



*“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*

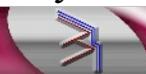
Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

Again in this segment, we will cover ground in our verse by verse look at Genesis much of which we have covered in overall discussions we have had in our last few segments. However, in our verse by verse look we have made it to Genesis chapter 12 verse 1, and that's where we specifically want to start this time. The first three verses of chapter 12 are very important to pay specific attention to because they are the actual words of God's calling of Abram. As we discussed last time, these words are confirmed by Stephen in Acts chapter 7 as being given to Abram before he left the Mesopotamian Valley to go to Haran with his father Terah and nephew Lot. All that being covered, it is now time to look at the calling itself!

Verse 1 tells us Abram was told the specific things he was to leave behind in order to accomplish God's plan for his life. Those things are: first, his country.

God wanted no dispute over the happenings of Abram's life and the eventual nations which would spring from him. There's a lot of talk about how God wanted Abram to leave behind the paganistic practices the people of his country observed. However, we should do this with the clear view that God wanted this not for the sake of taking Abram to a clean place where only The One True God was worshiped without pagan corruption. In truth, no such place - of at least any size - was known to exist, and that has a lot to do with why God was calling Abram. If anything, God was taking Abram to a place where things were even worse than his home country. After the family line that was suppose to develop into God's chosen nation came to full, God would take the family even deeper into the belly of the arising beast by placing them in Egypt. God did all this because it was much easier to stand among strangers and say,



we don't have the same practices of worship you have, than it is to say this among your own native people. This is true even if many of their practices are not really that different; and because all the world's false religion practices have their roots in what was started at the Tower of Babel, they likely were not. However, God would, in later times, allow Israel to be mistreated in Egypt, which should have made the people not just willing but desirous to leave for a land of their own!

All that being very much a point of discussion about this commandment for Abram to leave his country, there is also another very important point in taking Abram out of Mesopotamia which does not get talked about. We should all remember Nimrod and the earlier verses about him being the first to truly start a kingdom. Where did this happen? In the middle to upper parts of this same valley Abram lived in. If God had used Abram to start a chosen nation right where he was or anywhere not outside the realm of this valley, history would certainly have seen God's chosen nation as rising from that which Nimrod had begun. This in no way would have been a good thing! The beast described in Revelation as having seven heads, one which had a deadly wound, is the result of what Nimrod started. The head with the deadly wound is his kingdom itself; and the wound - the confounding of man's language which took place there. The Assyrians rose from this same region of the world,

and were the re-arisal; thus, the second head of the beast Nimrod started. (Rev. 13:1-4) Nineveh was even the Assyrian capital, which is one of the specific cities Nimrod is credited with building! (Gen. 10:8-12)

God wanted it to be clear that what He was offering through His chosen nation was not what He dismantled by confounding the language of men! This is especially true in light of the fact God will eventually be the first, through the man Jesus Christ, to truly establish a one world empire since the confounding, for this will happen upon Jesus' return to this world. (Zech. 14:1-11) Man chose to take the path of resurrecting the ideas of one world government. Man is the one who has and continues to insist this idea is the hope of mankind. When God established Israel as a nation, for all the laws God gave, they did not even have an earthly king. This is because from the creation of this world, the only True King of it was and is God Himself. He is The Alpha and Omega, The Beginning and The End. (Rev. 22:6-15) No man who is not God will ever be allowed to be the king over all men, and The True King of this world is Who Israel was to directly serve! (Judg. 8:22-23, I Sam. 8:6-9)

While it is true all the world will someday serve Jesus as King sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem, it will happen because this is the path man insisted on, not because it was what God

wanted to do in the beginning. Also, the fact man does not really want one world government for the reasons he says he does, will be proven by turning to the closing chapters of Revelation, which show us even with God sitting on the throne of this world and administering perfect justice among men, man will still be unhappy. This is what brings existence, as we know it here, to an ultimate end. (Rev. 20:1-10) In no way did God want to begin the story of building a chosen nation in a place where it would look like the re-araisal or continuance of what Nimrod started. Thus, God would order Abram to first and foremost leave his country!

The second item God would specify is that Abram leave his kindred. This could again be wrapped into that thought God wanted Abram to leave the pagan practices of his family relations. However, this has a more predominant point to it. That point I believe is that distinct genetic marker God was creating in the chosen nation, which we have talked much about in earlier segments. Yes, it is true that God inter-tied Abram's family to set this marker, but while the idea of taking wives out of the family Abram left behind in Mesopotamia was very important to the first generations of this family, that would come to an end. If God had begun the process of starting Abram's line which would lead to the chosen people

there among Abram's kindred, the resulting marriages would likely have never made Israel distinguishable from the general population of Mesopotamia. Even if all things had of worked out on the marriage level, leaving their kindred would have been much harder to do once there was an entire group developed, such as Jacob's family.

Not only would it have been hard for his sons to leave what they considered home and live in a strange land, but there's that point again about how it might have looked like Israel was nothing more than a transplant group from the families of Shem into the territory of Ham's family. By calling Abram away from his kindred, Abram was able to establish a presence in the land of Canaan that, by the end of even his wife's life, had already been easily accepted. Abram was known not to be one of them, but accepted as no invading or infringing group of foreigners. (Gen. 23) The fact Abram knew it might be too much of a temptation for Isaac to go back and seek a wife in Mesopotamia for himself, is why Abram (by then named Abraham) was so adamant his servant go, and not take Isaac, to get a wife from there! (Gen. 24:1-9) By the time Jacob goes back, even after spending several years with Abram's original family group, there comes a day when Jacob longs to go back to Canaan, which by then was a place he considered

home. (Gen. 31:1-18)

This was even in spite of the fact Jacob still feared Esau's wrath! (Gen. 32:3-12) Also, Jacob's wives were from Mesopotamia, and almost all his sons were born there, but they all knew Canaan was their true family home. Later it would even take drastic measures of preparing a path for this family, which would take place through Joseph being sold into Egypt, and a great famine on top of that, which left Israel no choice but to move out of Canaan, to get the family to Egypt. All these events would go hand in hand to create not just that beginning genetic marker that Israel needed to be a distinct group, but also just enough intermarriages with others to distinguish them even more, all the while establishing for Israel a land they knew as home. Only God could, in such a few short generations, have accomplished so much on all these levels!

