom, was allowed to truly fall, not just in that it went into captivity before the South, but it never was reestablished. The South, or Judah, would go into captivity too, but it would return to become the chosen nation on the promised land. As it was to begin with, this would leave us with just one nation, not two, and the rebuilding of the temple along with the reestablishment of the priesthood would be the very reason the Persian king would give for sending the captive Jews home!

What we should see is, there can be an array of ways a secular leadership is handled in Israel, even to the point the secular leadership is not even one with sovereignty from a foreign power, but God still wants the same thing from His nation. God wants them to be a people who individually answer to Him, and as He makes it possible, administer the representational Laws He originally gave them. What we have seen in our look at

what transpired to bring about a new dynasty of secular power in the Hasmonean Dynasty, is simply another one of many ways secular power was held among/over the chosen nation. The real point was to get back to administering the temple. This is why Hanukkah is such an important story, and this finally brings us to those two points I started out by saying we needed to see in this time period. First, the Maccabees would hold both the secular rule in being the king, or ruler, whichever title one feels is most appropriate for what they were when you consider the empires still existed, and they would also hold the High Priest's position. In many ways this was very wrong, but in other ways it was very appropriate in light of what we just covered. Again, I point to Samuel being very prophetic, and speaking of that, makes the real point which is - the only real need was/is to have the right man for the job!

The second important point is, the Hasmonean Dynasty was established as a temporary solution to a problem Israel understood they had. Israel had come to a place where knowing who should be the High Priest was not real clear. However, what was clear was the need to go on as a nation with an identity directly connected to the Law of God. Just as we talked about the Torah itself becoming of utmost importance to the nation, this made the temple more important than ever! The fact the Jews knew this new dynasty was a temporary solution, and one only God could really bring the answer for not needing, in spite of whether your concern was about the house of Aaron as the High Priest or David's as the king, is why the people established this family as the leadership, "...until a faithful prophet should arise." These two points set the stage for The Messiah to come. The nation had acknowledged they needed to get things straightened out on the issue of who would lead them, because what they had come to be was not correct. They also acknowledged that secular leadership, as much as this may have been their point in asking God for anything, was not the real point. What their statement acknowledges they needed was a faithful prophet in either case!

It is almost as if the people were asking God to take them back to the time of the judges, because a faithful prophet might or might not be the rightful High Priest, nor of the line of David to be the rightful line God ordained to set on Israel's throne forever. However, just like a judge, such as Samuel, a faithful prophet, meaning one who was truly sent of God for the task, could not only lead the nation to and through the restoration it needed on many levels, but also be directed of God to anoint both the rightful High Priest as well as the king. While I said this set the stage for the coming of The Messiah, what it really set the eyes of the chosen nation on was looking for

exactly what they knew prophecy had told them, which was that before The Messiah, Elias would come! (Mal. 4, Matt. 11:11-15) In many ways, they were looking for another Samuel. A prophet of God with great power due to his direct relationship with and calling by God. Who eventually came along and fit this description exactly? John the Baptist!

As we go forward looking at the nation's history between that time and where we are now, we still need to cover the transition from the Greek to the Roman rule over Judea, which means the Roman time period still lay ahead of us. However, let us not forget that the establishment of what would become known as the Hasmonean Dynasty came about in 141 B.C. Jesus would be born around 5 B.C., which means there is only about 135 years or so between where we are and The Messiah, Who, of course, would be a contemporary with John the Baptist. Considering life spans were down to more what we are used to in our day, and some would argue statistically they were shorter, those of the nation who were small children at the time of this temporary dynasty's founding would not live to see the time of The Messiah. It is not likely that their children would live to see Him either, and their grandchildren would be old at best. What this means is that you have those who were adults at the time of the dynasty's founding who made this commitment to wait for a faithful prophet, and while there is always more than one generation alive at any point, in general they would be the first generation to live under these circumstances.

Their children would be the second generation and their grandchildren would be the third. The next generation that I just pointed to as being very old, at the best, would be the fourth generation. An interesting note is that Simeon and the prophetess Anna are possible members of this fourth generation. (Luke 2:22-40) However, what I want to get to here is that God said something very interesting in giving the Ten Commandments. God said, "...for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;..." Exodus 20:5 Now a point that people, even many ministers, get tripped up on when reading this is that this is not God saying the sins of the father are the responsibility of the son, grandson, etc. God makes it clear in the Law, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." Deuteronomy 24:16 (Ezek. 18:1-4) This makes it clear God holds us all responsible for our own sins. So what is God saying?

