

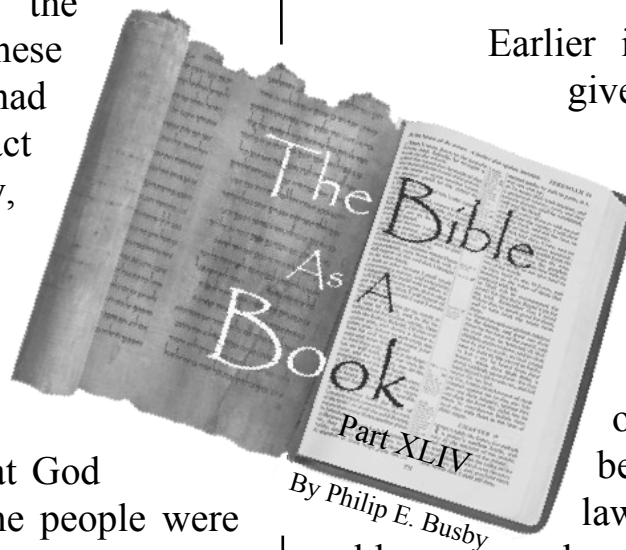


Shaqah

*“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 discussed in our last segment the very negative response the people had to being led back into the wilderness after refusing to trust God and go into the promised land. Their response was mostly to challenge Moses and Aaron's leadership over the nation, as they blamed these two men for what had befallen them, due to the fact they would not accept they, as a people, were the ones who doubted God. As God dealt with those who led this challenge, the people then blamed Moses and Aaron for what God had done, and many of the people were killed by a plague God sent among them, which was only stopped by Moses and Aaron's intercession for the people. After this, we covered how God showed the congregation that Aaron was the man whose family would always be the High Priests, by showing the miracle of Aaron's rod being the only one that blossomed. This entire segment showed how serious it was that God had put the responsibility of the

priesthood on Aaron's family, as we ended with even the instructions of how priests were to pay their tithe and remain holy before The Lord or pay for it with their lives. This brought us through Numbers chapter 18, and we are ready to start chapter 19.



Earlier in the law God had given many instructions about what made a person or thing ceremonially unclean, along with what needed to be done before a person or items (if possible because some items by law had to be destroyed) could be considered clean again. When it came to such things as people with diseases who had been declared healed by the priests, there were more extensive ceremonies that took place. However, for most things that made a person unclean, simply washing one's clothing, and often their body, in water was all that was needed to be declared clean again once evening came. After all the trouble the people had



gone through with not understanding they needed an intermediary between them and God in doubting the establishment of a single High Priest in particular, God adds an extra element in chapter 19 for how people and things can be declared clean. This element would show them that not only did they need an intermediary to come before God, but to truly get back to God they themselves would have to go through death. For this, God instructs Moses and Aaron to have the people bring a special offering of a red heifer to be sacrificed in an unusual way. This heifer was not to have been one used to do work, and, of course, a perfect specimen as all animal sacrifices were to be.

One very different specification was that this animal would need to be a specific color - red. It was to be a female that had not born any offspring. It also would not be sacrificed on the altar of burnt offering nor even within the tabernacle's grounds. Instead, this heifer would be given to the priest next in line to become the High Priest. This was so the High Priest himself would not be made unclean by the process needed for this offering; and the fact an offering would make the priest unclean makes this a very unusual offering indeed! However, at this time that man was Aaron's son Eleazar, and he was to take the heifer outside the camp. The priest would also not be the one to kill this sacrifice, but another person would kill the animal under the oversight of the priest. The priest would then take blood from this sacrifice and sprinkle it before the door of the tabernacle seven times. All this was to symbolize the completion of an individual's life as all of

us will stand before God at the end of our lives. The heifer was red to represent life's blood. The animal being a female represented the fact humans are to be the bride, not the groom, when it comes to our relationship with God. It would be killed outside, not just the tabernacle, but the camp as well, because our death separates us from this life. The priest would not kill the animal because it is up to us if we have presented our lives a living sacrifice unto God or not, but our actual physical death can come at anytime whether we expect and/or are prepared for it or not, as people die for a wide variety of reasons. (Rom. 12:1-2)

The priest would oversee the process of burning this sacrifice just as God is there for each one of us whether we choose to serve Him or not. (Rom. 8:32-39) As you might expect, the burning of the heifer would also not be accomplished in the normal manner a sacrifice would be. It would not be just the fatty portions of the animal that would be burned, but the entire animal. There is no instructions for dividing, skinning, or even bleeding out this animal. Other than the blood the priest would collect to sprinkle at the tabernacle, the entire animal would be burned whole! This truly represents the fact nothing of our physical bodies will go on into eternity. (Gen. 3:19) As this was done, the priest would add to the burning of the body the three elements also used in the ceremony for declaring a person clean from leprosy. These three would be cedar wood, which represents strength only God can grant; hyssop, which represents the bitterness of this life; and scarlet, which represents the

shedding of blood. All these elements represent how God is here with us to save us from our sins and the misery of this life that sin causes, for He shed His own blood to show us He can grant us a new and eternal life devoid of all these things!