The third command of God to Abram was to leave his father's house. Now, I have spent a great deal of time in this series making the argument that Abram's father knew of God's command and promise for his son, along with the belief his father desired to help him accomplish it. However, it was still crucial that Abram eventually leave even his father's house. First off, is a point we have touched on before. Just as Noah found grace in the eyes of The Lord, God chose Abram for this task;

but in the house of Terah, Abram was not the eldest son. This had its bad points but also some very good ones. The bad points we have already talked about before, for the most part. These are things such as the fact Abram was not by tradition allowed to simply rise up and do what he pleased. His elder brother would inherit the family leadership, and without the actions of Terah to set Abram free from this, Abram would have to have rebelled against it, or Abram would simply be one part of a family or tribal group, not the father of one. At the same time, this has its advantages in that Abram also had no obligations!

As we talked about with Terah, he had responsibilities, not just because he was the leader of the family, but specifically in that one of his sons had died after being old enough to have started a family himself. Terah was responsible for those Haran left behind. Being the head of a household is not just the power to lead others in the family, but the responsibility to make sure everyone in that family was and is cared for. This is a large load which Abram did not have to carry, and that was as much, if not more, of a positive as it was a negative to having not been the elder. Abram could leave his father's house, and God wanted him to because, again, he was not to enter Canaan as a representative of Terah's house or even a transplant of Shem's family group. Abram was to have full autonomy as a

What About God's Chosen People?

Part IV

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.”

We ended our last segment by getting into our third breakdown question of the main question we are dealing with here, which is the question of, are those people we know today as the Jews really the chosen nation God promised to bring through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? In getting into this I made what I believe is a major point in this argument, which is that the Jews are fulfilling the prophesy that God would one day gather His nation back together. In doing this, we talked a bit about the Holocaust and the Jewish fight to reestablish a nation in the land of Israel where Jews could freely emigrate. All this also has deep ramifications to something else we talked about in our last segment, which is the fact God sent Jesus at a time before the nation of Israel fell apart to the point Jesus could not have done what was necessary to show Himself as The Messiah. The nation of Israel is being gathered back together for much that same reason today. Jesus is to return, and there needs to be that prophesied place where His chosen nation resides for us once again, to see He truly is The Messiah!

Now, to truly answer our question of why those we know as Jews are that chosen nation, there are two main things we must

understand and look at. First, we must understand there was and is a point in what God wanted and wants to accomplish through His nation. This cannot be accomplished through allowing man to simply make his own choices while God stands back and takes whatever He can get out of them. Thus, God must interact all along the way to shape, preserve, and use those who are willing to follow His plan. The second thing is to go back and look at the history that shows us this interaction. We do this by studying the history of how God's nation became “the Jews,” which some would insist does not truly encompass all of Israel. In doing this, we will clearly see it is very true, the Jews do not necessarily encompass all of Israel, but they do represent God's chosen nation!

The truth is that the two things we need to understand and look at go hand in hand; and to see them clearly, we can, and really must, go all the way back to Abraham. In doing this, we see what has been a main theme in every part of this writing: which is the understanding that out of all the world, God chose a specific people to be a chosen nation. However, even this was not done by God gathering a group of people together, but by choosing one man to get it all started! That man's name was originally Abram, and God would call him out of his homeland and away from his father's house to go into that

land we now know as Israel. There he would dwell among strangers, who at the time lived on the land. These people would be strangers in that after the Tower of Babel and the confounding of the language that took place there, the world divided first and foremost along the family lines of Noah's three sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth. Abram was of the family of Shem, and the land God called him to sojourn in was held by people descendent from Ham.

Abram would be a stranger among them without having much of any of his family line around. However, God would change Abram's name to Abraham and promise that his descendants - not those of Ham's family - would one day be the possessors of this land. In this, we see God choosing a man from among men to be the father, not just of God's chosen nation, but of many nations! Abraham would have no children through his wife Sarah for many years, and it seemed to the couple that if God's promise was going to come true, they would have to find a way for Abraham to have a son. To do this, they would use Sarah's handmaiden as a surrogate. Abraham would take this woman named Hagar, and with her have a son named Ishmael. In spite of the fact Ishmael was a direct son of Abraham, God made it clear Ishmael was not the one God would choose to create His chosen nation. Nonetheless, Ishmael would be the father of those we know today as the Arabs. (Gen. 17:15-22) In this, we see God was not just turning things over to the hands of men, but was directly directing what He wanted according to His will.

When the time was right, God would miraculously open Sarah's womb at a time when both she and Abraham were considered way too old to have a child; and together her and Abraham would have a son named Isaac. After Sarah's death, Abraham would take a new wife named Keturah. Together they would have six sons. (Gen. 25:1-6) Again, all these later sons would be direct sons of Abraham and become nations, but none of them the one God chose to be His chosen nation. Isaac, the only son of Abraham and Sarah, alone would be the son of Abraham to be chosen of God for the task!

Isaac's life serves as an even better example of the point I'm trying to get at. Isaac would have a wife given to him by God's direction, and with no surrogates or later marriages to talk about, this couple would have two sons together. In fact, these two boys would be twins. The oldest, by just a few seconds, was named Esau, and the younger Jacob. (Gen. 25:24-28) In spite of the fact these two brothers were both born to Isaac and his wife Rebekah, only one would be chosen to go forward with God's plan to establish a chosen nation. On top of this, it would not be the elder son as tradition would dictate. Why would this happen? Because Esau did not care for the things of God; and Jacob, while by far not a perfect man, would! Thus, Esau, while also becoming a nation later known as the Edomites, would be left out of the direct plan to build a chosen nation. Jacob would go on to have his name changed to the name we primarily know God's chosen nation by - "Israel." (Gen. 32:24-30)

This is our first really good example of the fact God was not just interested in establishing a chosen nation out of just anyone, nor was He establishing it out of all those who were simply of the correct bloodline. Again, God was interested first and foremost in those who desired to be part of His plan. Now, we can in no way make the argument that everyone who ever was and is considered a part of God's chosen nation was/is God fearing and completely sold out to what God wanted to do. If that had been possible, the nation would have been completely successful in everything God wanted it to accomplish. However, these examples tell us something about the argument people make when they say those who are called Jews are not really, or do not entirely represent the nation God established to hold His written Word. To continue seeing this, we can continue down the historical time line.

Jacob (eventually renamed Israel) would go on to have twelve sons. These sons would actually come through four different women, the details of why and how we will not take the space to cover here. However, as you follow the story, you find Israel as a nation consists of twelve tribes, one derived from each of these twelve sons, and thus, named according to their names. Even in this, there would be one exception, and that was Joseph. Joseph was the one son of Jacob who was really sold out to the plan of God, and this would make a person think, out of all the brothers he would be the one who would really be something special. Well, he was, but not in the way some might have guessed. Instead

of becoming one of the tribes of Israel, Joseph would be used very specifically to accomplish and bring about the right circumstances for Jacob's family to truly grow from just a large family into a cohesive nation of specific people. It would be Joseph's two sons who would go on to receive the honor of having tribes in Israel which bore their names. These tribes would be considered half tribes, but considering God eventually separated out the tribe of Levi for the priestly service, both these half tribes would really go on to take their place as just tribes in Israel.

