

Free - Take One



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*

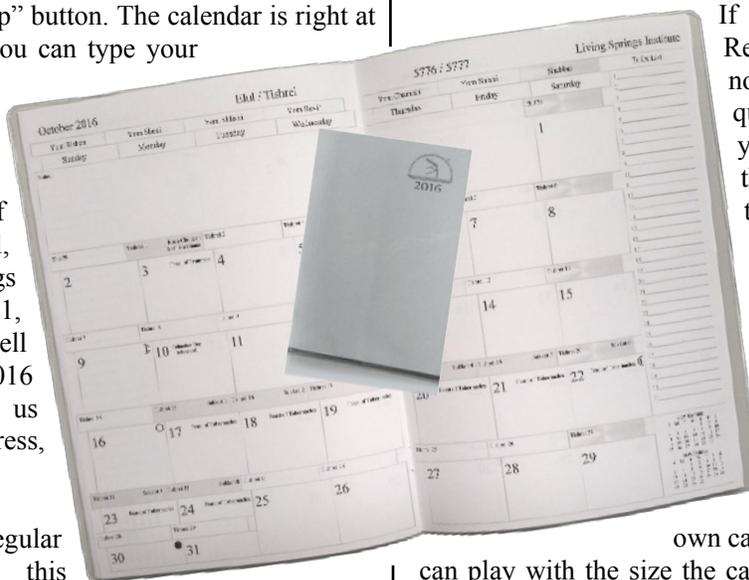
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For the eighth year, Living Springs Institute has published a daily planning calendar that gives you the Biblical calendar alongside the calendar most of us use. This planner is a Biblical education as well as useful in organizing a person’s daily life. We think this is an exciting teaching product; and by the grace of God, we are continuing to offer these calendars for FREE!

To order your free copy(s) of the 2016 planning calendar, you can simply write, e-mail, or visit us online. For online orders, just go to www.livingspringsinstitute.org and click on the “Resource Shop” button. The calendar is right at the top of the form, and you can type your mailing information into the lines provided on that form. If you are using e-mail, send your request to: resources@shaqah.com. If you’re using regular mail, write to us at: Living Springs Institute, P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539. Just tell us you would like the 2016 calendar; be sure to give us your physical mailing address, and it will be on its way!



Now, if you are a regular mail subscriber to this publication, you should have received one of these calendars with this issue of Shaqah; but you may still want others to share. On that note, I would like to remind everyone that it does save us on postage to send more than one calendar in the same package. So, if you and your spouse and/or a friend would each like one, or you know of others you would like to give one to, please, don’t hesitate to order the total number of calendars you would like, all at once! We would also like to send calendars to all of our e-mail subscribers, but we don’t necessarily have your current physical mailing address. Your calendar is waiting for you, so be sure to contact us with your current mailing address, and put in your order today!

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If you’re ever using our online Resource Shop, and the form will not allow you to order the quantity you need, please make your request for extra copies in the comment box at the end of the order form.

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In closing, I just want to say thank you and please remember to share Living Springs Institute with others, so they too may learn and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! God bless, and we pray you will be blessed by this issue of Shaqah!

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As we continue our overview of the book of Leviticus, we ended our last segment talking about the year of jubilee, the stipulations of when it is to be observed, what is to happen in such a year, and even the issue of how to survive planting and harvesting being set aside for that year. This brought us through Leviticus chapter 25 verse 22, and we will begin this segment with verse 23.

God begins the next stipulations of the Law with a fact very important to remember, and that is the promised land belongs exclusively to God! Because this is true, the chosen nation was to be stewards of God's possession, and this first of all means they were not to sell land with the thought it then belonged to someone else. The chosen nation is to be strangers in this world as a whole but sojourn with God, meaning every opportunity to be on the land God intended them to have was the best thing for them. Being on the land would also be about possessing the specific portions that had been assigned as possessions of each tribe and even families within the tribes. That's why the Law gives a way for families to regain most any of the land that had been sold to another.

Now, obviously, as it comes to dealing with losing the land to other people in the world, it would be up to God to protect and return the land to the chosen nation. However, in those times when the nation ruled over the land, they were to recognize the truth that they were responsible for their portions. Thus, God gives guidelines for when someone of the chosen nation becomes poor and sells theirs to others. Buyers were to purchase land with the understanding that the seller's family had the right to come and buy it back. Now, if the seller had no family, the seller still had the right to come and buy back the land themselves at anytime they could afford to do so. Because land was only to be sold with the understanding land reverted to original ownership in the year of jubilee, it was always as if the buyer was only leasing the land, until the jubilee anyway. Thus, purchase prices were essentially divided by the number of years the land could be held by a buyer. If the seller was to come back before the jubilee to buy their land, they only needed to repay the buyer for the years left before the jubilee, because the land would return to the seller, in any case, at that time.

For houses in a walled city, things were a little different because it really wasn't land one was buying as much as it was the house itself. In this case, a seller could come back at anytime within the first year of the sale and buy the house back. If this did not happen, the house would truly become the property of the buyer and would not be something that needed to be returned in the jubilee. On the other hand, houses not in walled cities were considered just part of the land and were to be bought with the same understanding of the fact they would be returned in the jubilee. All these stipulations about houses and land would not apply in the same way when purchasing those things owned by members of the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi, being the priests of God, would own certain cities in the same way other tribes owned regions of land. When buying a house in one of their

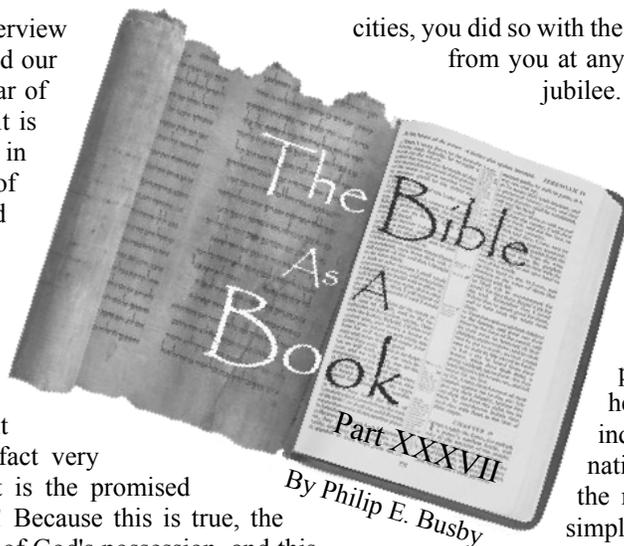
cities, you did so with the understanding it could be bought back from you at anytime and would return to them in the jubilee. As for the land that surrounded and belonged to those cities, none of that could be sold to anyone at anytime. All this simply belonged to the Levites just as the Levites themselves belonged to God.