After this was all performed, the priest was to wash his clothes and body in water. Once he did, he could reenter the camp but would remain unclean until evening. The man who did the actual work of killing and burning this animal was to do the same. A third man, who was clean, would then gather the ashes of the heifer and put them in a special place outside the camp so they were available to be used by the congregation for purification ceremonies. After doing so, this third man was to also wash his clothes and body and be unclean until evening. The use of these ashes were to be for those both blood born in Israel as well as those who had joined the nation, and this was to be done throughout the nation's history. To use these ashes, one was to collect running water (meaning water from a river or other natural flowing source) in a vessel and put some of these ashes in the water. This water and ash combination represented both the death of an individual's body as well as the sweeping away of one's ability to commit further sin which death brings. One's willingness to go through the ceremony of using this water/ash represented one's desire to take up our cross and follow The Messiah. (Matt. 16:24-27) In doing so, we show our desire to reject this life and receive the forgiveness and continued life only God can and will grant to those who

seek Him.

This is why this water was mostly to be used when a person was unclean due to touching a dead body. The person would be considered unclean for seven days, which is God's number of completion for this creation. However, following in representation of the same number of days The Messiah was tried, killed, and rose from the dead, it was on the third day of this period the person was first to be purified with this water/ash. This was done by a clean person using hyssop to dip into the water/ash and sprinkle the unclean person. This same process was also to be repeated on the seventh day. Both our willingness to follow our Lord in this life as well as God's forgiveness on Judgment Day is represented in this process. Those willing to follow God's commandment in using this water/ash on both days were then to simply wash their clothes and body on the seventh day, and at evening they would be considered ceremoniously clean once again. If the unclean person was not willing to, or simply did not care to go through this purification on both the third and seventh day, they would not be clean on the seventh day no matter what they did. In not following the instructions of The Lord, one showed disrespect for what God offered them through the tabernacle and its ceremony, thus representative of rejecting God's salvation plan! This person would not only remain unclean, they were also to be permanently separated from the congregation of Israel and no longer considered part of the chosen nation!

This stipulation was to be accomplished even if one did not touch a dead body but was in or entered a dwelling where a person had died. Also, every open vessel that did not have a secured top or closure on it would be unclean in such a dwelling. In the open field, if anyone touched the body of a person who had been killed, or died, they would be unclean. To emphasize how much we should not attempt to preserve this life such as the Egyptian culture and others tried/try to do in mummifying a body to make it last as long as possible, Israel was to dispose of a dead body quickly. This is emphasized in the stipulation, even touching the bones of a dead person or being in a grave would cause a person to be unclean. Anyone who touched a person or item that was unclean would themselves be unclean. Dwellings, vessels, as well as people were to be sprinkled with this water in the appropriate way if they were to be clean again. Even a clean person who did the sprinkling for another, or anyone who just touched the water/ash, was to wash their clothes and be unclean until evening!

In-between the end of chapter 19 and beginning of 20 is where we see the book of Numbers take a great leap in time. Basically, the information given to us starting in chapter 15 and going through the end of 19 is the bulk of the chronological account Numbers gives us, when it comes to the some 38 years of Israel wandering in the wilderness for the sake of allowing only the next generation to eventually enter the promised land. As chapter 20 opens, it tells us only that it was the first month of a new year for Israel, and they, once again, had

come to the very same place they were in when Moses sent the spies into the promised land some 38 years earlier. Moses and Aaron's sister Miriam would die and be buried in this place, no doubt bringing some of the harshest reality to light about how this generation was not going to enter the promised land. The people overall though show how they were still very much determined to blame everything on Moses and Aaron instead of seeking God, as they became upset that there was no water in this area. It's not clear if this was due to seasonal conditions Israel did not face the first time they were here, the possibility the water had run dry in the years in-between, or the congregation had grown too large for the water there to be sufficient. It may have been a combination of things, but it upset the people so much they went so far as to claim they would have been better off if Moses and Aaron had not interceded on their part, and they would have all died when the plague from God killed thousands of their brethren years ago. They believed it would not just be them but their animals as well that would not survive this wilderness, which they would have been out of if they had followed God in going into the promised land; and even began to complain again about how this wilderness was not a place of any kind of sustainable vegetation, bringing up the standard complaint Moses shouldn't have brought them out of Egypt in the first place!