The answer is, God is telling us there is a

responsibility for knowledge that is passed on to future generations. First, God wants parents and grandparents to pass on the knowledge they have. This truth alone covers three generations, and this teaching the next generation fact was/is especially true in the chosen nation when it came to remembering the Law. This point is made more than once as Israel is coming out of Egypt and God tells them that some day their children would ask why they hold this feast or that commandment, and they were to explain to them how it was more than, just because God said so. They were to remember and tell their children the experience Israel went through that led to God setting up this feast or that commandment. This is why studying the Law is not just about first knowing the word for word of every ordinance and how it is performed, but mostly to be ever mindful of why it came to be what it is! When God created man, He placed both the male and female in the garden He had planted, and the only real commandments they were given were concerning what they should eat, and specifically the one tree they were not to eat of.

What this simply shows us is, all that God has commanded has a purpose that is connected to the way in which we have chosen to live our lives. We started out naked and free. To say this in a Biblical teaching segment would seem to many people very inappropriate, but it is the truth! It does not mean we could do whatever we wanted, but before we disobeyed God we would not be held responsible for doing things incorrectly. It is a lot like a toddler who gets away from their parent and does things their parent would never have allowed them to do, thinking nothing about it. Now, Adam and Eve were adults, but under those circumstances, people would have been either stopped by God before we could do some things, and in all cases of wrong doing we would be instructed as to what we did or were about to do that was wrong and why. This is exactly what parents are to do for their children. The difference of God doing it for all humanity is that He never slacks, slumbers, makes a mistake, etc. God is perfect and can administer our upbringing perfectly. After Adam and Eve took of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, it did not even take God coming down and telling them it would be so, for them to understand there was a whole lot more responsibility to their every step and decision. The first thing they wanted to do? Not run around naked!

They did not have the experience to understand exactly why, but they had the driving instinct to cover themselves. We lost a lot of freedom that day, not just in that we had to start wearing clothing, but because disobedience to God has consequences. We can say it demands punishment, but we may think of punishment as simply about doing the crime and doing the time. What we

often call punishment is really meant to be a way of teaching us - we, along with any others we have affected, must now live with whatever consequences our actions have brought. Being responsible for the knowledge of right and wrong as individuals requires each of us to think ahead, and getting this right demands we ask God for the answers. Due to the free will God gave us to take on this responsibility and hold it for ourselves, He no longer has the right to stop us before we do harm. This is true even when it is unlike the take of the fruit Adam was told not to take of, and we have no idea what we are about to do will cause harm! God is still there for us to seek, and allow Him to step in; but we must do the seeking, both before we act as well as after. God wants us to yield to Him so He can guide us the way He originally wanted to as best as our current circumstances allow, but we constantly get in the way. Simply put, we are responsible for what we know is wrong, but this will never change the fact that even what we do not understand is wrong will still have negative consequences! (James 4:13-17)

So, what is God telling us about our generational responsibility? He's telling us not only are we responsible to learn the lessons of our lives in order to grow in righteousness, but we are also responsible to pass on what we have learned to the next generations we are able to affect as well as reach back for the knowledge and wisdom of the past. Many people live long enough to, at the very least, affect their grandchildren; and when God says He visits these sins to the third and fourth generations, He is covering the fact that not only is it possible for some of us to affect our great-grandchildren, which would be the fourth generation, but God does not accept the excuse knowledge is legitimately lost any sooner than that! Even if you never had the ability to learn anything from your great-grandparents, grandparents, or even your parents for that matter, it does not mean you are devoid of the ability to reach out to those from such generations. This can be done not just through the idea of talking directly with people in these generations, but regardless of how much face to face time we get or how good the records are kept in writing or the like, the information is out there.

Another truth is that even wisdom that might have existed before our great-grandparents, might or might not be lost, but God also gives credit to the fact time shifts. Many of us, especially after the confounding of man's language at the Tower of Babel, live in a very different cultural surrounding than those before our great-grandparents. This is true more and more in our time. My grandparents use to use many sayings when certain things happened or subjects came up, and I always use to ask, "What does that mean?" When they felt they could not really explain the depth of the saying, they would simply

answer, "It's just an old saying." As an adult I can say I fully understand some of these "old sayings," but not always because I get the full metaphor behind it. I may understand it relates to something such as the way they farmed or manufactured their own goods, but, at best, I still only have a slight understanding of what it was like to live day by day in those ways.

Others of these old sayings I have to admit, while I may get some of what they meant on the basis of in what context they used the phrase, I never experienced the daily lifestyle they experienced in order to really grasp what the saying brought to their minds. Now, especially being a parent myself, I see how many of these sayings are experiences the next generation will be even more unable to grasp. That being said, it does not mean the knowledge they brought to me can't be handed down in some fashion through other means of explaining an experience or lesson learned. The end result is that I clearly see a degrading in my understanding of many things from my grandparents' to myself. Therefore, I cannot pass on all they knew to the next generation, no matter how much I may want to or they may want me to. This is what God was telling us. He will accept that by the fourth generation much knowledge can be lost. The information may still be available, but God gives credit to the truth too many people do not, and that is - knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom!