The next part deals with one who is poor or going into poverty and is in ill health. God says it does not matter if the individual is a blood born part of the nation, one who has chosen to live with the nation as one of them, or a stranger simply living in the land. Such individuals

are not to be cast out in the street because they are poor. Effort is to be made to help such an individual's ability to survive. A large part of this is that any money loaned to the person is not to be expected to be returned with interest. Such an individual (or their estate, should they die) is only in debt for the base amount that was lent to them. Even if something causes them to make a gain, none of that is to be used to say the person now should be able to pay more. Especially when selling such a person daily supplies, such as food, you were to do so at no greater than cost, making no profit from the sale. All this, again, has to do with the land and everything the nation has, actually belonging to God; and the point is to do all that can be done to keep individuals from falling into a state where they are not able to support themselves, at which time they must be fully cared for through the charity of others!

Following this idea, if a person becomes poor who is in good enough health to make their living by becoming another person's servant, if such a one is part of the nation they are not to be looked at as a true servant. This person can live with you like your servants do but be paid for their work at the rate any hired servant living with you would be, and treated in the same way as any hired person which is only contracted, not "owned," by you. Such a person is also free to go out from your house in the jubilee, taking all their family and personal possessions with them to go back to any house and/or land that might also return to them through the jubilee. Individuals of the chosen nation are simply not to be sold into full servitude, but always be seen as belonging to God alone.

If the people of the chosen nation were to have true servants who "belonged" to them, those servants would have to be people who were not of the nation. They could even be of people not part of the nation that lived among Israel, even if the person was born in the land. All such servants would continue to be servants without regard for the jubilee, and even being inherited as part of the household by the heir to the house upon the owners death. Again, any member of the chosen nation was not to be held as anything more than a hired servant by any other member of the nation, but God goes on to stipulate the circumstances of the reverse happening. If one of the chosen nation was bought as a servant by anyone outside the nation, the one not of the nation was to do so with the understanding that, that person's family could redeem the servant at anytime. This,



Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

We ended our last segment by finishing the story where God had Abram bring a specific offering, and at which time God told Abram some more details about what God meant in making a great nation through him. In this encounter God truly confirmed to Abram that the formation of the nation was not going to happen overnight - so to speak. It was going to take several generations for the process of events to bring it about and the circumstances to be right for the nation to take the promised land. This brought us through Genesis chapter 15, and with this segment we are ready to begin chapter 16.

Chapter 16 verse 1 brings us to a very important story, as the ramification of Abram and Sarai's actions at this time are very much being felt to this day! However, before we go directly into the story I want to emphasize just how much, while talking about a man who had a very close and amazing relationship with God, we are still talking about a man who was vulnerable to the same wrong tendencies we all seem to have at the core. This subject also takes us back to what I was talking about in our last segment on how much we must understand we need to know more of God in order to get things right, but at the same time, doing this shows us just how very small we are along with just how far we need to go in order to be able to make good choices! That being true causes many people to come to the philosophy that even attempting to struggle through what it takes to grow in righteousness is just something we should or can take lightly because it's an impossible task anyway. The excuse is that we are always going to need God's grace, so why should we make life harder on ourselves?

The answer to this is in this story we are about to get into. If we want to be used of God, or at least be a faithful servant who is available to be used, we need as much righteousness and constant mindfulness of even what we already know to be right, as we can have at all times! This because at any point we risk making mistakes the ramifications of which may not be isolated to just us and/or those immediately around us. We could make very obvious mistakes that might reverberate out to who knows how many other people, and/or even those in time periods beyond us! Now some are quick to respond with the thought this is going too far as few to none of us will ever stand even remotely in as important a place as Abram stood. While I will readily agree there is a minute chance any of us in our day and age will stand in a place that has the potential to reach out, especially through later generations, as drastically as Abram, the question still remains, who do we want to be? Just because we don't believe there is as "important" or as far reaching a work for us to do, and even if we were, for argument's sake, one hundred percent right on that point, it doesn't mean we should accept that God does not want and even expect us to strive to have the same closeness in our walk with Him that all the Bible's great people

of faith had. God is no respecter of persons. (II Chron 19:7, Acts 10:34-35) Our actions can't save us, but our desire, or lack thereof, for God in our lives can condemn us!

We can't say for certain just how much time there was between the end of chapter 15 and verse 1 of chapter 16, but we know this much, the story chapter 15 ends with was the most recent major encounter God had with Abram before we see the decision he and Sarai make at the start of 16, and these incidents were not years and years apart. Abram's age, which is given for various events, shows us this is true. Thus, my point is, God had just shown Abram, in the details of the overall plan, how small a matter it was that Abram did not yet have a son. God had also emphasized just how many generations it was going to take to put it all together. Now, maybe Abram didn't have the foresight to understand how loudly this screamed there was more than one miracle needed to bring it all to pass, but I for one don't really buy that thought. I think Abram grasp the fact very well; but again, we see a reflection of us all even in this great man of faith. For the young people reading this, it might be a bit hard to fully relate, but many of us can look back on our lives and say, "Why did I do this or that when I knew very good and well it was a bad choice?"

To be clear, I'm not talking about simple choices like eating something you know tends to make you sick, or spending money on something you know you'll never use. I'm talking about looking back on decisions that have or had severe ramifications in your life, and you know that even at the time you did it you were knowledgeable enough to understand, at the very least, just what a mistake doing such a thing could be! This is where Abram is in verse 1. He had the information in hand. He had asked God about not having an heir. God had told him it would be so; and in asking how he could know it would be so, Abram had been sent through the symbolic offering process that laid it all out. God even spoke directly to him about it all. Yet, Abram shows no resistance to the idea posed by his wife in these opening verses, nor does he show any indication he would like to take time to seek God on the matter before they go through with it. This is because we often think just too much about our personal lives and don't realize the value in taking time to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by how much greater God's entire plan is!

From the very start of verse 1 we see the situation is being looked at from the cultural viewpoint of the day. Verse 1 tells us Sarai had given Abram no children, much less a son to be an heir. It is interesting that the wording here does not start with or contain the words that Sarai was barren, which is something we are told in so many places about different women in this kind of circumstance. Here the wording focuses on just the fact she had not yet given Abram a child. What is so

interesting about this is that being barren is a physical condition, which to be basic about it, God provides healing for in order for a couple to have children. However, it is not said at this point that this was the problem for Sarai. I point this out as being stated in the cultural view of the day because it was a common thought that if a couple could not have children it had to be the wife's physical shortcoming, not that the man was infertile. Now, this idea is proven more correct, at least in part, if a man has more than one wife and has children with another, but Abram did not have another wife. Sarai was it, and there was nothing to take the burden off her as being the one who was unable to bear.