Moses and Aaron would, once again, go before the door of the tabernacle to ask God for instructions as to what to do, and God would meet them there. The answer to

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we talked about the ending of the conversation Abraham had with God about Isaac's birth and the command that all the males in Abraham's house were to be circumcised. In this, we discussed how God's presence may have appeared to Abraham during that conversation, and we ended by talking about Abraham obeying God without hesitation in circumcising every male of his house. This brought us to the end of Genesis chapter 17, and we are ready to begin our look at chapter 18.

The beginning of the story told to us in chapter 18 is something I have taught on and referenced to so many times it seems as if we have already covered it. In fact, I could not help but talk about it in just our last segment. However, we have now come to that point where we will go verse by verse over this chapter, and I'm sure, due to what I just said, there will be those of you who will feel we have done much of this before. That being said, it is always good to take a look at these verses in the actual step by step context of the story they take place in, and what we have discussed before is mostly about the fact these verses show us God Himself was one of the three men who came by Abraham's tent that day. This truth is made clear by the very first verse where we are told The Lord appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre as Abraham sat in the door of his tent. The important note in this verse beyond that is the fact it was the heat of the day. Why is this important?

Because of exactly what we have talked about before concerning this story.

The three men who came by Abraham's tent that day were not figments of Abraham's imagination. I know many would say they never really thought they were, but the words here leave nothing to chance. It's good to stop and understand, this is not some point at dusk, the middle of the night, or just as the sun was beginning to rise. This leaves no doubt about Abraham actually seeing nothing more than a vision or spirits, what some might describe as ghosts. No, this was in the midday heat of the sun beating down, and it doesn't get much brighter than that. What this means is these men were clearly visible as any physical object would be, and there was nothing supernatural about their appearance. This is crucial to verse 2 because that is where we get the description that Abraham saw three men. Now, the words say they were standing by him, but this does not mean they literally were next to him, as in close or suddenly appeared. Abraham lifted up his eyes to see the men who were still a distance off so that he had to get up and go to them. The description of saying they were by him is a weakness of translation, but still carries with it a meaning we don't want to lose, and that is the fact they were in his territory - so to speak.

Abraham did not live in a city, a community of shepherds, or the like. As we

have talked about before, his possessions were very great; and so much so that he and his nephew Lot had stopped occupying the same area long before this just so they would both have enough room for everything they owned. Thus, when Abraham sees these men standing what might have been some distance off from his tent, they were still closer than anyone except someone of his household or a traveler passing through would be. Now, it would seem from putting all the information together, they were actually passing through. This is another way in which it is emphasized they did not just appear in front of Abraham. Due to this, Abraham gets up and wastes no time getting to them and bows himself before them. Some will pass this part off as being the custom of the day, but I would not. When a person or persons comes to see someone as great as Abraham was and entered his territory, it would be customary for the visitor to be the one to bow and ask permission to pass by or come before them. Only someone of great importance, such as a king or the like, would be greeted by a resident such as Abraham, with this kind of reverence.

What makes this so interesting is that these three men were not kings or men of earthly royalty whom Abraham would have recognized as such in order to pay this kind of great respect to. Depending on how they were dressed exactly, Abraham had no reason to believe these were anything from common men to some kind of wealthy strangers. Yet there is no hesitation in Abraham's reaction! This indicates that Abraham knew full well who they were; and, again, this being the heat of the day

means it was not because they appeared to glow or have some angelic appearance. If they did it truly would have had to be blinding, and there is no indication of that in these verses. There can only be two reasonable explanations for why Abraham immediately recognized them as important, much less for who they really were. One, he was led of the Spirit to recognize them; or two, he was so familiar with God appearing to him in a form Abraham could physically recognize, he immediately did so!

In the end, I would suspect there is a little of both involved here. God had appeared to Abraham many times, and while those times might not always have been in a physical appearance of a man, Abraham was so familiar with God's presence, there was a literal spiritual recognition of God no matter how He appeared to Abraham. For lack of a better way of saying it, this is such an "unbelievable" truth and something only a few men seemed to ever experience. Adam, of course, recognized God, Noah seemed to have this kind of relationship by all indications, and the other prominent example would be Job. What is sad is that all you have to do is get down to Abraham's grandson Jacob before you see a man, still greatly used of God, who clearly did not have this kind of relationship. Jacob's first very personal encounter with God and His angels was at Bethel as he was fleeing to Mesopotamia to escape his brother's wrath. It is at this time we get the story of what we often call Jacob's ladder, because Jacob sees a ladder going from the earth and up into heaven. This is a vision, a very real tangible vision mind you, but a vision still; and when Jacob awakes from seeing it, he is clearly

shaken by the event. He understands that this place where he had stopped for the night was truly the habitation of God. This is why he calls it "House of God," which is what Bethel means. (Gen. 28:10-22) Considering who his grandfather and father were, it's surprising he did not already clearly understand this!

