



# Shaqah

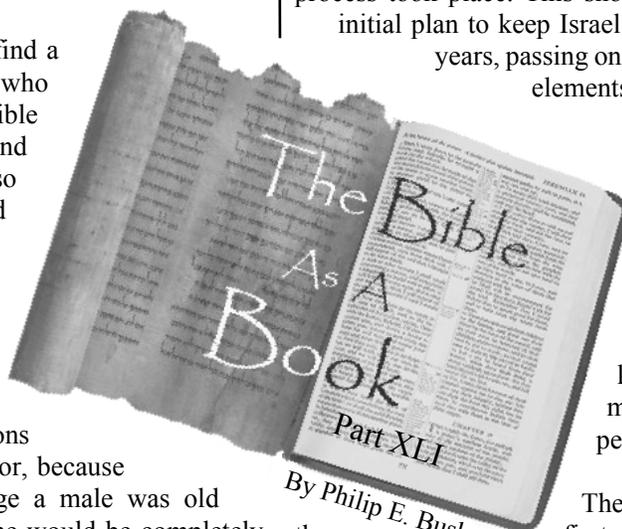
*“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”  
Colossians 2:8*

As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, we ended our last segment talking about the instructions God gave to Moses about how to dedicate the entire tribe of Levi as belonging to God. We, of course, also covered the fact, this ceremony took place because the tribe of Levi and the entire nation agreed Levi would belong to and dedicate their day by day lives to God's work, instead of the everyday kind of living others would do. This brought us through Numbers chapter 8 verse 22, and we will begin this segment with verse 23.

At the end of chapter 8 we find a final detail given by God concerning who among the Levite males were responsible to do the service of maintaining and transporting the tabernacle. This is also information that some find contradictory to the earlier instructions they were to serve from thirty years of age until the age of fifty. Here, God instructs their service is to start at age twenty-five. This is not said in contradiction to the earlier instructions about who was to actually do the labor, because these instructions tell us at what age a male was old enough to start training for the task he would be completely responsible for once he reached thirty years of age. While I'm sure males from a very young age were verbally instructed about the task ahead of them, when they reached twenty-five they would begin the process of more direct training for the specific labor they would do. God was saying one of such an age, while not being fully responsible for the task and not necessarily even allowed in direct contact with the tabernacle's items, was allowed to be in the direct presence of the process as the tabernacle was being taken down, carried, and put back up; of course, this was excluding the part only Aaron's house was to accomplish.

It also becomes clearer God is talking here more about those in the age that concerned training than He is those who would do and be responsible for the actual physical labor, as God also specifies when a man reached fifty he was to cease

doing the actual work. However, such a one was to continue to serve with his family, meaning no one really ever retired from God's service. Those who were older likely were the ones who directly introduced those who reached the age of twenty-five to the service. Having done it for so many years, they would be able to instruct the younger generations about how the various tasks were specifically performed, as well as keep those who were observing from getting in the way or violating God's instructions for how things were to be done as the process took place. This shows that while it was not God's initial plan to keep Israel in the wilderness for years and years, passing on how to maintain the tabernacle's elements, as well as moving it if and when it was necessary, was taken care of no matter how long it took the nation to get to the promised land, and/or how long after entering it such services were necessary. This would also have been good general knowledge to historically maintain even after the more permanent temple was built!



By Philip E. Busby

The next instructions take us back to the first month of the second year of Israel being freed from Egypt, for they concern Passover. This would be the first time Israel would observe Passover as a remembrance ceremony, because the year before was the literal event they were to remember. As Moses was given instructions on all the feast, so too, he was instructed on how to observe Passover year after year. Thus, the ordinances referred to here as being kept would be those in the Law, which, of course, were not the exact same instructions necessary for the actual event as it happened in Egypt. This also brought up an issue that had not come up originally. According to the Law, a person needed to be ceremonially clean in order to observe Passover because it included offering at the tabernacle. There were certain men who, due to touching a dead body, were not clean and were concerned about what to do. Moses tells them to wait while he seeks God's instructions on the matter.



God tells Moses that one who is unclean, or in the case there were those on a journey which made it physically impossible to make it back to the tabernacle on the fourteenth of the first month, should hold the Passover with all its ordinances on the fourteenth day of the second month of the year. This brings us to that same month most all the events Numbers has covered thus far took place in, and is likely why this is brought up in these verses. One way or another, there was no excuse for not observing the Passover. Whether blood born into the nation or one joined to it, if one of these reasons caused you to be unable to observe Passover in the first month, you were to keep it in the second month. If you did not have one of these reasons to wait until the second month, you were to keep it without excuse in the first month. Anyone who did not was to be separated out from the nation of Israel, and no longer considered a part of those who demonstrated the Laws of God!

The next words give us those facts again about how from the day the tabernacle was set up, God's presence appeared on the tabernacle as a cloud all through the day and as fire all through the night. The nation was completely led of God when it came to when to move the camp, where to stop, and how long to stay, as the pillar would lift from the tabernacle when it was time to move and lead them in the direction they were to travel. When they got to where they were to camp, the pillar stopped, and once again stayed on the tabernacle until it was time to move again. This was true whether it happened during the day or during the night. It also did not matter how long or how short the stay was. If it was short, they continued to pack up and travel, as God moved. If it was long, they did not worry about going anywhere, they were simply to serve The Lord as they had been instructed by the Law as if that place was home.

God also instructs Moses to make two silver trumpets, which the priests would use. These would be used in much the same way many an army of the past used a drumbeat or a bugle to direct soldiers, as these trumpets would be used to signal different things to the nation. When both trumpets simply sounded, all the people were to gather at the tabernacle. When only one trumpet sounded, the leaders over groups of thousands were to come. Then there would be a specific sounding of the trumpets known as an alarm. When this sounded once, the tribes that were to go first in line as the nation moved, which were those on the east, would begin to move. When it was time for the second group, which were those on the south, the alarm would sound again, and so on. No matter how long or short their time in the wilderness was, these trumpets were to be used throughout the nation's generations. This would certainly apply in that these trumpets were also to be used when the nation went to war. The real purpose of which was to sound the alarm at the tabernacle, or later temple, to show the nation remembered they needed to call upon God for the nation to be saved from their enemies, and God said He would respond. The sounding of these trumpets was also to celebrate before God, and, as such, were to sound on the days that were special according to the Law, including the weekly Sabbath; the first day of every month; the Sabbaths specific to the feasts; etc. They would also be blown

over burnt offerings and peace offerings as they were on the altar, as another reminder the people were calling out to God in offering such things.

It would be on the twentieth day of this second month of the second year that the first movement of the camp would take place, as on that day the cloud lifted from the tabernacle. The nation would move from Sinai to the north, into a region more on the east side of the peninsula known as Paran. The camp would move in the order God had specified, with the leaders of their tribes guiding the efforts of each. These words give us a more exact picture of this sequence after knowing what we know from the earlier instructions. When the cloud moved off the tabernacle, everyone would know it was time to begin packing up for the purpose of following the pillar of God. The priests would also begin to shut down the tabernacle's operations and cover the ark and other elements that had to be specifically prepared by them before the Kohathites could come in to carry them.