To be clear, I'm not trying to villainize Sarai in any way here, but it's interesting to contrast this with what she says in verse 2, which is that "...the Lord hath restrained me from bearing:..." Abram had no doubt shared with her what God had told him, and from this there would be the strong indication that being barren was the wrong thing to blame their having no children on. Thus, Sarai admits it is God's doing that they have not had a child as yet, but it would seem the very fact she goes on to suggest they use her handmaid Hagar as a surrogate for children, in spite of that admission or understanding, shows Sarai is disturbed about the fact she and she alone is culturally held responsible for them not having children. As we go into verse 3 we find it is also specified the plan Sarai comes up with was implemented after Abram and Sarai had lived in the land for ten years. Usually, we get more of our time stamp for events by being told Abram's age, but here it refers to how long they had lived in this region. Emphasizing the couple was well known among the people by this time, and it was common knowledge they had no child. Thus, just as later in the timeline Rachel would be jealous of her sister Leah's ability to bear children when she could not, and give her handmaid to Jacob to bear children in her place, Sarai's plan to use her handmaid to bear for her was likely spurred by more than just the fear Abram would have no heir. (Gen. 30:1-6)

That being said, I want to emphasize, I still believe the primary motive was most clearly about a fear Abram would not have an heir directly through Sarai, but Sarai's idea was heavily based on cultural views all the way around. In light of the culture they lived in, Hagar being Sarai's handmaid was looked at as more than simply a servant. Personal handmaids were looked at as almost an extension of the person they served. While there is a definite higher and lower rank in such a relationship, it was almost as if the servant and master were one person. This is why many servants, while clearly servants, were also people of great power if their master was a wealthy, powerful, and/or very influential individual. We see this in the earlier verses where Abram asks if his right-hand man might be the heir to the promise, in which case the servant would literally take the master's position upon the master's death. This would have seemed logical under the thoughts of the day. The point is, Sarai had full control to do with Hagar as she wanted to do. Hagar's life was literally in Sarai's hands, and using her to have a child with Abraham would mean the child would culturally be Sarai's more than Hagar's. However, the emotions in this situation don't end up following the cultural tradition.

Verse 1, as well as verse 3, tells us Hagar was an Egyptian, which may have some to do with this; but before we go any further we need to stop and think about that genetic marker thing we've talked about before. God wanted Abram to have a son with Sarai, so that son could have a son with another woman who came from Abram's original homeland. This was to be followed by yet another generation of a son having his sons through women from that same region, which did happen for Jacob, and is another reason Esau disqualified himself from being part of the chosen nation, for he married women of Canaan. (Gen. 26:34-35) There can be little doubt that blood from Canaan and especially Egypt came into play as the twelve tribes began to expand into a nation, but before that there had to be a base genetic setup in order to make Israel a distinct people. This would have been a dead issue before things even got started if Abram's heir to be the chosen nation had been the son of an Egyptian woman.

Now, verse 2 solidifies the cultural view, as Sarai tells Abram since God had restrained her from having children, Abram should go in unto Hagar so Sarai could "...obtain children by her." Abram goes through with this apparently without question, and Hagar is given to be Abram's wife. While some get a little confused by the use of wife instead of concubine or the like, we should look at a couple points. First, a concubine is a term that is not a very nice term as we would see it today. Essentially, to say a woman was a concubine instead of a wife mostly would be to indicate her real purpose was to give or expand the man's ability to populate the earth with children that carried his genetics. This is why kings often had many concubines. In the case of Abram, it actually is important to not call Hagar a concubine here, especially in light of her being originally a servant in the house, as servant women were most often the ones taken as concubines. This is because it was easy to feel no responsibility to a family who had given their daughter, sister, etc. This last point is also why it was not uncommon for a man to, at any point, leave behind a concubine and/or her children or sell them off as servants to others.

That brings us to our second point, because many cultures at least give credit to the thought a woman is given by her family to the man she marries. This is why it is traditional for the father, or in his absence, another close male relative to walk the bride down the aisle to be given to her soon to be husband. However, even in a day where women enjoyed very few rights and the men seemed to hold all the power, it is specified Sarai "gave" Hagar to Abram. In other words, as the man of the house, Abram did not just take Hagar as a concubine with no regard for whether she technically was his wife's servant or just a general housemaid, and in doing so, the resulting children would be nothing more than a way to expand his house and possessions. Hagar was given by Sarai (which would be proper considering she did "belong" to Sarai) to be a wife so that any children Hagar had with Abram would be looked at as being Sarai's; and the real point was that any children Hagar produced would be considered rightful heirs to the family's house, name, rulership, or whatever might be at stake.

Verse 4 is where the real trouble begins, and also

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XI

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."

Our last segment talked about how looking from the standpoint of a historical narrative, Ezra's and Nehemiah's work really brings us to the chronological end of the Old Testament. We also got into the discussion of why it is important for the sake of answering our question that we continue to look at the historical facts that brought what we see at the opening of the New Testament, because the New Testament tells of the coming of The Messiah to the chosen nation. Unless one believes in casting the Bible's narrative completely to the side (something that, if one does, there really is no point in having our discussion at all), I believe we've covered how the nation of Israel became known as the Jews by the close of the Old Testament. Thus, if the Jews at the close of the Old Testament are the chosen nation, then the Jews of the New Testament would have had to develop and take the identity of the former Jews during the roughly 400 year history that lies between the Testaments, to not be the same people as the original chosen nation.

Starting off with this thought in mind, I want to make a very obvious point about this idea. If the Jews of the New Testament were a different people than those of the Old Testament, then one needs to ask why God sent Jesus to them? I know some would love to answer this by saying the Jews, as a nation, did not accept Jesus because they were not truly the chosen nation, and I'm sure one could start a whole new cult with that idea at its core! However, no matter how much this might be another one of those things that sounds good on the surface for those with itchy ears, who like turning to fables, what we started discussing last time is the deeper point for those who seek the truth, and it destroys this idea. The Messiah was not sent at some random point in history. Jesus came when He did because He was the chosen nation's only real hope of getting things back on track by that point in history; and in talking about getting things back on track, I'm not talking about just keeping the chosen nation in existence. No, I'm talking about keeping the temple in existence and the Jews on the promised land. The fact God was continually working toward, and desirous to maintain this goal in spite of the pitfalls various generations fell into, is shown in no better way than by studying the work of Ezra and Nehemiah following the Babylonian captivity. Why? Because the captivity very well could have, and without God's hand would have, brought an end to there being a chosen nation at all, much less a nation able to return and rebuild the temple, Jerusalem, and bring together the Hebrew Bible which Christians call the Old Testament.

On this point, I would also like to speak again to just

how much no one has the right to judge the Jews for any of their failures, because maintaining their distinction as a specific people in this world was/is a hard enough job in and of itself. It is certainly a job many of us would never even accept the challenges of, especially in the political climate of today's world! The very thought pattern of the importance of protecting the distinction of the chosen people is a big part of what Ezra, Nehemiah, and their contemporary prophets can be credited with restoring an understanding the need for, and the importance of this should not be underrated. Why? Because the shifting political circumstances that lay ahead of the close of the Old Testament ended up making the intermixing of peoples, the earlier Assyrians had attempted, look like child's play! With that, I believe we're ready to begin looking more directly at the history between the Testaments.