When the Jews were at this point in their history, where the political tides had shifted in their favor, it seemed the right thing to do was to set up and support a stable leadership until God saw fit to directly intervene and replace it with what was truly correct. Their children would live with this decision and make choices on the basis of how to handle it with a much clearer understanding of what their parents had been through to bring them to make this circumstance than their children would have. The grandchildren would have less of this advantage, but still a great deal of the "why" would remain. By the great-grandchildren, you would be coming to a generation that not only had far less of a tangible understanding as to the truth of why this decision was made, but also their view could/would be clouded by the choices made by those living between them and the events that led to it. This might cause one to conclude God waited too long to send the faithful prophet - but not so fast!

Remember that while the choice to set up this new dynasty may have in truth been the right thing to do at the time it was done, especially with the acknowledgment that it needed to be replaced by God, we have to go back to our free will. This leads us to ask the question, how much did the people do after setting this up to truly continue doing what they could to get back to the ways of God's Law?

How much did they resist the steps God made available to them to get things back on track? How much did they seek for God to send them the faithful prophet who could set it all straight, and how much did they simply pass that responsibility off on the thought, God will make it right when He chooses to? This brings us to the old prophet Simeon who had been told he would not die until he had seen God's salvation. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple and Simeon got to see Him, Simeon declares he could die at that point because he knew that what Israel had been waiting for had finally come to pass. The answer to all of Israel's problems had come!

How did he know this? Many would argue that as a nation there was a great cry on a regular basis for this answer. The problem is there are those who did it out of tradition, using vain repetition, and there are those who did it with the whole heart! (Ps. 119:2, Matt. 6:7) Simeon and Anna are examples of those not only waiting on a faithful prophet to arise, but that handful who had truly sought The Lord with their whole heart for it. However, what they were no doubt greatly worried about was that the right steps in seeking God to act had not been taken by those generations between in order to receive that faithful prophet. What was an even bigger problem was that they also understood the generational degradation of how much the seeking or even desiring a faithful prophet had faded. How was it ever going to come about without another time of terrible national destruction, when the generations before them had done so little and the generations after them understood the why even less? How could they die in peace knowing all this? The answer to all this is that if God had waited all this time, there was a reason the circumstances needed to come to where they had in order for God to do the greatest work; and now, not only the faithful prophet but God Himself was here on earth to set it all straight!

If we continue to reach out in a broad look at where history goes from here, we see that John the Baptist was not accepted as the faithful prophet that would anoint the new king. Jesus was not accepted as the rightful King the nation needed in spite of being of the line and lineage of David. John was imprisoned by the descendants of the Hasmonean Dynasty, and eventually beheaded as well. Jesus was taken by the very religious establishment designed to help the people recognize The Messiah, to the even higher secular power of the Romans, so He could be crucified. In some ways this is very fitting. The faithful prophet who could have taken the priesthood and all its responsibility off the shoulders of the family of the Maccabees, upon whom it had been thrust because the priesthood was in such great question at the time of the Greeks, was disposed of by them; and the King he was to

anoint; Who would have taken the responsibility of secular leadership to restore the true Laws of God in Israel, was disposed of by the religious authority! The result of all this was not the preservation of their power, but like the long ago northern kingdom of Israel, it eventually led to their fall!

The temple would be destroyed not long after The Messiah had ascended back to The Father, and it came about due to battling with the very Romans the Jews had turned to for help under the Greeks. Then the continual fear the Jews were and always would be a rebellious people caused more and more laws to go into effect to the point every last rabbinical school/institution would be driven from the promised land. The Jews would go into a long history of being scattered to the four winds of the earth, often driven by one persecution after another aimed against them. Eventually God would turn this around, and the persecution would one day begin to drive them back home with a passion for the promised land itself that was higher than ever before. What do we see in all this? First, a time where the Law became more important than it ever had before. Second, a time when the temple became more important than it ever had before; and third, a time where the promised land itself has become more important than ever before!

Sure, there are plenty of those among the nation who do not see all three, if even one, of these things as very important, but the Jews' undying resolve in saying, "Never Again!" to being driven back, and certainly off their land, is undeniable! The deep ache by many to see the temple once again stand in its place is the central theme of many Jewish feasts, prayers, and even political battles. These facts lead us right back around to point three, or one, depending on how you're counting, which is the seeking by many for the Laws, and thus, the Words God gave the nation so very, very long ago. This, not just among the Jews but many people who understand the consolation of Israel just can not be far off, once again!

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