When the trumpet sounded the alarm, the first group of three tribes, who camped on the east side and were led by the standard of Judah, knew it was time for them to move forward. As Judah's group started to move, the tabernacle structure would be taken down and packed up by the Gershonites (who camped on the west side of the tabernacle and were responsible for most all the tapestries along with their related elements); then the sons of Merari (who camped on the north side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the more solid structural pieces with their related elements) could do their part. This work needed to begin, because after all of Judah's group was on the move, the alarm would sound for the second group of three tribes, which camped on the south side and were led by the standard of Reuben, to follow them. These two family groups of the tribe of Levi, along with the tabernacle elements they carried, had to be ready to follow behind this second group of three tribes as the last of them moved forward.

They would also need to be in front of the Kohathites (who camped on the south side of the tabernacle and were responsible for carrying the tabernacle elements which the priests had prepared for them), because these families would need to begin the process of setting up the tabernacle when the entire camp stopped. As the alarm was ready to sound for the third group of three tribes to move, who camped on the west side and were led by the standard of Ephraim, the Kohathites needed to be on the move and in their place in line. Lastly, the alarm would sound for the group of three tribes, who camped on the north side and were led by the standard of Dan. This would put the entire camp on the move in the order God had laid out!

As the camp prepares to move forward, Moses implores his brother-in-law (who had apparently stayed with them when Moses' father-in-law left, or he had come at another point) to go with Israel. (Ex. 18) Hobab initially tells Moses no because he intended to return to his home. However, Moses tells Hobab that he could be of great use to them in that he not only knew the wilderness Israel was traveling through,

# Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we spent our time talking about the name changes Sarah went through, as her birth name was Iscah, but then it was most likely changed by her grandfather after her father's death to that of Sarai. Finally, here in Genesis chapter 17 verse 15 God gives her the name she would be known as throughout time, and that is Sarah. While our discussion covered a lot of ground, it still ended up only covering verse 15 specifically, and that means we will begin this time in Genesis chapter 17 verse 16.

In verse 16 we, of course, are seeing a continuation of what God had to say about this name change for Sarah and what her life would ultimately mean. It is a truth we should always keep in mind while studying these verses that both Abraham and Sarah were well on in years. We often remember that Sarah was beyond the normal child bearing years. We tend to keep in mind the fact "normal" for their day and age would have been a bit older than we think of for us today. However, we should also be aware that Abraham and Sarah were way beyond that norm; and maybe more importantly, they both were well beyond what might have been considered midlife. The reason it's important to keep this in mind is that all of us find ourselves one day realizing there are more years behind us than there are in front of us. For those who have not made it to that point, trust me, your day is coming!

The point is that as God is giving all these great promises to this couple concerning what their lives would mean, they were well into this thought pattern. As we have discussed, Abraham was having a tough time wrapping his head around the idea that what they had already done was fulfilling any significant purpose; but that being said, to think they still had so much to accomplish ahead of them must have seemed daunting in light of their age. The truth of the matter is that what they had been through was already a big part of accomplishing what God wanted them to do, but what lay ahead was also a big part of the plan. What continued to surprise the couple was the fact that what lay ahead was a phase they believed should have been well behind them. They had made it to the land of promise, but they still needed to truly nurture the beginnings of God's plan for building a chosen nation on that land.

The fact we are so often too close to the circumstances of everyday life to see just how much God is accomplishing through what He is doing in and with those who seek to serve Him, is why we can become very discouraged about the thought that what we have done and/or are doing is just not any big thing. In truth, we just never know, and just like Abraham, we must keep trusting in God, diligently doing the things God has told us to do. Most of the time we never know what role we are playing in the plan of God because it is so much larger than any one of us, we just cannot take it all in! This is why

God is having this talk with Abraham. God just keeps reassuring Abraham that no matter how much his life may seem to be passing him by, God still has it in hand. This is what verse 16 is talking about when it comes to Sarah. Here, God begins to talk about why, in this late stage of life, God would change her name to denote her life would mean even more than what it already had.

As is typically the focus of this conversation, God says He is going to bless Sarah in that she would have a child of her own. However, before going too far from those first words, let's soak in the simple fact God was going to bless Sarah. Sure, her life was going to mean something in light of being Abraham's wife, for unto him was the promise made! However, God said He was going to bless Sarah specifically, and if we miss this we miss the truth of how much her role in this had an independence to it. I say that only for lack of a better way of putting it simply, not to suggest that what her life meant was independent of Abraham. It's just that when we think of marriage we often have so much trouble seeing the partnership. Many would quickly jump on the aspect that this is because women are so often unappreciated, or that the union makes two people one flesh, which is what God tells us. (Matt. 19:5) However, the inability to see clearly comes from not understanding, no matter what our argument, this still means a partnership! When we think too much along the lines of having to fight the fight because one partner is unappreciated, or that two becoming one is automatic in more ways than the physical relationship, we stumble off one side or the other of the path. We forget we are still talking about a union which takes work to get right, but is very valuable if both sides can and will play their part!

Abraham and Sarah are the focus of there being a chosen nation. While this seems obvious, we need to think about both sides here. To Abraham was given the promise; and someone such as Hagar, who had a son with Abraham, would be blessed through that promise. The same can be said of the later wife of Abraham named Keturah, and her sons. We could go on to state that this is true of all of us, as the entire world has obviously benefited from Abraham's life and what God used it for no matter if they want to believe it or not. (Gen. 12:3) However, Sarah is different. Sarah was joined to Abraham as what we might call the wife of promise! This is no small thing. It was equally important to the specific plan of God that Sarah be blessed, which also necessitated she be just like Abraham in being worthy, and in many aspects this means willing to be blessed for the purpose!

Of course, we can argue that everyone deserves to be blessed; and God has certainly blessed us all through offering us faith, which covers this all encompassing argument. We can also talk about the issue of degrees God can bless us on the

basis of how much we allow Him to use and be in our lives. However, for every purpose there has to be someone who is not just qualified but molded specifically for the task. We are all one body in Christ, but we are not all one member, and there's that union truth again. (Rom. 12:3-8) Fingers don't mean much without a hand to join them to, but a hand does not mean much without a wrist to join it to, and so on. Sarah, not just in that she was the wife of Abraham, for any woman could be that as Hagar and Keturah illustrate, was chosen for the purpose. In Abraham God had found a man through which He could work to build His plan of a chosen nation. However, just as it was not good for Adam to be alone in the beginning, in order to build this specific plan it was necessary God join Abraham to the right woman as well. (Gen. 2:18-23) A woman who was truly a partner in the purpose, and that woman was Sarah.