In contrast, Abraham, while being careful to take nothing from his great respect for God, was not surprised that God would pass by his tent on this day. He was very grateful for the opportunity, and that is why he runs to the three men bowing to them and asking that they not simply pass by. This is a move that it would appear if Jacob had such a thing happen to him would not have known to do, at least until much later in his life, which shows us how much each of us have a very personal relationship with God that we must seek for ourselves. As we are given the information in verse 3 of Abraham asking these men to stay, we find Abraham clearly understands they are not necessarily in the area to spend time with him at all. Thus, Abraham asks that if he had found favor in God's eyes they might grant him the time to do so. This is great humility and respect on the part of Abraham. Abraham knew that any time spent in the direct presence of God and/or His servants was nothing to let pass by! While saying that might seem to some a bit cliché, we should stop to think about how important it is to us to invite, even beg, God's presence into our lives and homes!

Abraham goes on to show his true desire to be of service to God in that even

knowing he was talking to no ordinary physical men, he offers them the amenities one would offer an honored guest. He desires to get them some water to wash their feet, some bread to enjoy in eating, and to sit under the shade of a tree for a time of rest. These are all things heavenly beings do not need, but they are physical hospitalities we can offer as physical men. This connects back to what we talked about last time in how God has always found value in coming down among us in spite of the fact He already knows everything. We read in the New Testament how He is not a God Who is untouched by the feeling of our infirmities, but we so often think only of this in referring to the fact Jesus came to live as a man. (Heb. 4:14-16) While Jesus is the proof, the more correct mindset, which stories such as this one show us, is that God did not create us in a manner that until Jesus walked this earth was something that eluded Him or was so far below Him He did/does not relate.

I know most would say they understand this, but I have to doubt whether we really do. It seems people want to go to one extreme or the other. Far too many people think of God, or at least want God to be, like some Greek portrayal of a god that is so like us we might find fault in Him or even be able to destroy Him someday. In truth, there are those who believe we already have! Others want to go to the other side and believe God is so big He just can't relate to what we go through or even hardly be aware of us as humans, much less as individuals. We just don't soak in how much God is so great it is beyond our

comprehension, while at the same time He created us not as the animals, but in His image. God created us to be a being with whom He can literally commune, and God greatly desires to do so. It may seem to us that Abraham offering simple physical amenities would mean nothing to God or His angels, and coming from those who do so without respect for Who God is, it would be. However, from a man such as Abraham who understood how small he was, yet offered what he had, it was truly an example of what God wants of us. (Matt. 12:34-44) This is why right from the start God walked with man in the garden He had planted in order to do such a thing on a regular basis; and even after the fall, He came to Cain and Abel when they brought the fruits of their labor to offer to Him. God loves us and wants to be near us. This is why Jesus said He was going to leave so that where He is there we may be also, for eternity, in a place where sin can never inhibit this kind of communion again! (John 14:1-3)

Verse 5 shows us just how much Abraham understood they were passing by on a mission that did not necessarily include coming to him; for Abraham acknowledges that after they had allowed him to serve them, they could pass on to whatever it was they were there to do. Abraham was never so arrogant as to believe he was all God cared about, or in anyway offended by the idea God might not take the time. It was Abraham's great honor that the men agreed to do so! Thus, Abraham runs back to his wife Sarah, not a servant but his wife, and instructs her to make fresh bread for the men. He then runs to the field, and he himself picks out the very best calf - what we might call veal - and instructs a servant

to prepare it for eating, who did so with haste. Abraham then does the job of a servant, as he does not sit down and simply wait for the others to serve them all. Abraham continues to oversee the preparation and gathering of what would go along with the meal. Abraham brings the food to them, and he stands beside them as they eat. This is the kind of thing a servant would do so as to be ready at a moments notice to run and get anything more they might request.

All this is also interesting in that Abraham had only asked that they stay for some rest and bread, but what he sets before them is a feast literally fit for a king! Abraham does this not in a way to obligate them to stay. It was no doubt with the hope they would, but more importantly he does it because, if they wanted it, they were worthy in his eyes to have the very best he could offer. It would be up to them whether to partake of it or not, and Abraham would not consider it a waste in either case! As they eat, we see another example of how God is willing to interact with us on our level. In verse 9 God asks where Sarah is. Now, of course, God knew where Sarah was, just as God knew where Adam and Eve were when He was calling to them in the garden that day. This is not to suggest that Sarah was hiding, but God wants it to be clear as to whom He is about to refer to, and thus asks this direct question about Sarah. He is also catching Sarah's attention which caused her to pay specific mind to what He was about to say, because God knew she was able to hear this conversation. To the question, Abraham simply says that Sarah is in the tent, and with that, God confirms to Abraham what He had already said about

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XVIII

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 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 use 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 so 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!