There was, for a short while following the return and reestablishment of Jerusalem, a time for the Jews to live on the promised land in a period of relative quiet when they were able to focus on their own affairs. The world empire of the day continued to be, at the very least, tolerant of the Jewish nation, or maybe even disinterested is a way to describe it at times. Either way, this is the kind of favor God could bring if His people would humble themselves before Him, and worry foremost about following God's Law and not the secular government part of this life. During this time, the Jews seemed to have made peace with the idea that serving God was possible and even in God's will, while still being under the governmental control of a foreign power; and again, having no aspirations of power for themselves helped maintain the quiet. However, one must not forget that the world empire, and others in the world, never believed in laying aside their aspirations for worldly power, and world affairs were already in flux during the time of the restoration of Judah. The reason for the coming storm all started when the empire chose to push its way into the territory further north and west of the promised land. This was an area the empires that had preceded the Medes and Persians very well may have claimed to rule, as they claimed to rule the entire world, but they never really had "harassed."

As the empire was allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple, it was making inroads into the West, eventually crossing over into what we call Europe today and clashing with the people living in the region of Greece. To condense the history here, the Greeks (to use a general term) did not just fold up and walk away, but fought back and forced the empire to settle for controlling only as far west as Asia Minor, or what is Turkey today. As much as these efforts were a loss for the empire, they did not give up on the idea they could go further one day, but in it all they never really understood the hornets' nest they were stirring up! Because of these activities, we begin to see coming to pass what Daniel was shown in his

visions. For Judah, there would be about one hundred years of quiet beyond the time of the Old Testament's close, but to the Northwest of the promised land many things were changing, and the Greeks were on the rise!

Essentially, the Medes and Persians had met with just what God had put in place by confounding the language of men during man's first attempt at a one-world government, which was the Tower of Babel. The Medes and Persians would push too far and anger a people not in agreement with their ideas. Probably a better way to look at it is to say because man no longer had that common understanding between each other that existed before the confounding, there was not a way to convey the grand humanistic ideas the empire represented. If there had been, others may very well have agreed with them and ideas would even have been shared in both directions. We see this again and again as empires fell only to be taken over by people who end up revering the very thing they defeated and attempting to rebuild, continue, and/or even expand upon it. Again, this is exactly why God confounded man's language. Man can choose to cooperate and agree, but no agreement is always better than bad agreements which lead to overall bad end results! (Prov. 14:12)

The fact each empire desired to force their great ideas upon the whole world, as well as their greed for power in general, is what spurred them to continue their attempt at expansion of territory through war instead of being content with taking in just those who agreed with them, and agreeing to just disagree with those who did not accept their ideas as grand. It is also fair to point out, this was happening on a smaller scale among people all over the world, and, in no small part, would happen among the Greeks before they chose to truly push back at the empire. The point is, in pushing for expansion, the Medes and Persians specifically anger people who otherwise might never have cared the empire existed. A man by the name of Alexander, who, due to his actions, would come to be known as "The Great," would take command of an army determined to revenge his land and family. Alexander would desire to turn back the empire and ensure it would not march toward Greece again. Overall, this would not just end in another political shift of imperial power, but as Daniel's prophecy illustratively shows, it would bring people into the picture who had, until then, been to the west of most all the imperial goings on in the East. This involvement would make the entire story of a world beast an ever greater, all inclusive matter for all the people living on this planet. Even those living far away on the continents now known as the Americas, and those deep into places such as Africa, would not go unaffected as some believe, but that's a much broader historical look than we need to go into for this discussion.

Alexander would have great success and very quickly overrun the empire, making it to, and taking the throne in Babylon. There, Alexander, being impressed by the glory of the city, would not turn in disgust of what the empire that had angered him consisted of, and head for home feeling good about the fact he had freed the world from imperial tyranny. No, Alexander liked what he found and even ended up living in Babylon's grander, demanding to be treated much more like a king instead of remaining the greatly respected leader which

had brought him success. However, this would not last long. In his vision, Daniel had seen one great horn on the goat that came from the west; but this first great horn of what would be the Greek empire was very quickly broken after its initial success, and replaced by four others. (Dan. 8:1-8) This vision would come to pass as Alexander would rule only a short time before his death at a relatively young age, and the bulk of what he had conquered would fall to four of his generals who would fight back and forth over who would rule and/or over what. The prevailing parties in this struggle would go on to continually do what had initially angered the Greeks, which is focus on their own desires for power, fighting with each other and attempting to expand their territory without regard for the people over which they ruled.

Now, as it came to the chosen nation, this would be a dramatic change of events. However, the effects of all this would not be felt so much at the first. At some point, as Alexander was fighting along the Mediterranean coast, presumably as he was on his way to conquering (some would say liberating) Egypt, or maybe as he was turning back north to head east to the empire's heart, Alexander would encounter the Jews. It's not known how much the Greeks may have understood about Jewish culture and/or religion, but I believe Alexander was wisely approached by the Jewish leadership with the very thought pattern God wanted them to have at the time Babylon was on the rise. The Jews simply ask for peace with Alexander on the basis Jerusalem was not a city of war or a stronghold of power. The Jews were not interested in secular power, but only their own affairs of serving God. While little hard information is really known about all this, it is likely Alexander saw in the Jews a people much as the Greeks had been many, many decades before when the Persians originally attacked Greece. He saw a people who just wanted to explore and maintain their culture while living their own lives. One way or another, the problem for the Jews being under the Greeks would not really begin to show itself until after Alexander was dead.

Alexander had actually encouraged Jews to settle in other cities of his expanding territory, giving Jews great freedom of movement, which could be taken advantage of for Jews to come back to, as well as settle, all up and down the land of promise. However, Jews would not just take the opportunity to reestablish their presence all across the promised land. As time passed, many Jews would leave the land and come to live even in places that the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity had not forced them into. Several Jews would eagerly go to live in the great Egyptian city founded by and named for Alexander. The Egyptian city of Alexandria would become a world cultural hub - so to speak - and the Hebrew Bible would become an important part of what was shared there. However, we'll come back to this subject a bit later. Looking at where the turmoil for the the Jews and the promised land in general came into play while under the Greeks, starts with an understanding that even in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it was clear the promised land was an important trade route between not just North and South but East and West. We get the sense that this died a bit when the Babylonians arose and seemed to shift world power, along with trade, more to the east. However, traders from all lands still moved goods across this land. In

spite of what might appear to be true in some ways, Israel was never some backwater insignificant place. No matter how many or how few people lived on the land, it was always a path for goods to flow. As one moved into the time of the Greek empire's existence, we begin to see the rise of how important monetary systems would become to the world, and the knowledge leaders had of how much money and/or trade systems in general was not just for their personal comfort, but an important part of obtaining and maintaining power itself along with interconnecting people.