This is why the next words of verse 16 go directly to the fact Sarah would have the son of promise. The next words tell us something grand, at least in the human eye, but which also carries a bit of sadness to it. God says Sarah would be a mother of "nations." We could brush this off as simply being wording meant to match the fact Abraham would be the father of many nations, especially considering what I just covered, but in Sarah it is a little different because of the fact there is a partnership in which each plays their part. Abraham was going to be the father of many nations, not just in that he would be the father of the chosen nation, but have son's with different wives. One can argue Hagar was a mistake which never should have happened, but there is no argument to it being wrong for him to remarry after Sarah's death. That aside, Abraham was the emblem of the representation all true believers become adopted children of Abraham, which is also represented in the fact all the men of his house were given the symbol of the covenant, which was circumcision. (Rom. 8:12-17) When it comes to Sarah, she was unable to have children. She would give birth to one son because God specifically willed it. This would fulfill the representation that all true believers will receive new life through one specific line, and that being through Jesus Who was not born of the will of men. (John 1:6-14)

Thus, the only reason Sarah would be the Mother of more than just the chosen nation is that not all those who would follow in Isaac's family would choose God's plan for their life, or listen to God in the way they should. This is in the simple truth of things such as the path Esau chose, but the other factor relates to what God says next, which is that kings over people would come of her. When Israel demanded a king and was given one, it was not long before the nation split in two - North and South. Both kingdoms had a king who were of the line of Isaac. While God did not want this to happen in the first place, the northern kingdom did not come about because God rejected them. It was God who ordained the split to happen on the same kind of basis Jesus explains divorce was allowed in the Law of Moses, that being for the hardness of man's heart. (Matt. 19:3-9) God also shows He does not reject the northern kingdom in that He continually sends prophets to them in an attempt to get them on the right track. God even specifically overthrows certain kings to install another

dynasty, but always of the children of Israel. In this way, what God was saying here in Genesis about Sarah was prophetic of the fact Israel would have more than one dynasty and even kingdom.

Another aspect is the fact that as the northern kingdom ultimately was allowed to be taken down by the Assyrian Empire, the people of the North were scattered to a much greater extent than what was allowed to happen to the southern kingdom in the Babylonian captivity. This means people of Israel ended up all over the place in different groups, many of which held on to some kind of identity as to the fact they were strangers in the places they went. Holding onto the Law or, at the very least, certain stipulations of the Law in their lives made them strangers in many places one way or another. History shows us many people of the world attempted to isolate, if not totally destroy, these displaced Israelites from among their culture. In doing this, there were times and various ways in which Israelites became specific groups of communities, some small, some not so small, which were very autonomous from the people they lived around. This is why it was so easy in later times to simply call all those of the chosen nation "Jews," in spite of the fact this name refers in its stricter sense to those of the southern kingdom or just the tribe of Judah, while calling all others in the world "Gentiles," which more properly refers to just those peoples who lived more immediately around and in more direct contact with the nation of Israel, while on their land.

The point is, those groups of Israelites or Jews, really became independent groups with their own community leaders, many of whom were specifically religious leaders/teachers. While this is not what many of us would classify as "kings," the wording here in Genesis has a softness to it which can be interpreted as being leaders over people, not the strict definition of a ruler over a nation or land. Thus, in English we read the translation, "...kings of peoples..." There is also the truth that as people who do or have lived in virtually all places across the earth, some Jews have become government officials in various places, even what is considered the top authority in different systems of government. This, again, would not be explained as anything more than "kings" to Abraham, as in his day total monarchs were the predominate form of government - to say the least.

Remembering that God's promise included the specific words that Sarah would still have a child, it is as we move into verse 17 we see Abraham exhibiting the thought pattern I mentioned earlier in this discussion. We are told Abraham falls on his face and laughs as his thoughts were that of how incredible it would be for him to still have a child, and with Sarah. Again, the biggest part of Abraham's life seemed to him to be behind him. It is important that we note Abraham did not just mention how old Sarah was, but specifically himself as well. He certainly would have been overwhelmed to know that he would later have six more sons with another wife after Sarah's death. In any case, there are a couple main theological issues we need to cover here. One is specifically about Abraham, and the other is more about Sarah and a similar reaction she had to this same news about her and

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part XV

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 talked a lot about the Christian church and how Christians today should learn from what the Jews went through centuries ago at the time of the Greek empire. In this segment, I want to turn our focus back to the Jews directly and specifically the internal groups that developed inside the nation who fought back and forth over how to be Jews. Of course, the two main groups we talked about in previous segments were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We focus on them because they represent some very general thought patterns in the realm of religion for the Jewish people. However, there was also a secular struggle inside the nation. This, as much as any issue inside the chosen nation, can be separated from being about God's plan; and thus, considered "secular."

This secular struggle can be particularly hard to see as internal to the nation because it had to do with the struggle the rest of the empire/world was embroiled in. However, it was not about the same thing exactly. This fact is what confuses many people when looking at Daniel's prophecy. Daniel sees visions about this time period that talk about many of the things that took place during the Greek empire's reign and eventual fall. However, he sees it for the twofold reason I am driving at here. Daniel is seeing these visions in order to help the nation see what it was going to have to endure, along with an emphasis important to our question for this series, which is that they would survive! He was also seeing that the world was not going to give up its destructive and useless quest to return all men to the Tower of Babel. In many ways, this sums up all of man's time that remained and still remains on this earth. Because our desire will continue to be to obtain a world ruled by man, where God does not exist or is simply some force we can harness as a power source, our actions overall will continue to be destructive. Eventually, God will have no choice but to put an end to it all.

Now, I understand that sounds very grim, but it is the truth of the world. The good news is that individuals can ultimately escape this utter useless fall into outer darkness by turning our lives to God! That is what The Messiah was sent to show us in the most physical way possible. By God living as a man and dwelling among us as one of us, He showed us how much this really has to come down to individuals choosing God for themselves. (John 1:6-14) We must face the fact Daniel was being shown, the world as a whole is not going to do it, ever! This is why Daniel's vision was not about what God would do to judge the world as much as it was about what man would do to take us to the ultimate need for God to bring us to

judgment. It was about helping us see the fruits of the intervention God had already set up through the chosen nation's existence, along with the coming of The Messiah through that nation, and His return one day for the final stage of this turmoil as well. (The last part of which Revelation goes into more detail about.) This all shows us how it was/is necessary for the chosen nation to continue through it all in order to be there for their part in all this, no matter what other cultures and people may come and go. Daniel was concerned about the captivity, but God was showing him the nation would go on to survive much more than that!