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

FBS continued from pg. 8

returning her to the ability of childbearing and they would have a son together. The fact Sarah heard this is confirmed in verse 10, and verse 11 goes on to confirm Sarah was past the age of bearing children in that she had gone through what we today call menopause.

This is specifically why God had said He would return the time of life to Sarah in order to make this possible! Not only had Sarah been unable to conceive a child all the years of their marriage, but now she was truly of the age where it was no longer physically possible. However, with God all things are possible, and that is why this conversation is taking place. God wants Sarah to hear this information for herself. Upon hearing it, Sarah's immediate reaction was to laugh at the thought because she was only thinking in human terms. She even remarks to herself that she is too old, and on top of that Abraham is no spring chicken himself. Now, we have talked about a lot of aspects to this, but that is why it is so important we talk about how God manifests Himself at different times. As God appears later to Moses and the children of Israel it is always in a very powerful way, and it was to show them they served a powerful God Whom they should never doubt could bring them through the impossible. God left no logical room for Israel to do anything but fearfully obey because He knew they would have a hard time obeying even under those circumstances.

However, that is not the situation here as God comes to Abraham and Sarah. God comes in the form of a man along with two angels who also appear to be men. God

talks to Abraham as one man would talk to another, even asking questions He knows the answers to. This is the nature of God. This was not a time of just showing forth His power and having either Abraham or Sarah obey out of fear in any way. This was about God bringing good news to them of a blessing that was beyond their wildest dreams. Abraham had already been given this information and no doubt told Sarah. We do not know what conversations this spurred between the two of them, but here God was clearly speaking to them both about what He would do. Once Sarah had the reaction she did to hearing this verbalized by someone other than Abraham, we see that God knows everything, and to Sarah's surprise, God asks Abraham why Sarah laughs at this. It is here God becomes more forceful about the fact that to doubt is to believe anything is too hard for God, and that is wrong. No matter how impossible such a thing might seem to them, it was going to happen, not by their will or ability, but only because they were willing instruments and God would bring it to pass!

This seems to be the point where Sarah begins to really think about who it is she is doubting, and this leads her to deny that she laughed, out of fear for what she had done. We are not told specifically if she comes out of the tent or not, but one must think she was compelled to come forward and make this plea more directly than just in her heart, because it seems to bring her physically into the conversation. This is clear in that God then speaks directly to her, not just in reference to her while talking to Abraham. God tells her He already knew she had laughed, which was just further

confirmation they should not doubt God knows all and can do all. In the end, it would seem this entire incident's main focus was for the purpose of God Himself coming to Sarah and letting her know directly, not just through Abraham, that what Abraham had told her about concerning God's plan for her to bear a son was, in fact, true! This is a moment that emphasizes the partnership of Abraham and Sarah as a couple, living in the one man with one woman way God created humans to live if individuals choose to be married, which is the proper relationship for bearing and raising children.

Now, this is where the conversation ends. There was no point in belaboring the moment. What needed to be said had been said and the point for which the angels in particular had come for was the order of business from then forward. This is why the next verse tells us the men rose up and headed for Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, desiring to be in their company for as long as possible, as well as continue to show them the utmost respect as honored guests to whom he was their servant, goes with them. Verse 17 is where we see the same point we talked about last time in discussing how God came down to see the city and tower man was building, before He confounded man's language, just after the flood. The incident here with Sodom and Gomorrah is very similar. While it would appear from the words that the decision had already been made, God still comes to see the city from our level - so to speak - before it was truly solidified. It is here we see one of the best examples one will ever see in the

Word of God of how much it is a truth, "...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16

God determines it would not be right to hide from Abraham what it is He is about to do to the cities. Why? Because Abraham was being set up as a great instrument of God in this world, and the reason God chose Abraham for this task is because God knew Abraham would instruct his children, not just in that he would raise Isaac to be a man who feared The Lord, but also be the father of the chosen nation who would never stop looking back to him as an example! You see, God intended to give this land to that chosen nation He would build through Abraham and the son He once again confirmed to them would be born through Sarah. The parts of the land that the chosen nation did not inhabit would be held mostly by other related people who came from Ishmael, Lot's two sons, and Jacob's brother Esau. God would give this land to this family not just because it was the best geographical place to position the chosen nation, but also because the people living on the land would one day come to be justifiably judged by God worthy of being driven off the land. This would make room for God to give it to Abraham's descendants. The issue here was similar to that of the Tower of Babel as all this needed to be in God's timing. It would be a while before God was ready to give this land to the chosen nation as obviously even Isaac had not yet been born, but the problem was that Sodom and Gomorrah were ahead of the curve when it came to sinful corruption.