The coming of the Greeks was shown to Daniel because of its importance not just to how it would affect the chosen nation, but also put all the pieces in place for the beast to be a true world beast, as well as one that could survive as an image of itself after its more physical fall. This is why Revelation refers to the beast at one point as being one "...that was, and is not, and yet is." Revelation 17:8 After Alexander's death, this rising understanding of how to rule the world, along with the shift of people involved with the seat of imperial power, combined with the division of that power, no longer being centered just in the Mesopotamian Valley, put the land of Israel right in the middle of world affairs, and the Jews living on that land, of course, came along with this. This should fascinate any person seeking to understand why God established a chosen nation to do a work in this world, along with why it was so valuable for them to remain on the land God promised Abraham they would possess. The chosen nation was placed in strategic spots from the very start. To grow into a nation, they went to the seat of the arising world power, which was Egypt. After being brought to the land of promise they eventually rose to be a great nation of their own, the influence of which at the time of David and Solomon really spread far and wide.

When the seat of world power significantly took world matters to the east, God used punishment for the chosen nation's rebellion against Him to place the Jews in Babylon. As events were going to move, once again, back to the west, and the promised land would again be at the heart of world affairs, the Medes and Persians were used of God to be ahead of those events, and sent those Jews willing to identify themselves as the chosen nation and go back to their land to do so. Using the chosen nation, time and again, as a focal point from which to influence the world with the ways of God, was, and still is, the nations purpose for existing; and again, The Messiah would come at a time it was necessary to, once more, ensure this job continued! The inability for many who call themselves Christians to see this is why they diminish the importance of, and/or believe there is no need for, and/or believe the church can or has replaced the chosen nation, instead of seeing that on this side of The Messiah there being Christians at all is a result of the very work God established and maintained the chosen nation for. Being able to share the message that The Saviour has come goes hand in hand with us having things such as the Hebrew Bible, and understanding all we teach about made available through God's use of a chosen nation!

Getting back to our historical look, by the time the Greeks come and the four generals take up positions of power,

which struggle against each other, the chosen nation is, once again, right in the middle of it all. The promised land would not be just a quiet place far on the west edge of an eastern empire, but a significant crossroads of all that was going on between the would be kings of the world! This is why Daniel's prophecy does not specify names, but simply lays out for us a continuous struggle where the king of the North would clash with the king of the South and so on. No matter who these kings specifically were at any given point, the promised land and nation would be marched back and forth over many times as the armies fought and political circumstances shifted faster than anyone could keep a clear score card on.

This would bring into clear view the truth that the world's, or we should say, man's thoughts have not been about God's ways! (Isa. 55:8-9) While God would often have liked to use the chosen nation in a more efficient way than they were willing to obey and follow, the reason kings of Israel/Judah and specifically the city of Jerusalem ever came to be known as rebellious places, and the Jews a rebellious people, during any point, was still based primarily on the fact their laws and customs, which God had given them, were "strange," even among what secular people would call a very diverse world of culture and religion. When the nation failed to put their trust in God's way of defending the fact not everyone appreciated their uniqueness, and went in directions God had not instructed, God still used them, but they made life harder for themselves! After Alexander died, possibly more than ever before, this became a factor. During the turbulent times of the beast struggling to put even itself back together again, it became very important for the Jews to be in tune with God, putting Him and His ways first, in order to know what step they should take at each point and time. Their success and failure to do and not do right would shape the path to the coming of The Messiah just as Daniel was told!

To take a little closer look at what we historically understand as happening after Alexander's death, than Daniel's visions were intended to give prior to it happening, the base fact about four kings taking the place of one is, of course, spot on. Four of his generals would initially divide up the new empire Alexander had put together. In a way one could argue that the Greeks only briefly had a world empire and then it was nothing more than a jumbled mess of territorial powers, the borders between which shifted time and again with little regard for the common people living their daily lives. While the last part of this thought is true, one should not rule out the idea Greece was as much a world empire as any of the others before it. If nothing else, we need to understand there is a more important point to the Greek's reign than the idea the world was not solidly ruled from one seat of power - and that is culture!

In all this, it is so important we understand that while God is a great God Who works His will using those who want to live for Him, the devil (who wants God's position) is only interested in gaining power over everyone. This is a most basic reason for God confounding man's language at the tower. What man was doing there made all of mankind ripe for the devil's picking. All he had to do was step in and take over. By confounding language, God protected people from the devil as well as each other. This was/is frustrating to men, many of

whom never have stopped desiring to rebuild a world of unity, but also for the devil. This is why, in Revelation, John sees both a beast with the seven heads and a dragon. (Rev. 12:3, 13:1-9) The devil's plans run parallel with those people who want to unify the world; and make no mistake about it, little to none of this is about the pursuit of real peace! As we have discussed, the tower itself, along with these empires are the heads of the beast, and the Assyrians represent the re-arisal of that beast after God wounded it with the confounding. Just to note, one-world government will never be accomplished by man, but his insistence on pursuing it will, as we clearly see in our day, destroy this world! This shows how much the idea may be masked in peace, but no matter how much it accomplishes peace, the idea certainly has nothing to do with righteousness, and there in is the problem! This, again, speaks to what we've been discussing about The Messiah coming and doing the work He did at the time of His first appearance, but let's get back to directly talking about the Greek culture thing.

You see, the Assyrian idea of how to unify the world was to force everyone out of their culture and attempt to set up a new and unifying world culture. Not to put to fine a point on it, this backfired in that it really only served to anger so many people that the empire fell to what was basically an internal rival who didn't like being told what to do. That was the Babylonians, and they had a different idea. Their idea was basically one of simple superiority. The Babylonians took power believing their ideas to be the very best and it being their right to rule the world. In this mindset they swept across various regions with force. They made agreements with those who would yield to them and leveled those places that resisted. This is why in Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream, the Babylonian king is said to be the head of gold! (Dan. 2:38) No other empire would rule with such certainty and centralization of power over such a vast amount of people and lands. However, the arrogance of being able to do this, especially holding secular power over God's chosen nation, truly went to the king's head; and in the end, God judged the empire, allowing the Medes and Persians to take over.

The Medes and Persians had yet another approach as to how to rule the world. They were probably the most interested in the concept of diversity. Sure, they were the rulers and had their fair share of a superiority complex, but to speak in terms we like to use today, in many ways they embraced the fact different people had different ways of living. This is why the Jews were allowed to return and rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. The argument the devil had to push for to counter this was that the Jews alone were a strange and disruptive culture to the harmony of the empire, and this argument is how the temple work was delayed for a time, and is also the one Haman had to use as the reason the king should single out the Jews for destruction, which is why we have the story of Esther. Let's not forget, all this embracing of diversity was not about forgetting the dream of one central point ruling the world and bring all the world under its umbrella. That is why the empire kept pushing its borders and ended up angering people, specifically the Greeks, which brought Alexander across to Babylon!

To get us back where we started this whole line of discussion, the fact Alexander died and the empire fell to an internal power struggle that greatly dampened the centralization of power idea, something of greater power than a central throne was taking hold in no small part because of what Alexander had done during his short time! Alexander is credited by some as being the first man to do a truly great scientific expedition. As much as his goal was to take down the Medes and Persians, he took time to plant many colonies of Greeks throughout the territory he conquered. He also is said to have sent hundreds, if not thousands, of plant and animal specimens back to Greece for study and research. This may also have caused many people from various cultures to be involved in transporting these things, and thus visiting Greece, at the very least. All this resulted in Greek culture taking root in many places and the Greeks not just being known as the rulers of the world.