This survival is what we are talking about. The Jews struggled because the world was awash with turmoil around them, but they did not struggle over the same things the world was fighting over. This is why I spent time last segment comparing the church to the chosen nation. The right lessons have already been shown us, and the organizations of men which call themselves the church are failing to heed them. How could something such as this replace the nation which has already been through the struggle and survived to tell about it? You see, the Jews did, in fact, struggle for the land of Israel, and this is a part of the story that has to do with looking like the rest of the world. However, this is why I've emphasized what an unusual time this was in history. While the kings of the Greek empire fought for power between one another, the world they ruled wished they'd just settle down and embrace what Greek culture had brought to the world. This is why it was so easy for the Romans to come in and simply become the world power. People who wanted to just live in peace eventually came to look to the rising power of Roman more and more in the hopes of putting an end to the seemingly endless struggle these Greek kings were having with each other. As we go forward in the history we will see this was even true of the Jews, but, again, not with the same intent in mind.

Many of the people who wanted to see the war between the Greek kings come to an end did not care so much to regain their sovereignty. Their interest was more in the line of wanting peace and security. Even for those people(s) who did hope to regain total sovereignty, the motives were different from the Jews. How? For the Jews it goes back to an attitude we see even before the Babylonian captivity, and it shows us something very interesting about how capable God is at using our failings to accomplish His will at and in those times when we refuse to follow the path He wants us to. The main thing that brought down the wrath of the Babylonians on Judah was the continual insistence that in spite of what God had told the kings of Judah through His prophets, they believed it was "God's will" the nation be sovereign. This is something we have covered in this study, and the rebellion of Judah against

Babylon is what ultimately cause the Babylonians to come in and destroy Jerusalem and the temple.

On the other side of the captivity, in the time of the Greeks, this attitude would be used in favor of the Jews instead of against them, "...for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." Ecclesiastes 3:17 The Babylonians were content with power, and they had it. All Judah had to do was allow them to be the secular ruler and focus on the ways of God, allowing God to take care of the details of problems that might arise. Taking direct action against the Babylonians when they stepped out of line is exactly what we see God doing, and this is most prominently recorded in the book of Daniel as well. On the other hand, at the time of the Greeks, there was a cultural war going on for the heart and soul - if you will - of the Jews as a people. While cultures all around them were willingly laying down their arms in this fight, this was no time for the Jews to sit back and be at ease. This goes directly to the truth we are told in I Thessalonians 5 that when people say peace and safety, sudden destruction is imminent. Many debate whether the Jews should ever have rose up in physical war in and/or at the times they did, but I don't see how we can dispute that the uprising due to the Greek's eventual attempt to outlaw the Laws of God was a time to rise up if there ever was one!

However, before we get into that directly, let's look again at the religious struggle of the Jews and how it was connected but not exactly like the world's struggle. The religious fight was mainly between those who wanted to use the Greek way, which was becoming the commonly accepted and highly regarded way for men to think, not as a way to totally cast aside the Law of God (I say this with the knowledge of the fact losing the Law of God is where this path would have eventually led, but that is another discussion I feel we've already covered pretty well.), but as a guide for how to make it more compatible with the rest of the world. The Sadducees, who believed they had the right to make these changes, no doubt considered themselves to be the great intellectual thinkers among the Jews. As I've said before, there was good and bad intentions on all sides as there always is going to be among any group of men, but those who believed in taking on the Greek way of doing things thought they had found a path to - dare I say it - "Win the world to the Law!"

Well, maybe they didn't see it as saving the world, but, at the very least, they saw it as a way to solidify all Jews, especially those who had already come to think in more Hellenistic terms, as well as make their ways more compatible with the world at large. In any case, before Christians go off judging the Sadducees as wrong and part of the reason God "rejected" the Jews, they should stop to consider how familiar this thinking sounds. We often believe the right way to keep people in the church is to tailor the message to the world in which we live, and that is not our choice to make today any more than it was the Sadducees' back then! That being said, we should also understand the Pharisees were not far behind this in their thinking, they just went at it a bit differently. While the Pharisees did not believe in turning their backs on the spiritual in favor of a more humanistic approach, they still believed they

were an authority that had the right to tailor make the message. Because they did not reject the spiritual, they stayed closer to the real intent of the Law than did the Sadducees. However, their adherence to Jewish customs over the true Law was a very blinding experience, as most all religion can be, and it was this factor that caused even them to reject, and feel they had the right to reject, The Messiah!

The interesting thing in all this is that individual literacy of the Law itself might have been greater and grew more during this time than in most all others. In talking about how odd this might seem to some, considering the Law was meant to lead people to God and the Greek period would seem to be a time of great danger for the existence of the chosen nation, let's look at the facts Biblical history shows us. When we look back at Israel post-Moses, and even Joshua, one would think the nation would have been more knowledgeable of the Law, considering they were not far removed from those days Israel had lived it in a more pure form than any other time. This because the nation had literally traveled and camped with the tabernacle at the center of their existence day and night. God was guiding them to the land of promise in the physical appearance of a pillar of cloud and fire. People had been instructed directly by Moses and Joshua. How could it go so wrong so fast?

First off, while there was a more solid daily practice of the Law that happened during the journey, they were just at the beginning of a very long journey as a nation; and the real problem is, life gets in the way! Maybe it's more appropriate to say, the life we as humans choose to live gets in the way. There is ample evidence that during the wilderness journey Israel worried far too much about their ability to survive, and this means they did not concern themselves nearly enough with learning the specific words of the Law. As Israel got to the land and settled in, they quickly started to neglect going to the tabernacle and even learning the ceremonies of the Law, much less the direct words for themselves. The tabernacle even fell into disrepair and was all but forgotten at times. Without going to the tabernacle as they should have, individual knowledge of the Law started to decline very quickly, and I believe this was more serious than most of us appreciate!

As Israel suffered the consequences God had already warned these kinds of actions would bring, God sent judges to help Israel at those times when they desperately needed to, and in order to get Israel to open their eyes to the fact they should not neglect what God had given them. When one stops to really consider this, you begin to see the time of the Babylonian captivity and the Greeks may not have been the most dangerous times for the nation losing their identity and disappearing into the people of the world. Often complacency and neglect are far greater enemies than any outside influence can be! This, in no small part, has to do with the fact it's not just about one generation surviving a time of strife. Personal knowledge of the Law was/is vital for those that follow. In talking about maintaining freedom, a United States president reminded Americans that, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected,

and handed on for them to do the same.” Ronald Reagan

This was/is true of the Law, and fighting is not always about physical combat nor even arguing with one another about doctrine. Fighting is also about pushing back against everyday pressures that take time away from us learning about God's ways and handing the knowledge on! Parents of the chosen nation did not pass on the experiences of the wilderness journey in the bloodstream. They did not pass on the general knowledge of the Law that way either. While being of Jewish blood was important, being the chosen nation was more than having a group of people who could say they were born into it. The ways of God must be important enough to put great effort into remembering and teaching them to the next generation so they can teach the next, and so on. The fact people are most easily compelled to do this when the information is historical facts of their people is why God committed His words to a nation in which God's Laws were made exactly that. (Rom. 3:1-2) However, the fact man is still bad to forget and/or distort history is why God wrote down the Law, originally putting its most basic precepts in stone! (Ex. 24:12)

Those books we call the Torah contain the stories of the creation of the world all the way through Israel's development and journey to the promised land. This provides hope for remembrance of this knowledge by future generations, even if parents failed to pass it on directly. By the time of the kings of Israel, this was shown to be crucial. Even after the great restoring of the ways of the Law by David and Solomon, a large part of which was the building of the nonmobile version of the tabernacle, called the temple, there were times when the writings of the Law would come to the king's attention and they would realize the nation was way off the path! (II Kin. 22:8-13) God also sent many prophets all through these times to remind the people directly.