In this, we see again the fact God had a plan and was not simply going by what man chose to do or came up with. After Jacob's family takes time in Egypt to develop into a true nation of people, God would call a man, out of the tribe of Levi, whose life had been specifically directed to make him the perfect man for the job of leading all the nation of Israel out of Egypt and back to that land God had called Abraham to many long years past. This was to fully fulfill the promise God had made to Abraham that his descendants would one day be the possessors of the land, instead of those from Ham's family who then possessed it. I say, fully fulfill the promise, because descendants of Abraham through sons such as Ishmael and Esau, already possessed portions of the land which lay adjacent to that portion God wanted to give to His chosen nation. This fact along with the fact Abraham's nephew Lot, who was originally taken by Abraham into the land, also became two separate nations possessing adjacent land. Israel was truly

coming out of Egypt to a land now surrounded by family!

Of course, the man God called to lead Israel was named Moses, and anyone who has read the Bible very much at all is familiar with him, or at least his name. God would use Moses to lead Israel out into the peninsula which lies between Egypt and the land God promised to Abraham. There we would see another story that really speaks to our point about God directing, not just accepting whatever man did just because they were of the right bloodline. It would be in this desert region of Sinai that God would go on to prove to Israel He was not just capable of freeing them from being Pharaoh's slaves, but continually care for them even under the harshest of circumstances. God would provide drinkable water where there was none, and food for this great multitude of people in a place where there was little to none to be had. The Bible even records that through all the years Israel had wandered in the wilderness, even their clothing had failed to deteriorate as physical circumstances dictate they should have! (Deut. 8:1-6) God was truly showing that earthly circumstances aside, He was going to bring about His chosen nation, and the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

At the same time, God did need people willing to follow; and not long after leaving Egypt there came a day, when out in this wilderness Israel was brought to a mountain where God would speak to them directly. This was the beginning of God laying out His written Word, which He would commit to His chosen nation. The

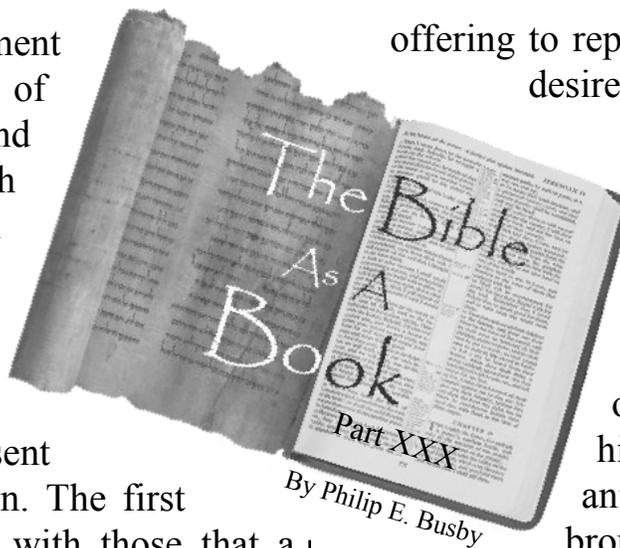
people were scared to hear God's voice for themselves, and eventually Moses was called up into the mountain to commune with God about how this would all move forward and come together. (Ex. 20:18-21) Moses was in that mountain for a long time, too long, according to the people's thinking. Thus, they came to Moses' brother Aaron and said, "we don't know what happened to this Moses who led us out of Egypt into this wilderness. As far as we know he's dead and never coming back." They believed under these circumstances they needed new leadership and a binding tie as a nation. What they chose for this was a common human practice - they developed a religion.

To do this, they broke off the gold they had and gave it to Aaron so he could make them an idol, which was an object they could see and touch. This idol was in the form of a calf, and when Israel saw it, they said, "this is the god which led us out of Egypt and gave us our freedom." Thus, they worshiped this idol; and because idols can't really talk or do anything, it gave them exactly what all people forming false religions really desire - the freedom to make up the rules of life in whatever way they choose. The people began to party and have a good time as they pleased instead of caring about the righteousness God desired from them. As this takes place, God tells Moses to get down out of the mountain, so God's anger could consume the people for their actions without Moses being taken along with them. Moses did not, at the time, know what the people had done, but he wondered how God's promise to establish a chosen nation was going to happen if God

What About God's Chosen People? continued on pg. 17

In our last segment we began our overview of the book of Leviticus, and that took us through chapter 4 verse 12. In these verses we are going over the sin offerings, which are required offerings for when one needs to represent their repentance from sin. The first category of these starts with those that a priest should bring if they commit sin without realizing it, and then it is brought to their attention or they themselves realize they sinned in taking certain actions. This brings us to verse 13 of chapter 4, and that is where we will begin this segment!

The next sin offering covered is, again, for when a sin is committed without intent or knowledge, but is to be offered when the action taken comes to be recognized as a sinful action. This second of these is for when the congregation of God's chosen nation as a whole are guilty of the sin. These could be a number of things; but examples might be things such as being forgetful of certain parts of God's Law which the entire congregation failed to perform - such as if a feast was neglected, or the holding of a prescribed Sabbath was not observed. Things forgotten about how to perform certain representations, or the following of an ordinance of everyday law that was not being recognized or observed by the nation, would be held to the account of the entire congregation. When the mistake of what they had done or failed to do was realized, they would bring a sin



offering to represent they, as a people, desired to ask God's forgiveness and get back on track with the job God called them to do.

For this, like the sin offering for a priest, the highest order of the animals allowed to be brought would be needed, and that would be a young bullock. As with the burnt offerings of the cattle, the bullock was to be brought inside the gate of the tabernacle's courtyard, and there the elders of the people would be the ones to lay their hands upon the head of the animal as it was killed. This, of course, represented all the people in the same way a single person would put their hand on the animal's head to represent themselves. The blood would be collected and, again, as with a priest, the blood would first be brought inside the Holy Place to be sprinkled seven times before the veil, which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies where the ark was kept. The blood would also again be placed on the horns of the altar of incense.