Thus, in spite of all the infighting after Alexander's death, the more people of the world learned about the Greek culture the more they liked it! If one has much of a world view and grasp of modern history, I really should not have to defend this point at all, because the truth is, people, to this day, still consider Greek culture the true classic of the world. During the Greek's rule, people literally started to look at their individual cultures as inferior to the Greeks. In many people's eyes the Greeks had more beautiful art than they did. The Greeks told better stories and had a more beautiful way of thinking which seemed wise and highly developed. The Greeks even had more attractive gods, and their pantheon of gods was more organized and logical than the vast majority of cultures. Even the later empire of the Romans couldn't argue with this point, and it has a lot to do with why it is so easy to draw direct parallels between most all the Roman and Greek gods.

Striking directly at what God did at the Tower of Babel, people even believed the Greeks spoke a more beautiful and expressive language than any other! The end result of this is that almost without trying the Greeks accomplished what the Assyrians could only have dreamed of doing. People of the world started learning the Greek language, how to read and write it, how to organize thought and build philosophy like the Greeks, all the while voluntarily allowing their own unique cultures and languages to be left behind and lost. The Greeks, more than any before and any after them, accomplished the biggest reversal of the Tower of Babel effect. What happened in their time drew the best map the devil has ever found for attempting to unify the world, and he has never stopped using this as a model. The catch is that because the devil and men don't care about bringing righteousness to the world, they will never figure out how to bring true unity, much less peace to it!

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

brings up a very important point about not listening to God and instead taking matters into ones own hands. I don't wish to distract from the main point here that Sarai and Abram were trying to obtain an heir by means that were in their control, because that's the glaring misguided thought in all this. However, it is quite possible that one potential outcome Sarai had in the back of her mind was that Hagar would not have a child, at least not right away. This would show that Sarai was not fully to blame for the couple not having any children. This is not to suggest she wanted to embarrass her husband for being the reason, but just to say this no children thing is not all my doing or fault. Hagar, being Sarai's handmaid, would have been knowledgeable of many of the most intimate thoughts of Sarai, probably even more so than Abram, meaning whatever feelings Sarai may have had in this way Hagar would have been the one to know.

In any case, Abram goes in unto Hagar and she conceives right away. However, once that happens, Hagar does not willingly relent to the cultural norm of the child being considered Sarai's. Hagar evidently made it quite clear she didn't like the idea Sarai was still her master, and while this may have been simple jealousy at work, as a servant it's strange that Hagar did not handle this with more outward humility no matter what her internal feelings. The point about her possibly knowing Sarai had been wanting to prove or, at the very least, had always insisted it was not her fault Abram and her had not had children might also explain why Hagar acted as she did. Hagar may have been unhappy that Sarai was not willing to admit at this point that it was obviously Sarai that couldn't have children, and in doing so, be at least grateful on a private level that Hagar had been able to bear the child Sarai couldn't. One way or another, this whole incident was not just outside God's perfect plan for bringing about the chosen nation, and as such gained Abram and Sarai nothing on that front, it also caused significant internal turmoil for the family which would drag on through the years!

Now, verse 5 can be looked at as a very angry rant on Sarai's part if you view it as Sarai being jealous it turned out the way it did. However, for all the bad stuff that some might throw on Sarai over the next actions she took, this is actually where she proves she did believe God and was humbly admitting she was wrong in suggesting the whole thing! Here she is not saying her wrong is not her's but Abram's, she is saying to Abram her mistaken idea had caused a problem for him and was not isolated to just hurting herself. She points out that because she made a mistake in giving Hagar to Abram and Hagar conceived but didn't want to yield to the traditional role of being just a surrogate, Hagar is going to cause relationship problems which will affect their marriage. To be simple about it, the whole thing turned out to be a curse instead of a blessing. Instead of making things better, Sarai recognized it only made matters worse. She ends this admission by saying it is up to God to judge between her and Abram, and in saying this she is referring to where she started the statement. Only God knew who would be held more responsible for all the trouble this had and would result in. Sarai definitely came up

with the idea, but Abram executed it, and there was no changing those facts!

To this, Abram simply reminds Sarai this was all done with the cultural view of how things work. He does not consider Hagar a wedge between Sarai and himself, and he is not going to take Hagar's side in the matter at all. Hagar is nothing more to Abram than what the plan intended from the start, which is that she is an extension of Sarai - meaning Sarai is free to deal with Hagar as she sees fit to deal with her. Abram was not going to interfere. Upon hearing this, Sarai apparently went to Hagar and made it clear Hagar was going to gain nothing in continuing the attitude she had. She was Sarai's maid and nothing more! Hagar was to take the role of being a surrogate with humility; obey Sarai in all things; and the fact she was carrying Abram's child changed nothing in the matter. The idea Sarai mistreated Hagar or was demanding more from her than was culturally expected of any servant in her place, which would give Hagar a legitimate reason to run away from the household, is not justified according to the following verses.

Verse 6 tells us Hagar chose not to yield but run away from the situation. As she does, verse 7 says an angel of God met with her at a fountain of water in the northern desert region of the Sinai Peninsula. Hagar may have been thinking she could make the trek all the way back to her homeland of Egypt, but the angel asks her in verse 8 to basically think about where she came from and where she thought she was going? It is important that the angel starts this by addressing Hagar as Sarai's maid, because he was pointing out the fact her running had not changed that fact. Hagar was a servant woman and making it anywhere was not going to change that, especially considering the culture of the day. Without a family of some kind, she was sure to never rise above this position, hence, his question about where she thought she was going. In reminding Hagar she belonged to Sarai, he's telling her that she still had a home and she needed to think about that before she took another step!

Hagar doesn't seem to take this in the fullness of its meaning and tells the angel what he already clearly knew, which was that Sarai was the very one she was attempting to get away from. Verse 9 is where the angel confirms to us that Sarai had not truly mistreated her or asked more than what was expected of Hagar. The simple fact Sarai may not have dealt with Hagar with the kindness, appreciation, and/or respect Hagar felt she deserved after conceiving a child with Abram, did not change the fact Hagar needed to return and take her place as the servant to Sarai she had been. However, in verse 10 the angel goes on to explain to Hagar that the cultural view of the world didn't really matter, and it didn't even matter what the future held for Hagar. You see, her child was, as she obviously took great pride in knowing, a child of Abram. As such, the child she was going to give birth to would go on to be more than just another servant or underling in the house of Abram. This information was more important than Hagar could grasp at the time, because according to God's plan, Abram and Sarai would have a child together. When that happened it would seem Hagar's child would be not just

irrelevant in being the heir Abram needed, but the true child of only a concubine!