As we have covered in this study, neglect of the Law continues to this day; but as much as people want to point to the time of the Babylonian captivity as being the end of the chosen nation, in truth, it solidified their understanding like no other experience ever had. They needed to hold on to their heritage, and that was the Law. No matter how much interpretation might distort the right teaching of the Law, having the Torah as the core of what all the other teachings were/are about gave/gives people the opportunity to go to the source for themselves. This is true for both the Jew and the non-Jew. Among the chosen nation there was a growing understanding of the real need, and at least some of those who survived at all points in time to carry on the nation found it more and more important that Jews not lose their identity by losing the Torah! While the Sadducees had a very nonspiritual way of interpreting the Law, it was still very important to many of them, along with the Pharisees, and many of the people at large, to read the Law and the prophets to all the people. Knowing there needed to be wider availability of copies of the Law for reading and studying is why we hear many references to another group in the Gospels called “the scribes.” Making sure all Jews were given opportunity to have the knowledge was accomplished like no other time period due to the development of the synagogue system. There, Jews who cared

to be truly Jewish would send their children to school to learn the Torah, and all would go on the Sabbath and other days to hear the Torah read!

However, this point also brings us back to that subject of the world becoming very Hellenistic. As more people began to speak the Greek language, the Jews were not immune to the effect. More and more Jews began speaking the Greek language as a way to communicate with the rest of the world. At first, I'm sure many people saw this as a convenient way to communicate with a broader segment of the world's population, especially for the opportunities this brought to commerce, and for some to take advantage of the open door the Greeks initially gave for people to travel the empire. However, it did not take long before people of many tongues found it even more convenient to simply use Greek all the time. This led to the loss of more and more native languages over time. While the Jews maintained Hebrew in the heart of Judah, it began to slip away in many other places. It's not hard for one to see how it crept in, as many people had a language they spoke daily in order to communicate with the non-Jews around them, and Hebrew was something they learned because it was necessary for reading and understanding the Torah. In other words, Hebrew was the language of their religion. As the Greek language became more convenient, and even necessary, especially for business, it had to be tough for many to maintain a daily language, Hebrew for religious purposes, and Greek as well. These kinds of effects man's ways put on those who serve God is exactly the kind of thing the Bible is talking about in speaking of the mark of the beast. (Rev. 14:9-13)

As Greek became more important, and especially since it was so revered, it would be Hebrew which would suffer the most. A daily language would need to be held onto for at least a time as a way to continue to speak to friends, and in particular older generations who did not learn Greek. Since the Law and prophets were written words, being able to take part in reading those words would necessitate Hebrew being learned as a written language. Many local languages were not necessary to learn to read and/or never were a written language. However, Greek was one of the most highly praised languages for being a written language; and due to this, it seemed so much more universal and certainly more well defined than any common language of the day. All this called for real dedication as Jews had to take on the task of learning and teaching their children Greek, which many believed was the direction of the future, and also maintain reading, writing, and verbal understanding of the Hebrew language for religion. All this was on top of possibly still learning a more regional language people around them used.

This was made even more difficult in light of the fact that by the time of the Greeks, not only did many Jews already live outside the direct realm of the Jewish cultural influence which was centered around Jerusalem, many moved to places such as Egypt and more and more of those not in the land of Israel were beginning to become illiterate in the Hebrew language. This would seem to be reversing my point in the individual literacy of the Law expanding, but consider what happened. It was at this time we see the rise of the Law being

translated into other languages, not just for the Jew but for the non-Jew as well, for the most prominent example of this is - as you might guess - a Greek translation! While there were many Greek translations done for various reasons, the most complete, widely respected, and to our knowledge, carefully translated work is called the Septuagint. This name for the translation actually comes from a Latin word which means "seventy," and did not get used until much later when Latin had become important due to the Romans. The actual Greek name of the translation means "The Translation of the Seventy," but both have to do with how the work was accomplished.

The historical evidence tells us this translation was done in the third century B.C. in the most famous of the cities named for Alexander the Great. It is said the work was ordered to be done by Ptolemy II who was a king in the direct line of one of the four generals who divided the Greek empire after Alexander's death. Due to him, Alexandria, Egypt was home to a great ancient library where much effort had been taken to collect writings from all over the world and from among many different cultures. Since there was a great presence of Jews in Egypt, of course the Hebrew Bible would be among the scrolls collected there. It is said there was a desire to have the Hebrew text translated into Greek so non-Jews could study it. This may certainly be true, but there was also a great desire among Jews who were losing Hebrew to have a Greek version of the Hebrew Bible. This was because in spite of the fact many Jews were losing their native language to the shifting sands of time, there was still an understanding that losing the ability to read the Torah was not acceptable if one wanted to remain truly Jewish. This shows us how much the written Word of God had become the real tie that bound the Jews no matter where they might end up. What is fascinating about this is that it also gives us a view of how much the intent of what the Law was trying to teach us was/is far more important than the actual practice of the ceremony, which only the Jews could perform and only under the right circumstances.

Now, it is by no means my intent to degrade the importance of the ceremony God gave in the Law, but as I have mentioned on many occasions, the idea that Jesus' coming somehow meant the ceremonies were made unnecessary in a way they had not already been is ludicrous, and based on a narrow view of the historical fact there were many times before The Messiah when the ceremony was allowed to go unperformed. Why did God allow these times? Because while the actual performance of the rituals are powerful, seeing the representation is not as important as living the truth they reveal. If they can't be done right, it's better they not be done at all; and for those who are slated with their performance, rituals can actually become what is depended on instead of the truth. One way or another, it has always been true, just as Abraham told Isaac, that the performance of religious ceremony is not what saves our soul, but only the path God and only God could provide for us does that! (Gen. 22:7-8, John 14:6)

The Word of God was meant to be more central to the

chosen nation than the performance of its rituals, and this is obviously true for the non-Jew! This brings us to another interesting point as when you read information about the Septuagint you will no doubt come upon the idea that most of the quoting of scripture done by Jesus, and the writers of the New Testament, are actually quotes from the Septuagint rather than the actual Hebrew. However, I would caution taking this information at face value, as it is very likely the more clear understanding is that many conversations, accounts of events, and the letters written, which became the New Testament, originally took place in Greek, or, at the very least, were preserved by being written down and copied in Greek. This made for a baseline version of the New Testament's information that was more universal. For many centuries after the Greek rule, almost no matter where one went in a vast area of the world, if anyone knew how to read or understand a common language with you, it was going to be Greek!