For a priest, this has to do with his desire, as one who comes into this place, to receive God's forgiveness and completion in his life and for his job. This was done for the congregation, because the reason a priest goes into the Holy Place to do his work is to continually represent the people of God, before God. Thus, the congregation was also asking for God's forgiveness of their sin and His completion in their lives to be the people

God had called them as a nation to be! The blood was placed on the horns of the altar of incense because it is on this altar that incense was burned continually to represent the prayers of God's people coming directly before God. The remainder of the blood was then poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, as it was with other offerings. Because this is a sin offering, the fat would once again be burned upon the altar, and the remainder of the bullock would be taken out of the camp to be burned in that clean place as discussed when talking about the offering for a priest.

The next sin offering is a continuance of the sin through ignorance offerings, and this one is for when the sin is committed by a leader of the people. Now, because Israel was originally given no king, for God was to be their King, (I Sam. 8:6-7) this was for a leader of many different types: such as an elder of a tribe, a judge of the people, etc. To represent the fact these people - which we might call governmental personnel - were actually servants of the congregation and not the other way around, they did not bring the same offering as a priest or the congregation, nor was it treated exactly the same. Their offering would be the next step down from the most costly sacrifice of offering a bullock. They were to offer a young goat, which was a male, and, again, a prime specimen. It would be taken to the place on the side of the altar where this category of animal would be brought for a burnt offering, and as with the others, the leader would place their hand on the animal's head as it was killed.

Now, for this offering there would be another change from the other sin offerings

discussed already, as well as the burnt offerings. Instead of taking the blood into the Holy Place, or sprinkling it round about the altar of burnt offering, the blood would be placed on the horns at the corners of the altar of burnt offering. This is due to the fact these horns were placed on the corners of both altars as a handhold, of sorts. These were in no way meant to be handles by which the altar could be carried, but a place which represented something to hold onto. No man was to touch the throne of God, which on this earth was represented by the Ark of the Covenant; because no man, until Jesus, was worthy to come that close to the direct presence of God or touch those things His presence had touched. (Lev. 16:1-2) Only the priests were to go into the Holy Place where the altar of incense was, but that was as close as men got, with the exception that once a year the High Priest was to go beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. The fact this was very dangerous is one of the reasons the priest's garments had bells around the hem. (Ex. 28:33-35) If he stopped moving, it would be known to those outside that he had not survived the task!

Thus, the horns on the altars were the closest thing to a place for man to have something to hold onto which was implemented into the design of the tabernacle's elements. That being true, even these horns were not really something that could be literally held by a person coming to the temple, though it is recorded as being done on occasion. (I Kin. 1:50-53, 2:28-29) This was in no small part because the continual fire that burned on the altar would make them too hot to literally do much more than touch, much less hold onto. The point

being that even in taking hold of these horns one would be reminded of the impossibility for our flesh to stand before God and live. Because of this, the sin offerings would have blood from them, which represented the life of the one bringing the offering, placed, by the priest, upon these horns. This represented the price of our physical death, which it would take to truly stand before God one day in all His glory to be judged for our actions.

For the priest, the blood would be placed on the horns of the altar of incense. The same was true for the congregation; but for a leader among the people, the blood would be placed on the horns of the altar of burnt sacrifice to once again represent their position as being among and to the people. The rest of the goat's blood would be poured at the base of the altar, as with other sacrifices. The fat would be burned on the altar, and then we see the simple wording that the priest would make atonement for the sin. This is also different from the sin offerings of the priest or congregation, because those offerings would be burned in a clean place; but what this wording means about the priest making atonement for the leader is not explained until later. The reason this is simply stated here in such a vague way is that this is where the process of offering a sin offering ended for the person bringing the offering. The rest would be handled by the priest as he went before God. This represents the fact there is only so much an individual can do, which is the willingness to give one's life to God, and the rest is something only God can take care of. The truth of this representation would be

fulfilled by Jesus ultimately coming to provide Himself as a Lamb to take away the sins of the world! (John 1:29)

The last of the sin offerings specifically for sin committed out of ignorance would be those brought when it was a person of the general congregation who had committed the sin. For this, it would be very similar to what was brought by a leader in Israel. The big difference would be that in this case the animal was to be a female, not a male! This is because once you get out from the representative positions, such as the priest who represented those who are responsible for standing before the presence of God to do His service continually, and those things such as the congregation as a whole, which consisted of both the priests and the common man called to the responsibility of God's representative Law, there was only what we might call the civilian population. This was about individuals living their lives and doing the jobs they do day by day, like the general population of the rest of the world. This includes both secular leaders, and the individuals who comprised most of God's chosen nation.

The leaders would bring a male because they still represented a position of authority or what is better described as responsibility. However, when it comes to the individuals not standing in any of these positions, you are talking about the representation Jesus used many times when describing those whom He was going to take with Him to the place He promised to prepare for those who sought God. That

representation is that of being the bride of Christ! (Matt. 9:14-15, 25:1-13 John 3:25-30) There are other things in the Law that represent this about God's people, but this is one of the first and most prominent in the Law. Common people would bring a female, and again, these would not be the most costly sacrifice, which would come from the cattle. This should not be confused as being because the common person was of lower importance or value, but to represent that all of us as individuals are truly unable to be the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. All we can give is what we are, and fall upon the mercy of God to provide Himself a Lamb for the ultimate cleansing of our sin through The Messiah!

The common man was, for this purpose, given the choice of bringing a prime specimen from the goats or sheep. Both a goat or a sheep was to be handled the same, in that they would be brought to the side of the altar and the person's hand placed on its head as it was killed. The blood would once again be handled in the manner it was for a leader's sacrifice. The collected blood would be placed on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and the remainder poured out at the altar's base. The fat of either of these animals would be handled and burned upon the altar with the same differences between the animals as existed for a peace offering. Once again, we do not see the full explanation of the remaining process, just the wording that the priest would make an atonement for the person's sin.

The next category of offerings also deals with sin, but they are called trespass offerings. This, because the greatest

commandment is to love God with everything you are, and the second, which is like unto the first, is to love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two hang all the other Laws and words of God! (Matt. 22:34-40) Sinning through ignorance has to do with the understanding none of us are perfect, but we should be striving to be. (Rom. 3:21-23) When we have done sin, but did not take the action in rebellion against God, then realize, after the fact, it was, this is sin due to imperfection, and the sin offering should be brought. However, when we do things that actually cause damage to others or are things we directly know are against the Laws of God - which Israel was to specifically study and know - then we have trespassed upon God's will directly, and at times directly upon the rights of others.

For trespass offerings we are first given a list of examples that individuals can do to be in violation of this kind. The first is related to what we might call perjury today. There may not have been such a formal court system in which this term might be applied, but the point is the same. If someone has knowledge of an agreement between parties, they should be willing to testify of what was witnessed by them. They may have nothing to do with or have knowledge of it, or when the agreement was broken or violated, but they should be willing to tell what they know about what was agreed to at the outset. If they do not step forward and/or tell the truth, they are trespassing the expectation God's righteousness demands of us.