Hagar is also told her child would be multiplied beyond number, meaning he would be the father of a whole separate group of people who would turn out to be a nation (or nations) in their own right. This shows us something very important in that aside from how the world looked or still looks at things, God looks at people. God looked at Hagar as the individual person we each are. Being no respecter of persons, God's heart was touched by what a tough situation Hagar was in. Because of this, Hagar was assured she would give birth to this child she was carrying and it would be a son. She was also given the name she was to call this son, which was "Ishmael," meaning "God hears." This is no trivial point made in verse 11, again because of the culture of the day. Hagar, especially if she was to go back to submit herself as a servant to Sarai, would have no right to name the child she gave birth to. This is not to say she couldn't suggest what she wanted his name to be, but Sarai was in her full right to name the child whatever she wanted. Beyond that, Abram had the right to change the name even from anything Sarai had chosen. This means the lowest person in this naming matter was Hagar, yet the angel tells her what to name her son. This was just another sign Hagar was being treated in God's eyes as the equal human she was regardless of the fact that among the culture she lived, the right path for Hagar was still to go back and remain a part of Abram's house in the same position she had served!

One more interesting fact about this naming issue, in contrast to the idea many have about Sarai treating her badly, is that "Ishmael" does become the child's name. Verse 15 of this chapter tells us Abram gives this name to the child, and whether this is because Hagar had told Sarai and/or Abram the angel had told her this, or Abram had been told this by God, is not a fact we are given. However, the fact we are not shown where God tells Abram the name, would indicate Hagar was not as disrespected as she perceived herself to be, and both Sarai, along with Abram, believed her story and/or simply felt she had the right to choose the name as a mother initially had the right to do!

Going into verse 12, we see the angel also gives Hagar further information about what kind of person Ishmael would be, and in this he is not just describing Ishmael but the entire people he would go on to be the father of. Hagar is told Ishmael would be a wild man. This is not that he would be some crazy person, but a fact that would actually make them a real thorn in the side of men's attempt to create a world of unity. Ishmael and his seed would be people not easily melded into the population of the world. They would value their individuality in ways that would serve to put them at odds with other people in the world, while they also would be in constant contact with much of the world because they would become masters of the trade routes.

The trade thing has a lot to do with why the angel also

points out that Ishmael's seed would live among his brethren. This is not just to suggest that he would live among the populations that came from Lot and Abram in general, but, again, the entire world. They being independent minded would not lead to them all going off to some far corner of the globe where no one else was and/or wanted to be in order to live in isolation from the world's population. They would stay among the world population, and even in the region we call the Middle East they would not settle down to form nations with more designated land borders for a very, very long time. They would live as some Arabian tribes still live today in spite of national borders that might have existed. They would live in tents and be nomadic, traveling around to the best places for their animals and their lives in general. This being nomadic is also what led many of them into the trade business. They had no trouble with travel, and their moving around brought them into contact with various people from the very start.

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that over the centuries, in spite of their crossing the various empires' territories to do trade and be nomadic in lifestyle, the Arabian population would never come under the true control of any of the empires. There is even the fact that this individuality thing would turn out to be true among themselves, and it's very interesting to consider when one looks at the history of how centuries later, even after the empires had fallen and man's ideas about worshipping that beast were in a bit of a free-fall, the religion of Islam arises. In many ways, one could say the religion of Islam really owes its reason for being to the fear the Arabian tribes had trouble cooperating. Due to world circumstances it was becoming more necessary they do so in order not to be swept away in the shifting political circumstances, especially after the fall of the Roman empire. Quarreling as, and even among tribes they may have simply been lost one by one, but Mohammad's teachings, for all the strife it originally caused, turned out to be a very binding tie between these tribes as a people. We, of course, have the benefit of knowing history, and one can see how even this never brought the individuality thing to a halt as the religion has broken into distinctly different groups between which conflict still exists.

Now, in all this I'm in no way suggesting that it was God's will for a religion which has seen and brought so much violence into the world, be formed. The angel is simply laying out the facts of what Ishmael's seed would be like, and from there nature took its course among them, just as it did with the general population after the confounding of the languages at the Tower of Babel. In the end, we see that what the angel said was all very true, and while Ishmael's descendants would be nomadic, they would very much grow to cover and dominate the area south of the promised land while still populating a great deal of the Middle East over all. There certainly can be no argument as to the fact they became a people of tremendous number!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

of course, was like other property in that the price to buy the individual out of servitude would be highest when there were many years before the jubilee, and the amount incrementally lower as you got closer to the jubilee. Basically, the individual would be working off the price paid for them, just as if they were a hired servant; and those not of the nation needed to understand they should agree to a price on the basis of being required to release the Israeli in the jubilee year. The chosen nation was also to see that their brethren were not mistreated by those not of the nation during their time of service to them. Again, all this has to do with the fact everything in Israel actually belongs to God and no one else.

Next, God would turn to an emphasis of the second commandment out of the Ten Commandments as it relates to the promised land. While Israel was not to worship idols at all, there were to be no idols set up in the land by anyone for any reason! Worship, even of God and his ways, was not to be done by setting up shrines or anything of the kind. God's land and the people on it were to observe the Sabbaths as the Law required, and the temple, along with its ordinances, was to be central to everything the people did in religious practice and worship of God. God follows this with the promise that if the people would obey and observe the commandments He was giving them, none of the things that might worry them about running short on food would be a concern. The fields, trees, vineyards, etc. would yield fruit in an abundance. This would provide stores of food that, at all times, would cover the wait between harvest, planting, and growing time for crops. There would be no famine or shortage.

If they would follow God they would also live in safety and peace from both people as well as the dangerous animals in the land. It was God's will to bless Israel as they joined Him in doing the work He had established them to do. War would not come into the land, and God's blessings would expand Israel's population. As it did and the need for more land came about, Israel's enemies would fall before them so their land holdings could increase. This would happen even when their enemies greatly outnumbered them! God desired to bless them with such an abundance it would force them to sell off or dispose of old stores of food, and the like, just to make room for all the fresh new goods they would produce. God wanted them to follow His commandments so He could maintain His temple in their midst. God wanted to dwell among them and be their God for they are His people! This was the whole point of bringing them out of Egypt and breaking them loose from servitude to any other people in the world.

This then is followed by the contrast as to what it would mean not to abide by God's commandments. In not following, they would have just the opposite. The chosen nation would not have God's protection against sickness and sorrow. They would not see their crops produce an abundance, and planting seed would even be a waste of time, as their enemies would steal anything they did produce. God would also give their enemies victory over them and allow them to be subjects of other people in the world. Israel could also end up in such fear about always having enemies after them, they would feel the need to be on the run even when no enemy was pursuing them. If seeing these things coming upon them did not convince them they had fallen out of the correct ways of God, then God would increase the

intensity of these truths in their lives until there was nothing left, and everything they tried to do would be a waste of time and effort until they no longer had strength to even try anymore.