Now, when God came down and confounded man's language at the tower, He did so because all men were on a path to be corrupted in one lump. If this was allowed to happen, God would very quickly be right back to needing to destroy the world as He had done with the flood just before the tower. God had said He would not continue to destroy creation for man's sake, and the time to end the world as a whole had not come. Thus, God puts in place a measure that would give individuals a chance to escape this overall corruption. This was the righteous and just thing to do on so many levels we don't have the space to even begin to mention them all. However, when it came to Sodom and Gomorrah, we see a smaller version of this type of action. In this case it was not that these people were a threat to necessarily taking all humanity down, but they certainly were a threat to corrupting the people of Canaan long before the time it would have happened to the region overall in a more natural course of events devoid of Sodom and Gomorrah's influence. The other difference here is that Sodom and Gomorrah had already went way beyond the point people had come to at the tower. It was not just that they had come up with a corrupting theology, they had come to such utter sinfulness, especially in comparison to the world at large, their sin demanded immediate judgment!

God shows us this decision was not made lightly. This is not to say God does anything lightly, but God wants us to know He does not sit in heaven making judgments from there which in our minds might seem to be disconnected or out of touch with the truth on the ground. This, again, is because

we are humans and think as humans. Those who are not wise enough to see the truth just never will, but those who consider right and wrong clearly see how many mistakes we as humans make when we make decisions without clear understanding of - to use an old expression - walking a mile in the other person's shoes. Parents can have this trouble with their children when they forget what it was like to be their children's age and think as one does at that age. They can also do this when they don't understand their children may face different challenges than they did at that same age because society has changed. If we can see clearly how this can be true in relationships as close as parents to children, we should be able to see why central government is a bad idea. The more decisions that are made from a governing authority that is far away from our day by day lives, the more mistakes are going to be made. This is being human, and while we should understand God does not have this problem, even God wants to show us we do not have to take that as a fact without evidence!

That's why we see this clear example of how God deals with Sodom and Gomorrah. God knew what was going on and how bad the people had become, but He still says He wanted to come down and see if what had reached to heaven was really true when one comes and walks in and among the situation directly. If that is not one of the most amazing things in the Bible, I'm not sure what it will take to impress upon you how much God is a God Who is attempting to do everything He can to convince us He desires to have a relationship with us, that He cares about each of us, even to the point of what we

think of Him and how He judges us. As I mentioned before, it was not just at the time of Jesus God became a God Who did such things or came to grasp what it would mean to us. The God of the Old Testament is truly the God of The New Testament, and what we see in these verses is an often overlooked point in the story of what many see as an angry God destroying sinful men. God is guided by His righteousness and mercy. Always has been, always will be!

In the midst of this story we also see God being perfectly righteous and Holy does limit how much He can come among us, and this is why He later did come in true human flesh to overcome this limitation. God would not go directly into Sodom and Gomorrah. If He had, there would have been nothing to stop His righteousness from consuming the cities in a moment. That would defeat what God was trying to show us here, and that is why the two angels came with God. Verse 22 tells us only the two angels went on to the cities. Abraham would stay with God where He had stopped and began to talk to God, giving yet another opportunity for us to see how much we do not serve an untouchable God. Even as much as Abraham knew God, he was moved by the fact the cities were going to be destroyed. Abraham knew these people, he had even saved them once from an invasion of foreign kings. Abraham knowing God was/is righteous was still compelled to ask if God was willing to destroy both the sinner and those who might still have hope of being saved all in one lump? This is where we see Abraham begin to reason this situation out and show

us what a God of mercy He is concerning every last individual for whom there is hope of salvation!

Abraham would begin with asking if there turned out to be just fifty righteous people in the cities was that not reason to spare them? God confirms to Abraham that he is correct, and yes God would spare the cities if there were fifty righteous. Abraham acknowledging he is pushing it in asking, proceeds to ask if it turned out that number fell short by just five leaving only forty-five would that be enough to save the cities. God tells him yes He would spare them even if this was true. Abraham lowers the number by another five, and God agrees again it would be enough. Abraham starts to drop by ten at this point and asks about thirty, and God says yes. Abraham again acknowledges he has no right to ask further, but at this point it is as if Abraham is simply seeking the depths of God's forgiveness. Knowing the people of the cities were exceedingly sinful, Abraham asks if twenty would be enough, and God again says yes. One more time Abraham lowers the number by ten and this brings the number to just ten. To this, God once more confirms even ten would be enough to spare all the people, but this is where all reason ended. Abraham knew full well there were not ten righteous people in that place, but what Abraham gets, as well as all who read this story through the ages, is direct confirmation from God about how much His mercy and salvation is extended to all people if they are only willing to call upon Him!