The next example deals with the Laws God would lay out about what are clean and unclean items, and the touching of unclean

things such as certain dead things, people, or bodily fluids. The person becomes unclean in touching something unclean, whether they are aware they did it or not; and in being unclean, they trespass the Law of God until the uncleanness is dealt with. At whatever point it comes to their attention or realization this has happened, it requires a trespass offering. Another thing God tells us is that vengeance is His. (Rom. 12:19) Connected to this is the fact we should not think we have the ability to make something happen just because we want it to. The truth is, it may not be God's will, or we may not truly be able to make it happen. If we say we will do something, it should never be for evil; but even if it's for good, we should include in our words the truth, that if God wills we will do something, because without this, if we can't make good on our word, we have lied. (James 4:13-17) This is certainly true if we promise someone something or swear to make it happen; and it's always wrong to invoke God, or anything we believe is a power, to take vengeance if we fail. (Matt. 5:33-37 James 5:12) All this is a violation of what God expects of us. We should turn back from it and confess we are not larger than God's will or unlimited in our ability. We need forgiveness for the fact we shouldn't have said it. Because our words are to God or someone, this is another example of what would require a trespass offering.

Trespasses such as these are sin, and the offering is much the same as a sin offering. Thus, the animal offered should be a lamb or young goat, as the sin offering for a common person prescribes - which means the animal would also be a female, and the procedure for offering, the same as well.

However, for these trespass offerings there would be, as with the burnt offerings, some more affordable options for those not able to bring a lamb or goat. First, this would again be the choice of two turtledoves or young pigeons. One bird would be offered as a sin offering, and the other as a burnt offering. The sin offering would be performed first. The bird would be killed by wringing off its head, but after that, the bird's body was not to be split open. The wringing off of the head was also not sufficient for sprinkling of blood, so the priest would specifically use the body to sprinkle blood on the side of the altar, and any remaining blood would be worked out at the base of the altar. As with other sin offerings, the priest would take it from there. The second bird would be offered as a burnt offering, and offered in the same manner as such - which means this bird's body would be burned upon the altar.

If you could not even afford to bring the birds, there would also be an option of bringing a plant-based sin offering of fine flour. This, unlike the earlier plant-based or what is called meat offerings, was not to have oil added to it. This has to do with the fact blood from a sin offering is placed in some manner on the outside of the altar, and other than when birds are used, which have what little blood a bird has, thoroughly worked out of the body, only the fat of an animal is burned. Flesh, which would still contain some blood, was not burned upon the altar's fire. While oil may be the plant-based equivalent of blood, if it's put on the flour it can't be separated out for proper use; and if oil is brought separately, then it never truly was a part of the flour being offered. Thus, it is to be left out completely. A plant-based sin offering is also not to have the

representation of an already dead and needing to be preserved preparation added to it; thus, there was to be no frankincense put on it as with other meat offerings of flour. There is also not the options of bringing more finished products such as cooked breads of any kind. The plant-based sin offering was to be as close to the raw living thing as it could be without leaving the work of milling the grain itself to the priest. To offer it, the priest would take a portion of this flour in much the same way as the other meat offerings of flour, and burn it on the altar. However, this was not a tithing thing on the priest's part as with the others, it was in place of the fat which would be burned from a sheep or goat, or the second bird offered as a burnt offering for those who brought turtledoves or pigeons. The rest of the flour would also be taken by the priest, but not as an oblation - which is a gift to God's work. It would be taken for the same reason the prior sin offerings say the priest would make an atonement for the person bringing the sin offering, which is explained later.

The next trespass offering would be for one who, out of ignorance of the Law or forgetfulness, violated one of the stipulations concerning what belonged to God. This could actually cover many things; but examples would be if one failed to bring their tithe of the first fruits of their crops or out of their herd. If they appeared before The Lord on a special day without an offering, which males were not to do. (Duet. 16:16-17) These actions mean one would have sinned and be required to bring a trespass offering to make amends. For this

they would need to bring a prime specimen of a ram out of the herd. This would be entirely in representation that there are sins, once committed, we can do little about except believe as Abraham did that God would provide Himself a Lamb for our sins! What would be brought for the person to do their part, would be silver, the monetary value of which was to be the best estimate equivalent of what you failed to give God, plus interest. This would be calculated, not according to the markets of men, but by the value set for a shekel of silver at the tabernacle. The ram would then be sacrificed in the manner of a sin offering, and the atonement would be made.

The next one is a very interesting one, because this trespass offering is not for the knowledge of a specific action or neglect, but for a convicted one. If for any reason a person believed they had been neglectful of or violated God's commandments in anyway, they were not to simply let bygones be bygones. No matter if you knew the specifics of it or not, you were guilty, and you were to come before God to ask for forgiveness and make an amends as best you could. To do this, you would bring the same elements as the trespass offering just before this - meaning a ram - and your best effort to estimate what you thought you might have failed to give to God. This might be very hard, considering the person may simply be feeling conviction from God and have no tangible basis for what they might have done. However, one should allow the spirit to lead in the matter of the silver, and bring the ram to be offered as a sin offering, falling on the mercy and grace of God!

The next one certainly shows us how loving our neighbor like ourselves is like unto loving God with all we have. This trespass offering has to do with failing or cheating a neighbor. If a neighbor has left something in your care or you have borrowed something, or if you have taken something using force or deception, and lie about it in order to keep the thing or keep from making reparations for damage: If you have found something lost and know whose it is or find out whose it is and lie about finding it, all these things are trespasses against your neighbor and a sin against God. To atone for this, one is to restore what they kept, maybe literally or monetary, plus interest. This is to be done, and then you are to set out for the tabernacle to offer both the ram for your sin offering, and the same payment as you would normally bring if it had been a direct violation toward God!

The next instructions from God are aimed more directly toward the priests so all these offerings could be brought and processed appropriately. The first item would be the altar of burnt offering itself. The fire on this altar was not something to be kindled every time an offering needed to be performed or even just every morning. The fire on the altar was to be fed with wood each morning to ensure it was ready for the morning sacrifices, and, of course, wood would be used all day long as offerings were offered, so the fire would burn continually through the night without fail. This would ensure the fire never went out, and any offering to be burnt upon it would be fully burnt no matter how long it took. To keep this up, it would be the priest's responsibility, while dressed in his priestly garments, to take ashes out of the altar and

place them beside it. Once this pile of ash had built to a point it needed to be removed, a priest would take off his priestly garments and put on other clothes in order to collect this ash beside the altar and take it out into a clean place where it would be left undisturbed. The clothes issue would ensure the priest, acting as a priest, was the one truly tending to the altar; but as a more general workman, one would remove the ash pile to a place not just outside the tabernacle's courtyard but outside the camp, all the while the entire process would still only be carried out by a priest.