God goes on to emphasize He would increase their suffering by sending the wild animals to attack them, killing their children and their animals, making it unsafe to even travel across the land or have the number of people it would take to populate the land. These attacks and resulting effects would serve to continually decrease the number of people the nation consisted of. Walking contrary to God's ways instead of turning back to them would only continue to make things worse, as God would equal their being contrary to Him by being contrary to them until the cycle of breaking them down was complete. This repeating of "seven times" was a warning that God would go all the way in doing this, and there was no reason to believe it would one day just pass and God would give up and leave them alone. Enemies would continue to raid and kill them. If they attempted to shut themselves up into fortified cities that could protect them, natural pestilence would destroy them from within, and they still would find no safety from their enemies.

Food supplies would eventually run so low that there wouldn't even be supplies to ration to each family, but several would work together to prepare what little they had and divide the finished product leaving so little for each individual that no one would have enough. This would get so bad that efforts to sacrifice food for the adults so at least the children could have enough would not see any success. God would see to it that all they worked for in the worship of false gods would be destroyed. Turning from God to build and worship false gods would leave no legacy of their accomplishments, as their accomplishments in what we might call the field of religion would be buried with them as they passed away. God would be willing to continue this until all their cities were destroyed and their land leveled in a way that even their enemies would be amazed at the degree of destruction the land had suffered!

The chosen nation would also be driven off the promised land instead of specifically protected in it. They would be chased by their enemies and forced to seek refuge in all different places across the earth. This desolation and vacancy of the land would serve to allow the promised land the rest the Law commanded Israel to give it, but refused to do so, thinking they knew better or didn't trust God in allowing it to be. The chosen nation would also find no real peace living in the new lands they would flee to, as everywhere they ended up would be a place where they would have enemies. This would be true to the degree that even when they did not truly have an enemy after them, they would live in fear of everything that might even indicate danger was coming. There would be no hiding in these lands as many would die, and many communities of the chosen nation would not survive. Those that did would live among those who hated them and/or never understand them, leaving those of the chosen nation to long for the days they had given up by refusing to walk in God's ways when they had the chance to be on a land of their own!

God, however, is not going to ignore those who are willing to recognize and confess that they are where they are because of past generation's sin as well as their own. If, recognizing they cannot, under their current circumstances

devoid of land and temple, fully follow the Law in all its ordinances, would at least humble themselves before God, He will remember the covenant He made in creating the chosen nation as well as the promised land itself. While the land would still be allowed its rest, God says the process would begin to reverse. In spite of all the nation's sin, it would always be God's will to restore the nation in equal steps to the nation's desire to take steps back toward Him. Humility for sin and the effort to take the opportunities God gave them to follow the Law in those ways they could, would give the nation the opportunity to step out a process of regaining what they needed to fully observe all these ordinances by being back on the land and having the temple in place. God would help them through each step needed, and at anytime they made it back to the fullness of the Law, they would again receive the fullness of its blessings!

God would end all this by making it clear this is the covenant He is making with the nation. Its not just a prosperity promise, but a true contract where both sides take on obligations. God said what He would do if the nation fulfilled its side of things, as well as what He would do if they didn't. From there, God moves to a very related subject in that people will often make a commitment to give themselves or certain possessions to God, which is a contract of a more personal nature. Individuals may make these for various reasons, even without stopping to think about if it is truly feasible or the right thing to do in the end. God expects us to keep our promises, but at the same time He is a God of grace Who will not put more on us than we can bear. Thus, He gives stipulations for dealing with how to keep one's word and yet redeem ourselves for not being perfect in our choices.

The first of these would deal with promising a life to God's service. For this, a value would be set according to the age category a person was in, so that money could be given to God in place of the actual time and labor if that was desired. These amounts would be measured in shekels of silver, each shekel weight needing to be as the shekel is considered to be for temple service. For those twenty to sixty years old, a male was to give fifty shekels and females were to give thirty shekels. The amount would go down for younger people who are, most likely, promised to God by their parents. From five years old up to twenty, males were to give twenty shekels and ten for a female. Children were not to be taken from their mother younger than a month, so the youngest category was one month of age up to five years old, and the amount would be five for a male and three shekels for a female. God demonstrates to us respect for those of greater age in that for those sixty and above, males were to bring fifteen shekels and ten for a female. For someone too poor to pay these standard amounts, God allows the person to come to the priest for an evaluation of what was reasonable considering their finances, and the priest would set the amount accordingly.

In the case of a person vowing to give an animal that was of the category used for sacrifice on the altar, that specific animal was to be given. It could not be traded for another regardless of if you wanted to give a better or a worse one. If a person wanted to give another animal in its place, both animals were to be given. If an animal was from a category not allowed

for offering on the altar, that animal was given a value by the priest, and if the person wanted to keep the animal, they could give the priest's value plus a fifth of that value for the animal. If the gift to God was a house, the priest was to determine the value of the house, and if the person wanted to give money in its place, again the priest's set value plus a fifth of that would need to be given.

Land was much the same, but it was valued by its ability to produce a crop of barley. A yearly value of fifty shekels for every specific volume of barley was to be the standard. This estimation of value was also to consider the jubilee, because just as in selling any land, it would return to the owner in that year. The land's full value as it would be in the jubilee year would be determined, and then each year (if any) that had passed since the last jubilee would be subtracted from that value. Again, if the individual desires to give the value of the field instead of the field itself, they were to increase the priest's set value by adding a fifth to determine the gift. If that individual does not give money to redeem it, or sells his right to the field to another person before the jubilee, the field can never be replaced by offering money, and the jubilee does not return it to the original family. That land will always be considered a possession of the priests. If an individual promises God land that they have bought but which will return to another family in the jubilee, the individual shall instead pay the value the priest determines for the land, again taking into consideration the years remaining until the next jubilee. In this case, the land would then return to its original owner in the jubilee just as it would ordinarily do. All these stipulations end with the specification that all values determined were to be based on the temple shekel, which was of a specific weight!

Lastly, it is made clear, no first born animal is to be a vow because they already belong to God according to an earlier stipulation. (Ex. 13:11-16) Most unclean animals could be kept by giving their value plus a fifth, but if not, the priest was to sell them to someone else for the value he had set. Then we are given an overriding stipulation to all these vows which concerns taking vows seriously! If a person puts forth a vow with the commitment it is unbreakable, there is no changing one's mind or turning back. Items become God's and can't be redeemed with money nor sold by the priests, and living things are committed to God's service until death! Tithing is also never a vow but part of the nation's contract with God, and any tithe item a person wishes to keep must be replaced by giving its value plus the fifth. The tithe of herd animals comes from passing one's herds through to be counted and every tenth animal given to God. This was to be completely random, the good with the bad. None of these could be redeemed, and, again, if the person wanted to give another animal in place of the tithe animal, both animals were to be given.

These are the Laws and the contract the chosen nation was agreeing to, and which God laid out to Moses right at the start when Israel was first at Mount Sinai.

Let's stay in God's Word!