Until next time, Shalom!

the problem of water would be solved as God had proven once before He could do, which was to bring water out of a rock. The difference this time would be that instead of striking the rock as Moses had been instructed to do the first time, Moses was to simply command the rock to bring forth water. Interestingly, God actually instructs Moses to specifically bring his rod in spite of the fact he was not to strike the rock with it. Moses and Aaron would gather the people before the rock; and showing his true frustration with the people by this point, Moses ends up posing a question to them basically asking if they deserved to have what God was about to miraculously provide. Allowing this frustration to guide his actions, Moses would then strike the rock with his rod twice. The water would abundantly flow from the rock, and the people would drink of it in spite of Moses' failure to follow God's instructions in only speaking to the rock. God would reprimand Moses and Aaron for not following His instructions properly, but these words are far too often misunderstood by many people as God would tell them both they would not be the ones to lead the people into the promised land when the time came. If the stories of Israel's wandering show us anything, it is that they needed a person of Moses' character who would intercede for them and keep God's Holiness from destroying them when they doubted or rebelled. The reality had come that even as patient and caring as Moses and Aaron had been to the people, they were being pushed beyond their human limits. God would not continue to put this burden on them. This was/is a great evidence that no man of the

line of Adam can save us. Only The Messiah would be able to perfectly bring us to salvation!

The verses here give us no indication Moses or Aaron protest in any way to this news. They would simply go back to the daily task of leading the people and wait for God to relieve them of their earthly burdens. (Rom. 14:7-9) This is shown in the very next verses as we see Moses sending messengers to the king of Edom; the Edomites being the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of the chosen nation's forefather Jacob. Moses approaches them with the truth they were or should be familiar with all that had happened to Jacob's line of the family, including the fact God had led them out of Egypt after years of captivity. He informs the Edomite king, Israel is just outside their territory and simply asks for permission to pass through Edom's land on their journey east around the end of the Dead Sea, where they would turn north and end up on the east side of Jordan. Moses also explains that Israel is not expecting to be treated as family or anything special. They would not eat from or damage Edom's fields, vineyards, or the like. They were not even asking to drink of their water. Israel wanted only to travel by the main trade route that would bring them through the land as any normal traveler would be expected to pass through.

The king of Edom not only did not grant them special favor in telling them they could have what they needed, or even accept what Moses was offering to do, the king would not allow them to enter his

land, and went so far as to say if Israel tried, Edom would attack them! Moses wanting to be clear, tells the king they would even pay for anything, such as water, that did get used, they only wished to pass through. The king again confirmed he would not let Israel pass through, and even sent his army to keep Israel out of the land. Thus, Israel would travel east and enough south to avoid a dispute with Edom. Though they would make it close to and eventually cross the King's Highway, which Moses wanted to use to travel north, they would continue east to get on the other side of Edom's territory. However, before making it that far east, they would travel only to a mountain range and camp at Mt. Hor. There God would tell Moses it was time for Aaron to leave this world just as God had said would happen after the water out of the rock incident. This would necessitate the High Priesthood passing to the next in Aaron's family, which was Eleazar, and demonstrate the truth God had emphasized over and over about how this family would continue to hold this position. God instructs Moses to bring both Aaron and Eleazar up into the mountain, and there Moses would remove the priestly garments from Aaron in order to put them on Eleazar. Upon doing this, Aaron would die there on top of the mountain, and Moses, with Eleazar, would return to the camp. The entire congregation would spend thirty days mourning Aaron's death; and according to later verses in Numbers, Aaron's death happened about mid year during Israel's fortieth year out of Egypt. (Num. 33:38)

The next verses illustrate why God

wanted Israel to move south after they first refused to believe He could bring them into the promised land. A king at the southern end of Canaan had knowledge that many years earlier Israel had spied out the land of Canaan, and now that they were back, this king determined to take preemptive measures. The king would attack Israel, and to show Israel how much God was still not yet willing to allow them to enter the promised land, God would allow the king to take some of Israel as prisoners. This would bring about the first taste of the real battle God had sent them to do against the Canaanites. Israel turned to God in this incident and vowed if God would give them victory over this king and his people, they would be God's instruments to not just recover the prisoners but destroy all these Canaanites' cities! This, being God's will for Israel to do to most all the people when Israel was allowed to enter the promised land, God granted and gave them this victory. Israel did as they had promised in destroying every one of the king's cities, and thus, the place was named "Hormah," which means, "a devoted place"!