The next item would be to emphasize the proper procedure for accepting a meat offering of flour mingled with oil. They were to take out the handful as prescribed with the frankincense, which would be on top, to burn on the altar. The rest would be theirs to eat, but it was to be eaten in the courtyard of the tabernacle, and they were not to use it to bake bread with leaven in it, nor eat it alongside such bread. These offerings are holy, and all the males of Aaron's house, through all its generations, were eligible to eat it; but everyone of those who even touched it would be considered separated out for God's purposes.

The priest would also have a required meat offering they were to offer for themselves every day. This offering would consist of a prescribed measurement of fine flour like the other offerings of flour. This flour was to be baked in a pan along with oil, and then brought to be offered. Half of this would be offered at the start of their day in the morning, and the other half at the end of the day at night. None of this meat offering was to be eaten, because it is an

offering from and for the priests. It is to be wholly given to God by burning all of it on the altar of burnt offering. This was to be done starting with Aaron, and continued by all the priests who would follow him throughout the generations of God's chosen nation.

What came next would explain the priests' side of the sin offerings, which is that part described during the layout of these offerings as being simply that the priest would make an atonement for the bringer of the offering. God would begin by emphasizing that the sin offerings, which would cover any animal type, was to be killed in the same location prescribed for the burnt offering. There was no variation on this part of the process for any of the offerings. However, sin offerings would be treated differently, in that after burning the fat of the animal upon the altar, the edible parts of the animal would then be eaten by the priest who handled the sacrificing process of that particular offering. It was also something the priest was to eat there in the tabernacle's courtyard. This is because the sin offering was eaten by the priest, not because it was given to the priest for his uses, but because the eating of it was as much a part of the representation of these offerings as any other part of the process!

As discussed, a burnt offering was fully consumed by the fire of the altar to represent the total giving of one's life to God, both here in the flesh and forever. The sin offering was to represent the shedding of sin through the death of our flesh, and the burning of the fat represented the soul returning to God. When it came to those sin

offerings for a priest or for the congregation, the remainder of the animal's flesh was to be burned outside the camp in a clean place, and the ashes left to the elements of the earth just as our flesh will someday be. However, for those offerings, which were more for an individual, the flesh was to be disposed of by the priest eating it. This is in direct relationship to what Peter talked about when speaking of Jesus, he said, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." I Peter 2:24 In representation of the work of our True High Priest, Jesus The Messiah, the priest would take into his body the part of the sacrifice which represented the part of us where sin resides. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Romans 7:22-23 Jesus taking on this problem is prophesied by the sin offerings and the prophet's words about The Messiah. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:4-6

Let's stay in God's Word!

What About God's Chosen People? continued from pg. 8
killed the entire congregation of Israel. God tells Moses He would simply begin again with Moses!

Now, if this had happened, we can't say for sure by what name we would call God's chosen nation as a people; but we know there would not have been the twelve tribes of Israel, named for the sons of Jacob, as there ended up being. The point here is that if God had done this, it would have shown, in a way far greater than any other example, just how much God was willing to put quality before just taking whatever man came up with. As it happened, Moses would put himself in the very dangerous place of standing in the gap between Israel and God. Moses would beg God not to destroy the people. In doing this, Moses was committing himself to a far greater task of taking on the responsibility of teaching and leading the people into what God wanted them to be, than God had ever asked of him in the first place!

Because the people continued to doubt God's promise, Moses would eventually lead the people through forty years of wandering in the wilderness. This specifically comes upon the people because they did not believe they could take the land of promise, after spies had been sent to observe the land firsthand. Thus, the adults who left Egypt would not enter the promised land, and Moses would turn over a new generation of Israelites to one of the two spies, who forty years before had come back and believed they should not hesitate to take the land. This

man's name was Joshua, and he was the man God chose to take Moses' place and lead the next generation of Israel into the land. However, even after many great victories under his leadership, when the time came for Joshua to go home to glory, the job of taking full possession of the land had not been completed, and God was not turning the leadership of the nation over to another individual. Joshua reminded the people that it was still their responsibility to continue to take the land as God directed them. Joshua knew this would be a long-term task; for one thing, God had instructed Israel not to take the entire land until they, as a people, were large enough to possess it, but they were certainly not to live intermingled with the Canaanite population. They were to drive them out so as to separate themselves and the work of God. (Ex. 23:27-33)

Joshua understood it would be up to the people to do what was right from then on without having such a direct human leader as they had with Moses and himself. All Joshua could do was commit to the fact he had led and taught his house to serve The Lord! (Joshua 24) It would be up to the collective people and individual tribes to stick to the plan from there. Israel would fail to do this, and many would take on the practices of the ungodly people they had failed to drive out. Through this period, Israel would even find themselves at times being oppressed by those around them, and God would send judges to help lead Israel and/or show them the way they were suppose to handle the situation in order to get back on track. These men God called were referred to as judges because it was

not God's intent for Israel to have a king. The better way to put it is to say God did not want Israel to have a man as their king because God was to be their King!

Now, God had said early on the people would not go for this situation, and would eventually want an earthly king like other nations, (Deut.17:14-20) and this is really where we start to get down to the part of the history that takes us to the issue of Israel eventually becoming known as just the Jews. The last judge of Israel was a man named Samuel, and it was this judge, more than ever before, that would live in the time when Israel demanded they have a king as other nations had a king. God told Samuel to warn the people about what it would mean to have a king, but God also told Samuel the people wouldn't listen. This is all part of what we talked about last time when discussing how God's righteousness gives us the chance to do what is right, even when He knows we will not take that path. After warning the people about how God had done nothing but provide for them, where as a human king would lay heavy taxes and burdens on them, the people would do as God said they would and demand an earthly king anyway. Samuel would be led of God to anoint a man by the name of Saul to be king. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin, and he was the kind of tall and strong specimen of a man that people would desire and readily accept as a king.