What all this means is that the New Testament's close kinship to the Septuagint translation is not necessarily proof Jesus and the early church ever directly used the Septuagint. It is more so proof the Septuagint is such a solid translation into Greek that anyone speaking in Greek about scriptures they knew from Hebrew and/or those writers who wrote in Greek doing the same, translated the Hebrew very much the same as the words of the Septuagint. One should also keep in mind that the Hebrew language is very strong and expressive. Translating it into Greek was a far more simple task than attempting to bring Hebrew or Greek into a language such as English. While there arguably may be endless numbers of ways for the words to be translated in an attempt to express the same thing in English, there would not be that many correct variations in how to translate something you knew in Hebrew into Greek. This is a fact those highly fluent in speaking and writing both languages at the time, understood in ways the best scholars today just can't!

Regarding the Septuagint, it is said there were, in fact, seventy-two highly knowledgeable Jewish elders who were put into separate chambers and each asked to individually translate the Hebrew scriptures. When each one had completed their work, independent from the others, all the works were compared, and all seventy-two were identical translations. It is difficult to look at such a story and believe the hand of God was not in this work, if there is even the remotest truth in this story. Couple that with the fact I pointed out above, which is, there is less room for variation in translation from Hebrew to Greek for one who knew both ancient languages well, one can feel confident the New Testament's quotes of the Hebrew scriptures are very much led by The Holy Ghost!

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

**Questions submitted to the Institute, answered by  
Philip E. Busby.**

## **FBS continued from pg. 4**

Abraham's life.

When it comes to Abraham, Paul speaks in Romans chapter 4 about how Abraham was not weak in faith when it came to believing he and Sarah were not too old to have a child. Paul says point blank that "He staggered not at the promise of God..." Romans 4:20 Some would argue the verse here in Genesis disputes Paul's assertion. To this I could say many things, as people are always trying to find ways to dismiss the entire Bible's message with the idea that at first glance a few facts and/or verses seem to contradict each other, and that is just ridiculous. To stay more focused I will go at this in light of those who are looking for an answer to the issue, and not waste time on those just looking for an argument. Most importantly, Paul is really talking about the fact Abraham did go forward after this conversation with The Lord and lived his life in anticipation of the event he would have a child someday with Sarah, along with what that would mean. Not only did he and Sarah never again attempt the surrogate idea, which they had tried with Hagar; but to be blunt, they physically tried to have a child. If they hadn't, it would not have happened. Isaac was a miracle, but he was only a representation of The Messiah - not The Messiah. This means he was not placed in Sarah's womb as Jesus was Mary's. (Luke 1:30-35)

On that note, I'll also point out that even if he had been, there would have been reason to doubt a successful birth. Mary was clearly in her child bearing years, Sarah was not. Thus, consider the simple fact that if Abraham and Sarah had not believed God, they would not necessarily have ever tried for a child. For those who would argue their age did not mean the end of their relationship on that level of physical contact, consider the danger we would still believe it to be today for a woman of great age to carry a child. In a day before hospitals and medical "technology," believing it was still possible Sarah was capable of conceiving a child could have been the reason not to try! Let us not dismiss that thought with the idea of, if you could believe God would allow her to conceive, you would easily believe God was able to bring her through it. Often people will take a first step and still have trouble believing further. The children of Israel did this. After witnessing the miracles God performed to free them from Egypt, they quickly feared Pharaoh's army as it came after them while their backs were against the Red Sea. (Ex. 14:10-12) Peter also does this while walking on the water to Jesus, in spite of the fact he himself had requested the experience! (Matt. 14:25-33)

Initial faith does not guarantee continued faith! This is true for all of us whether we are talking years, days, or in some cases, even moments. This is what Paul is referring to as he tells us Abraham did not falter in his faith on this matter. It was only natural for Abraham to be a bit set back by the direct confirming statement of God that he and Sarah were still going to be the biological parents of the promised son. This brings us to our point about Sarah because in a later incident when this fact is again directly stated, she laughs in herself as well. (Gen. 18:9-15) This is often made a big deal of while it seems Abraham's action was not. Some find this odd, and we want to

address this issue by looking at how these are the same and yet different responses; because this is not, as some suggest, just about the difference that Abraham is the male and Sarah is the female. The first item here is that both Sarah and Abraham laughed to themselves or in themselves. This means neither are doing this before men. In other words, this was not something that for either of them was witnessed by others, and that's important. Why? Because having a personal conversation with God is one thing, it is another thing entirely to doubt God and His power before others! This is made clear when Jesus, in talking about salvation, says if we deny Him before men He will deny us before His Father. (Matt. 10:32-33)

Abraham was in a direct conversation with God, and it is no small thing that the fact he falls on his face coincides with him laughing in his heart. Abraham was having an emotional response that he could not really control for a variety of reasons, one of which may very well have been what a tremendous blessing this would be if it were still possible. At that same moment he was conscious of the fact doubting God on any level was not proper, and he humbles himself as he does it. This is exactly what God tells us we should do. Humbling one's self in the sight of The Lord means a great deal. God made us, and He understands our emotions better than any of us ever will, but what He asks of us is that we understand one simple point - He is God! He is not a pagan god just looking for a reason to crush us or cause our harvest to fail. He desires to have an honest relationship with us; and just as was the case with Abraham, God knows what we are thinking and feeling whether we show it outwardly or not. Abraham fully respects this, and that is why he falls on his face even though he did not laugh out loud.

Abraham was also generally getting ready to express his feelings in this discussion, and he understood clearly if he was going to do such a thing it had to be done with recognition God knew what He was doing. In the end, Abraham was willing to accept whatever outcome God said was going to be. It could be said, Abraham was really just trying to get a handle on everything being told him. When it comes to Sarah, there are two distinct differences in what she did. First, Sarah in no way appears to be talking to God, only herself, and her reaction is nothing short of being dismissive of the facts being stated. It's true Sarah, more so than Abraham, had reason to be amazed at the idea she could still have a child, and she was trying to work this out in her mind, but what she lacked was the humility of turning to God in seeking these answers. That solidly brings us to the second difference of her reaction. Sarah is confronted by the direct fact God is aware of our thoughts and feelings at all moments, and He knew she had laughed. Thus, she is asked the rhetorical question of whether she thinks there is anything too hard for God. At that moment, Sarah was being given a chance to humble herself, which she had initially failed to do. However, instead of taking even this second chance, she claims she did not laugh.

All this is not to judge Sarah, but to show us how hard it is for us to live our lives, not just with the knowledge God can do all things, but in true belief! Sarah's reaction would not have been known if God did not see the heart, so it was foolish

to think she could get away with claiming she didn't do such a thing. However, this shows us how hard it is for us to put our trust in God not being a pagan god of anger, and humble ourselves before Him. We often stand in the direct light of God showing us how much He already knows everything, and instead of falling on His grace, we attempt to escape and/or fight. This too is a natural reaction, but one we need to constantly put work into purging from our thought pattern when it comes to our relationship with God. We may be critical of Sarah, but one thing to remember here is that God still did not come down hard on her, and this proves He is not a God of anger. While she got a stern response concerning the fact God knew she had laughed, it could have been much more. God simply left her with the humbling experience of being called out on this matter and gave her the chance to digest what He had promised, along with the feelings it had brought to the surface. This is the God of grace we serve!