This incident caused the army of Israel to go back north and west from Mt. Hor, but they still would not enter the south end of the promised land as God had originally intended them to do. Instead, the army would return to the camp, and Israel would follow the path that leads from the top of the eastern finger of the Red Sea to the south end of the Dead Sea, the southern part of which they knew all too well as later verses confirm they had been to the tip of the Red Sea in the preceding years of

wandering. This irritated the people, and, once again, they would start to complain about Moses bringing them out of Egypt at all. They again claimed there was no food or water, and even added the complaint that they were tired of the manna God had been providing for them, which ensured no matter how little of their own resources they wanted to trust God to replenish, they would always have food to eat. To punish the people for this complaining, God would send poisonous snakes among them, and many of the them would die. This seemed to cause the people to understand for once, it was not Moses they were complaining to or about, but God! They admitted they had sinned in speaking against God, and they asked Moses to go before Him to take away the serpents. Moses would do so; but instead of taking the serpents away, God instructs Moses to make an image of one and put it on a pole so anyone who got bit could see it. If they were only willing to look at it, the person would not die from the bite. Moses would make the serpent out of the same metal the altar of burnt offering was covered with, which was brass; and it would be a symbol of how one day The Messiah would come in the likeness of fallen man, live in the same environment we live in, and after enduring humans punishing Him for being purely righteous, He would provide our salvation from the death this life demands we all face! (II Tim. 2:1-13)

Israel would now turn more northward going along the eastern edges of Edom. They would camp at a place named Oboth, which many maps of their journey today identify as a place much too far to the west, because after leaving there they

would go to a place many maps also place too far west, but is right on the border between Edom and Moab, named Ijeabarim. The verse here in Numbers specifies this was in the wilderness area on the side of Moab facing the rising sun, which would be to the east without a doubt. They would continue moving north, but really only to cross the river Zared, and camped again in the north side of the valley of this river that defined the border between Edom and Moab. From there Israel would move further north along the eastern border of Moab and cross over the river that divided Moab from the Amorites, before they would camp again. This is where Israel, while not entering into the part of the promised land God wanted Israel to initially settle on, did enter an area God would give to them. This is why it was/is notable that God brought Israel through the Red Sea and over the brooks and streams of Arnon. Israel's aimless years of wandering in the wilderness was coming to an end in many ways, and they were now in the area where Jacob first settled as he returned from Mesopotamia before he traveled on to the west side of Jordan and the Dead Sea.

This was also the time for Israel to turn west back toward the King's Highway that Moses wanted to use in order to travel north when he sent messengers to the king of Edom. However, they would first stop at a fairly unspecified place where God had Moses gather the people, and God provides a great well of water. This is why the place is identified simply as Beer, which means, "a well." Here the people would see God giving them a taste of the fact the promised land was truly a land flowing with milk and honey, and Israel would sing a song to

commemorate the abundance of water much in the same way they sang after crossing over the Red Sea being delivered from Pharaoh's army some forty years earlier. (Ex. 14:30-15:21) It was as if the next generation of Israel was getting to experience events that would remind them of those things done for the nation right after leaving Egypt. Israel would camp in various places along the border of Moab and the Amorites before heading directly north along the King's Highway to Pisgah, which is part of the hills that were just to the south of Mt. Nebo. This brought Israel into the territory of the Amorites and very near their capital city. Here Moses would send the same message to the Amorite king named Sihon, which he had sent to Edom. This signaled Moses' intent was simply to continue traveling north. To this news Sihon would not only refuse as Edom had, but come out to destroy Israel.

Of course, God would not allow this to happen, and the time had come to start allowing Israel to obtain territory in the region. God would give Israel a great victory over this king and his people. Israel would then take possession of all the Amorite territory from the river Arnon, where they had just come from the northern border of Moab, to the river Jabbok, which was the river where Jacob had wrestled with an angel and received the name Israel! (Gen. 32:22-30) This land would extend from the river Jordan on the west to the border of Ammon on the east. What this did was give Israel a piece of land that had been occupied by true Canaanite people, descendent from Noah's son Ham, without

disturbing the Edomites who descended from Jacob's brother Esau, or the Ammonites and Moabites who were descendent from Abraham's nephew Lot. Israel would not destroy the cities but inhabit them, including the capital Sihon had established and used to originally take most of this land from the Moabites, of which there was an entire parable about. Thus, God had used Israel to exact revenge - so to speak - on the Canaanites, and prove to Israel's related people how much God was truly with Israel.

The driving out and destruction of the Canaanite people had begun, but it would not end there just because Israel had not yet crossed over Jordan. Moses would send spies further north into the land held by more Amorites who were not under king Sihon. The villages of these Amorites, Israel would also take by driving the people out. Israel would continue into the land of Bashan, which is so far north it lays to the east and extends north of the Sea of Chinnereth: better known to most Bible students as the Sea of Galilee! This land had a king named Og who came out to fight with Israel as they moved on north, but God told Moses not to fear them because He would give Israel the victory over this king, his people, and land just as God had Sihon. Again, we see an example of God using Israel to bring judgment upon these people, as Israel did not just drive them out but killed them all in battle and possessed their land as well!

Let's stay in God's Word!