God would also choose Saul because Saul was a humble man who in no way sought the job. In fact, Saul would try to

run from the job at first; but in the end, Saul would prove that the old adage - power corrupts - is true. Saul, like the general population, would fail to serve God. He would fail to be a king who was to translate God's desire for the nation unto the people. He would eventually become so puffed up with pride, that even before Samuel died, God would send Samuel to inform Saul the kingdom was to be taken away from him and given to another. (I Sam. 15:10-29) God would also send Samuel to anoint the next king, and that would be the youngest son of a man named Jesse; who, out of all his sons, it would be a surprise Samuel was sent to anoint his youngest, named David. (I Sam. 16:1-13)

Israel would spend many more years of sorrow and war with Saul as king, but eventually the day would come when Saul and his sons would fall in battle to Israel's enemies. (I Sam. 31:1-13) This would pave the way for David to take the throne. This would not just be a change in what man was leading Israel, but what tribe the person came from! David was from the tribe of Judah, and this is the next very important point in understanding why the people of the chosen nation became known as Jews! David would be a man very pleasing to God; and for the most part he followed God's direction, leading the nation in that direction with him. It would be David who would drive out the Jebusites from a place called Salem, in the time of Abraham, (Gen. 14:17-20, II Sam. 5:4-13) and which was directly adjacent to the hill God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to, in the story where we get the message

directly from Abraham that true believers before the time of Jesus, and even the Law, believed God would provide Himself a Lamb. (Gen. 22:1-14) This hill would also eventually be the building site for the temple!

David would make this place Israel's capital, and it would be known as the city of peace - or Jerusalem! David would desire to build that more permanent structure to replace the mobile tabernacle Israel had traveled through the wilderness with, but God would tell him no. David was a man of war and known for his might in battle. God did not want the temple to be looked at as some crowning jewel of David's victories over Israel's enemies. However, God would promise David that when his son set on the throne of Israel there would be peace on every side, and this son would be the one God would allow to build the temple in Jerusalem. God would also promise another important item to our discussion of Jews being the chosen nation. God would promise David there would not fail a man from his descendants to set on the throne. (II Sam. 7:12-17)

This is a very important point, in that what God was really promising David was not that his lineage would continue to be the kings of all the tribes of Israel, no matter what Israel chose to do. God's promise was that David's throne would rule over God's chosen nation. Some might think there is no difference, but there is, and this is what we have been driving at through this look back at how God established His nation and the history of it. The fact we need to see these things are the reason we have much more than just the Torah to call the Bible, with

maybe a few prophetic books, but we also have a large historical account that tells us the chosen nation's history right up to the time man began to keep some much better historical records for himself. We also now have what we call the New Testament, which shows us how this promise is ultimately fulfilled through Jesus, The Messiah, Who was of the line and lineage of David! (Matt. 1:1-16, Luke 2:1-21)

We clearly see the intent of God's promise to David and his house as David's son's reign as king of Israel is coming to an end. It would be at this point the people of Israel would become dissatisfied with a king for just the things God had told Samuel to warn them about back when they so readily desired one! As Solomon's life came to an end and his son Rehoboam was ready to take the throne, the people came to Rehoboam and complained that his father had asked too much of them and taxed them too much. Before they would make Rehoboam king they wanted to know if he would ease this burden. Rehoboam would ask counsel of his father's advisers who were older and wiser, and they would tell him to lighten the burden and the people would serve him all his life. Rehoboam would then ask his younger and more contemporary advisers what he should do, and they said, "you tell the people that if they thought your father was heavy on them, they haven't seen anything yet." They believed this was the way to maintain law and order in the kingdom and establish Rehoboam's authority over the land.

The older advisers were right, but Rehoboam went with the advise of the young and foolish. Thus, in spite of God's

promise to David, ten tribes of Israel would, at this point, break away from the throne of David and become the northern kingdom of Israel. God would show who should be the king of this new kingdom even before Solomon's death, and God would send prophets and judgments upon it throughout its history, because its people were still suppose to be part of God's chosen nation. (I Kin. 11:26-40) Officially, the throne of David would be left with only two tribes under its rule, those being that of Benjamin and the tribe of Judah, which is the tribe David was from. Together they would become known as the southern kingdom of Judah!

Now, here's the crucial point of understanding. This separation was not strictly a house by house division down tribal lines. While this may have been true on an official and territorial level, there were people from all the tribes who chose to stay in the southern kingdom of Judah, some because they already lived on that side of the dividing line, and some because, through the years, they chose to move to the south. These stayed with David's lineage as their king and Jerusalem as their capital. (I Kin. 12:16-17) This, in no small part, affected those who desired to retain free access to the temple in Jerusalem and the Laws of God, which were only able to appropriately be performed there. Even many who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel would cross the border on a regular basis in order to continue accessing the temple. God had told the northern king, named Jeroboam, if he followed Him, God would establish his throne; but as Jeroboam

viewed the trend, he became far more concerned with maintaining the northern kingdom's independent nation and power on his own, instead of trusting God.

This resulted in the development of a religion in the northern kingdom which was meant to replace the Laws of God, Israel, as a whole, was to be committed to. "And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan." I Kings 12:26-30 Now, Jerusalem was no further away from these people than it had ever been, and Jeroboam knew he could not simply abolish the historic tradition of following God's Law, over night. Thus, to truly separate Israel from Judah, he made a religion of convenience, putting one false temple in the north of the country and one pretty much on the border with the southern kingdom, in a place with historical significance to all of Israel! (Gen. 28:10-22)

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.***

true stranger in a strange land, who would begin a nation of people to be God's chosen nation without prejudiced or bias for or against any of the three family lines that came from Noah's three sons, and which comprised the world! This, of course, is why the verse ends with the words that Abram is to go to a land God would show him, not just go out wandering across the world. God had a place where He wanted His chosen nation to ultimately be, and it would be in that place Abraham would establish a presence for that to happen.

Verse 2 is where God really tells Abram the point as to why he is being sent out into a strange land to live among strangers. However, there is a fact many who know the Bible already have in mind, which often keeps us from picking up on the specific fact pointed out to Abram in this verse. Many of us have heard numerous times how God told Abram he would be the father of many nations, and this is certainly true. (Gen. 17:1-6) God does, in fact, make this promise to Abram, but not in this verse. Here, in the initial verses that tell of God's original calling of Abram, there is the words, "And I will make of thee a great nation,..." The wording here is singular, not plural. Why is this important? Well, for one thing there are a lot of people who are tempted, if not downright determined, to say God's chosen nation is not as relevant as it really is to God's plan. They believe this

nation can be set aside or replaced for different reasons and/or ways. One of the ways, of course, is what is called replacement theology, which is that Jesus changed everything. It's the belief that what Jesus did made the chosen nation irrelevant, especially in light of the existence of what people refer very generally to as the church. The truth of the matter is that what many of these people are talking about when they say the church, is not a group of true believers no matter where they may be, but a religion that calls itself by the name given to those who originally followed and taught the good news of Jesus as The Messiah. (Acts 11:19-26) This is ridiculous in light of the fact knowing who God's chosen nation is, is crucial to having any true understanding that Jesus was anything more than any one of many other religious leaders who have come, gone, and will come about throughout the history of men.