Looking at verse 18 of Genesis chapter 17, we find Abraham asking God, "...O that Ishmael might live before thee!" In an earlier segment I emphasized that this was more about not wanting Ishmael to be left out than it was about not wanting God to give him a child with Sarah. I still hold to my earlier statement, but it's still true there is more than one aspect to what Abraham is saying here. Some of this reflects what I was talking about above. Abraham was ready to pass on what he had to a son, and the thought he still had a child who was not yet born who would need to be raised and nurtured, must have seemed a large task. This also relates to what God is saying about Sarah. Having a child is enough of a miracle, but raising a child is something even more. While they had servants to help them, there is no substitute to raising a child, especially when it is a child of promise as Isaac was to be. The responsibility for parenting him was definitely going to be on Abraham and Sarah!

Keeping in mind both the aspect of Abraham's understandable human concern for what lay ahead of him in having another son through whom God would work His ultimate plan, along with the fact Abraham did not want to see Ishmael left out, we look over the next few verses to see how much God was/is unshakable in what He wants here! In order to accomplish what God brought Abraham out of his homeland to do, there would only be one path. That path would be the one God had designed from the start and not based on the human actions Abraham had taken. Thus, in verse 19 God repeats that it is an unmovable fact Sarah would have a child, and this child would be the son the direct covenant God made with Abraham would pass to. While there is more we want to talk about in this verse, let's move to verse 20 and stay on the thought of Ishmael's life and the covenant, because this goes hand in hand with what we have been discussing in this segment.

As with the issue of circumcision, there is a covenant through Abraham, and there is a covenant with Abraham! We have actually talked about this duality all along as we began talking about Abraham being called out of his father's house.

There is a covenant God made clear through Abraham, and that covenant is offered to all people. This is the covenant of salvation! However, salvation has always been for whosoever will come to God and walk in faith with Him. This is a covenant we must all accept personally, and being born into any family does not automatically grant us anything on this issue. However, there is also the physical part of revealing this covenant's truth which would bring about a chosen nation so that through them The Messiah could come. Being part of this covenant is very much about being born into it. While there are ways in the Law of Moses to join the nation, those born into it are obligated. The fact they are born into this covenant is the reason they are to be severed from the chosen nation if any individual chooses not to follow what God has instructed. God was not and is not going to do away with this truth as long as this world remains. Jesus did nothing to change this, and there is nothing the nation can do to change it. Individuals can change it for their personal lives, but the chosen nation will remain!

This is shown in what God says about Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham's biological son. As God told Hagar, he was going to be a nation of people due to this. God tells Abraham here in verse 20 that He has heard Abraham, and this does not just mean at this moment, but, again, God already knew Abraham's thoughts on this. Because of this, God said He had already blessed Ishmael, and Ishmael's life would mean something. More so than just going along with the next statement that he would "multiply," this is what is meant by saying he would be "fruitful." However, Ishmael's life would not mean what Isaac's life would mean. It would not carry on what Abraham's life was about. Ishmael would be a people of his own in this world. God's plan of salvation would, of course, be for him and his seed as it was for everyone, but Ishmael was not the chosen nation and never would be.

In spite of the fact Ishmael's life was not carrying on the main purpose Abraham had been called to, God says of Ishmael he would be a people of great number. It's as if Ishmael was being promised to become the father of many nations in just being a branch of Abraham's promise. This again contrasts with Isaac, in that Isaac was intended to be the father of only the chosen nation, and this might be the most singular important point to look at in comparing what it meant to be a son of Abraham versus the promised son of Abraham. As I have said before, Isaac is a representation of God The Son. While Scripture tells us nations will flow in and out of the New Jerusalem in heaven, this is just a way of describing the multitude of people from among all people across the world who will be chosen in God's plan of salvation. (Rev. 21:23-27) The deeper truth is that we are all one people through Adam to begin with, and the plan of God is for Jesus to be The King of one people out of all people whom all have one important thing in common, and that is a desire to be born again into the new life Jesus came to show us God is offering to those who long for His righteousness!

Until next time, Shalom!

## The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

he also knew the ways to survive in such a place. While Moses had much of this same experience, it would be a great help to have someone else. Especially someone who had truly lived their entire life there. Moses also explains more than once that Hobab would be blessed right along with the nation. Some believe he did not stay, but there is later evidence that his people are among Israel in the promised land, making it plausible he did. (Judg. 1:16)

To understand the next words, it is necessary to understand the pillar of God went before the nation to lead the way as they traveled, but when they stopped at any point, it rested on the Ark of the Covenant. Thus, the wording in English seems to almost interchange the pillar and the ark as if they are one. Israel set out to make a distance of a three day journey after leaving Sinai, and the ark would be in the middle of the line as they traveled, being carried by those given the responsibility. However, the way Israel knew what path to take, as well as the place to stop at each point, was shown to them by following the pillar as it moved and stopped. The ark could only be moved when the pillar rose to lead the way. Thus, as the ark moved, Moses would cry out to The Lord to rise up in order to scatter and cause to flee those who don't desire God's will in this world. When the pillar stopped, they all stopped, and Moses would call for God to come back into the midst of the people, which was to request God's direct presence be on the ark, in the tabernacle, which was at the heart of the camp! These words and actions were also intended to calm the fears of the people during their journey, as well as encourage them to put their trust in the fact God Himself was always The One truly guiding and protecting them!

In spite of this, the people quickly began to find reasons to complain about their journey. In a place Moses would name "Taberah," which means "a burning," due to what would happen there, God became very displeased with the people for complaining. Due to this, a fire would begin to burn, starting on the outer perimeter of the camp and work its way inward, which killed many people. When they cried to Moses, he prayed for them and the fire died out. However, this incident did not change the mind of those who sojourned among Israel, as they craved the food that was available in Egypt. Even those of the nation, who knew only slavery in Egypt, began to join in with this grumbling. While God had provided quail on their way to Mount Sinai, the complaint now was that they had been sustained by manna all along, which God had continually caused to come with the morning dew. The manna was like coriander seeds, which made it more than just something that had to be eaten directly. Manna was the color of bdellium, which means once processed it would not look different from many of the spices commonly used in the day. When eaten directly it tasted like wafers made with honey, but it had a taste like fresh oil when it was processed. Either way, it was not like eating dry bread alone. It had a taste normally only available at the time of year the produce used to make oil was being harvested or when honey was available. While bread, flavored with oil, was a mainstay for people of that day and region, and the people had proven manna's usefulness for making everything they would normally use

grain for, they wanted flesh along with fresh vegetables.

Being of the tradition of herdsmen who moved with their flocks often, God's provisions, along with the fact Israel had animal stock with them, meant they were living the life of their forefathers. In complaining, Israel was truly lamenting the loss of Egypt's way of life, obviously forgetting the hardship of slavery. The idea that in Egypt they had fish available and the ability to raise the food they desired each year is specifically mentioned. Now, with God providing "only" manna to eat, they felt as if they were wasting away! The complaint is made as if somehow God regularly providing manna caused them to have no other foods, such as milk, meat, etc. The sad truth is this wasn't just about not trusting God's ability to sustain them, which is why the manna started in the first place, but complaining about the how! Moses is aware this complaint is coming from all quarters of the camp, and God was certainly displeased with the people. However, Moses had also reached a bit of a limit as to what he could tolerate from the people, and he goes to God to inquire if he had somehow displeased The Lord in order to cause Him to give Moses the burden of leading these people.

Moses points out they are not his children, as a way of saying he had not created this position for himself, which was very akin to a father who must carry the people to the promised land. Feeling it was up to him to pacify the people, Moses also points out it is out of his ability to provide what they want. Moses tells God if he had found any favor with God, he would rather die than to have to continue in this position. God's answer is not to kill Moses, but that he gather seventy men who are already known to be leaders in Israel and bring them before the tabernacle. God would then show them that He was taking the full responsibility in such matters off Moses and making them equally responsible. Moses was also to order the people to sanctify themselves, because the next day God was preparing to act on their complaint. God would provide them flesh to eat, which would at first make them very happy; but as God daily provided this for a month, they would find it to be something they wished they had never asked for. At this, Moses wonders how God could do such a thing, because in his mind, slaughtering all the animals they owned would not accomplish this, nor did he see how it was possible to gather all the fish in the sea, and even so questioned if that would meet their demands. Moses is rebuked for this, because it was one thing to acknowledge his own inability to satisfy the people, but it was another to question God's ability to do even above and beyond! Moses was told he would see for himself if God was able or not.

Moses went out to tell the people what they should do and to choose the seventy men. As those he chose gathered before the tabernacle (in a scene very much like the day of Pentecost that is recorded in Acts chapter 2 concerning the coming of The Holy Ghost), God, being present in the familiar cloud form, came down and rested on the men who were to share the burden with Moses. When this happened they began to prophesy. For reasons we can only speculate on, two of the men who were suppose to be at the tabernacle, were not. These men were out in the camp, but they also began to prophesy.

When word came to Moses that this was happening, Joshua, a young man who had served at his side for quite sometime, suggested they be made to stop. To this Moses asks if Joshua was worried about Moses losing his high standing in the people's eyes as the one who had a direct connection to God, and informs Joshua that it would be his desire all the people have God's spirit upon them in this way. This in and of itself was prophetic, as when The Holy Ghost was given after Jesus returned to The Father, this was the exact thing made available to all who choose to serve God!

After this, Moses and the elders went out into the camp themselves. When the time came, God began to do what He said He would do in providing flesh for the people to eat, by causing a wind to blow out of the sea. With this wind came quail which landed on the outskirts of the camp. There were so many of these quail they covered a day's journey in all directions around the camp. On top of that, they were so packed together their fluttering made them seem to continually occupy a space between three and four feet above the ground. Instead of seeing this as proof God can greatly provide at any moment, the people went out to gather all the quail they could, until quail meat, even being dried for preservation, was spread everywhere across the camp. In all, the people stayed out gathering quail for two entire days and the adjoining night. Even those who gathered the least still gathered literally heaps of them! This unbelievable greed caused God's anger to come upon the people, and God sent a plague among them that killed many of them as they were engorging themselves with the flesh. Because so many people had to be buried in that place, it was given the name "Kibroth-hattaavah," which means, "graves of lust."

From there, Israel would move further north and west to a place called Hazereth. Due to all the complaining Moses personally had to endure from the people looking to him for everything they wanted, God chose to place some of Moses' responsibilities on other men. Now Moses' authority as the leader God had chosen to speak through would be challenged. This challenge would come from inside Moses' own family, as it would be his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron questioning Moses' character. They complained that his wife was an Ethiopian. (This is not a reference to the country but to say she was from the land of Cush.) It was true Moses' wife was from a family who lived in this Sinai Peninsula and not of Israel, but considering her father was a priest of God even before God gave Israel the Law (which does contain stipulations concerning marriage, in particular for the priests), this was an ignorant argument. On top of this was the more glaring fact, God had shown He had chosen Moses from the start, and there never was even the slightest indication Moses had ever done anything to effect God's initial choice in this matter!

That being said, their apparent end goal in this was to make the point they too had been given words from God, which was to say Moses was not necessarily the only and/or

final word when it came to dispensing God's instructions for the nation. Moses, being a very humble man who had not desired this place of leadership from the beginning, does not attempt to deal with this uprising against him, but God does not allow it to go on! God calls for all three of them to come before the tabernacle; and when they did, the pillar of cloud came down in front of the door. God specifically calls Miriam and Aaron to come forward, which they do. Then God lays out something very important, which is the fact they, as well as others in the nation, might very well hear God's voice at times. However, that does not mean they are in the position Moses was given. God tells them if there is a prophet, He will speak to them in a vision or in a dream. In other words, God will communicate in a way that is not like a person having a conversation with another; but with Moses, God not only spoke directly, even in a very verbal way, but without the use of parables or the like. God's communication with Moses was very much like a conversation one person would have with another.

Because Miriam and Aaron already knew this was true of Moses and not of themselves, God asks what would make them so bold as to think they could speak a word against a person who stood in such a direct relationship with God? How did they think Moses was able to have such a relationship if there was something that displeased God in his life? Upon giving them this to think about, God's presence lifts from in front of the door of the tabernacle; and as It does, Miriam finds herself covered with leprosy. Aaron, most likely because he was serving as the High Priest, was not made an example of. However, it is Aaron who sees Miriam and immediately admits to Moses that their actions were foolish. Then in a total turn around from their previous attitude, Aaron pleads with Moses, as if Moses could make the choice on his own, for Miriam not to be allowed to die in such a terrible and shameful way on the basis he and she had made this mistake! Moses, not being a man who sought vengeance in any way, cried for God to heal her right then.

However, God reminds Moses that according to the custom of the day, if Miriam had so much as insulted her father she would have been punished by bearing shame for seven days. Since Miriam had insulted God Himself in questioning His servant Moses, she certainly deserved no less. Therefore, Miriam was to be regarded as the Law stipulated for a person with such a disease and be sent to live outside of the camp. She would not be allowed back, and thus, healed for seven days. The nation, knowledgeable as to what had happened and possibly a bit stunned by this series of events, would not move from that place during these days. They would stay until Miriam had been allowed back into the camp. Once this was behind them, the camp moved on through the wilderness of Paran, bringing them ever closer to the south end of the promised land.

Let's stay in God's Word!