The second point people like to get into is the fact Abram (Abraham) was to be and is the father of many nations. This causes movements to come and go who believe they as a group or specific people are just as much the chosen nation as anyone in the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, simply because they too are descendants of Abram. This is why it is important to emphasize that here in Genesis chapter 12 verse 2 God tells Abram he is being called out of his home and family to be a great nation. This is not a reference to the basic idea

he would be the father of many nations, but the specific promise Abram would be the father of one specific nation, which God would make great, or use greatly among all the other nations of the world, no matter to whom those other nations may be able to trace their heritage!

This fact is why we see the next words of verse 2. These are directly connected to the fact God would use Abram to create one specifically chosen nation to be used of God, in that God would bless Abram in doing this and for this purpose. If we jump ahead in time from where we are here in chapter 12, we find Abram and his wife chose to have a son through his wife's handmaiden, and his name would be Ishmael. However, God would promise Ismael would be blessed of God without receiving of Abram's estate. (Gen. 17:17-22, 21:12-21) If we jump ahead to after the death of Abram's wife Sarah, we find he takes another wife through whom he has six sons. However, he would send these sons away with gifts, and they too would not receive of Abram's eventual wealth and estate. (Gen. 25:1-6) Isaac, who was the son of promise through whom the great nation God is referring to here in Genesis 12 verse 2, would receive all that Abram built and was blessed with by following the commandment of God to leave his home and family. Later, Isaac would have two sons, but as one did not truly believe or care about the promise of God

to Abram, Isaac's estate would not be passed down to him in spite of the fact he was the elder of the two sons. Isaac's estate and blessings from God would be passed on to Jacob! (Gen. 27:30-40)

Now, the next piece of the promise in verse 2 is that God would make Abram's name great! This is as close as this verse gets to talking about the fact Abram would eventually be the father of many nations. God's chosen nation would not come through a man vaguely remembered in the history of men. They would come through a man whose name and life would reverberate throughout man's history. This is why so many can claim their heritage goes all the way back to Abram, or at least speculate that it does. As much as we know Noah to be the father of the world on this side of the flood, so too was Abram blessed with a great name connecting many of the people in this world back to him and his obedience to God. Because of this, few have an excuse not to see what a great example of living in true faith in God looks like, and that God's nation came through a man of such faith!

The last of the blessings laid out in verse 2 takes us directly back to that fact God's real intent in calling Abram out was to form a specific chosen nation which God would specifically use! God tells Abram he will not just be blessed and his name made great, but Abram

would be a blessing. It is so good to be blessed of God in our personal lives, and certainly our personal walk with God is of the most importance to each of us as individuals; for without faith, no matter what else our lives may be, we will be lost in the end. (I Cor. 9:24-27) However, it is also a great honor for our lives to be used of God. This is why the apostles, after being imprisoned, beaten, and generally persecuted - even unto death - for taking the Gospel out into the world, were known to rejoice because they were found worthy to suffer for the sake of God's work. You know you're on the right path of finding, following, and working for God when the devil is persistent on coming after you every time and in every way he can find opportunity to attack! God promised Abram the great blessing that his life on this earth would be used of God to be a blessing to others, if Abram would only follow God's instructions in doing what God asked of him in verse 1!

Verse 3 is where God expounds on all this and gives us the words familiar to so many when talking about Abram. Here is where God promises He is serious about bringing about His chosen nation through Abram, and man was not going to be able to stand in the way of this coming about. Why? Because God would lay out a simple formula. God promised He would give the world an incentive to be for God's chosen nation rather than against it. God would do this by promising to bless those who bless

Abram. On the other hand, God would put a discouragement to those who did not desire to be on the side of God's plan, by promising to curse those who cursed Abram and this chosen nation God was to bring about.

Now, many might argue that throughout history we have seen many people be persecuted for standing with God's people, and God's nation being greatly persecuted by men. This is very true, but there are a couple of important things to consider. First, it's no light thing to stand before The Living God! Remember what I just said above about how you know you're on the right path when the devil just won't leave you alone. Satan has certainly taken every opportunity he could and can find to attack God's chosen nation. This is why it is a true fact we must be willing to follow and seek after God without fail, because when we fail, the devil is waiting for those exact openings to gain a foothold in our lives. (Matt. 12:43-45) When given great responsibility from God, it is all the more easy to step off the path if we fail to maintain our faith. (James 4:13-17) God warned Israel of this truth over and over as He was leading them to and into the promised land. If they followed God, He would not fail to protect and lead them, but if they did not, the consequences would be very bad!

We often think of this as being - if we do good God will bless us, and if we

do bad God will curse us; but that is not so much the dynamic as it is - if we do good God can protect and bless us, but if we walk outside His will, the devil is waiting to devour us. (I Pet. 5:6-11) All that being said, there is also that point we talked about with the apostles being joyous to be found worthy to be persecuted. It is not, at all times, God's will that we skate along through this life with ease. Again, our faith in God is of most importance to us, but the trying of our faith is what makes us grow. (James 1:2-5, I Pet. 3:1-7) What we too often forget is when this is the reason we are allowed to face struggles and persecutions, God will never put on us more than we can bear. (I Cor. 10:13) We also must realize that one of the main reasons persecution and trials can grow our faith is because it can turn our eyes more and more away from the desires of the things this temporal world has to offer, and unto those things which are eternal and, as such, of God's perfect will! This is why when we are tempted and trials come along, we must never give into the false teaching that God has left us or forsaken us, and choose to turn away from our faith taking the path of least resistance instead. The truth is always one of two things: we have either turned from God already and put ourselves in a wrong place, or we are being allowed to go through a trial in order to grow our faith and be used of God. The beauty of it is that no matter

which one is true, the answer to both circumstances are the same: We must confess that we know we're not perfect and seek God's guidance on how to go further down the path to being so! (Matt. 5:43-48)

The fact Abram was a man who would continually do exactly this, during all things that befell him all through his life, is why it was so easy for God to make the promise that all the families of the world would be blessed through him. Because Abram was constantly willing to follow God, always willing to turn back when he had made mistakes, is why we have the blessing of Jesus our Saviour through the chosen nation Abram was specifically called to be the father of. Those who curse at this may not always appear to be cursed by our fleshly standards; but make no mistake about it, they will not share in the eternal blessings of God, which are so much greater than anything this world could ever offer! (Matt. 18:7-9)

Until next time, Shalom!

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