



Shaqah

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

As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, our last segment brought us through the transition of Israel being a group wandering in the wilderness for the sake of allowing a generation to pass, into a people on the move to the promised land. We talked about how this new generation showed doubt in God's ability to provide, but also how there were signs of hope they were gaining an understanding the generation before just never seemed to have. Thus, we see them not just taking a journey to where they would enter the promised land but the first battles Israel would have with the Canaanite inhabitants and the victories God gave them. This brought us to the end of Numbers chapter 21, and we are now ready for chapter 22.

The key to understanding chapter 22's story is that of remembering how Moses had requested the king of Edom allow Israel to pass through their land, and when the king said no, Israel took a path around them. Israel also went around Moab without even attempting to ask about entering their land, but when they got to a part of the land the Moabites had lost, mostly to Canaanites, Moses asks to pass through. When the Canaanites refuse, instead of going around them, Israel is told to destroy them, and they do. Israel would go on to destroy a couple more Canaanite groups living on the lands east of the Jordan, but never touched or even threatened Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, or the Midianites. This is because they were related people, descendants from Abraham and Lot. In another point that clearly shows how much this was about eliminating the Canaanites, Israel now possessed a great deal of the land on this eastern side of Jordan, but God would not break the camp of Israel from being centered around the tabernacle. At this point, Israel would set up their camp just across the Jordan from Jericho in part of the territory they had taken from the Canaanites. It was only called the plains of Moab because the Moabites had once held the area. All this indicated that the next move for Israel would be to cross the Jordan without attacking people such as Moab, which they could have done on their way up from the south

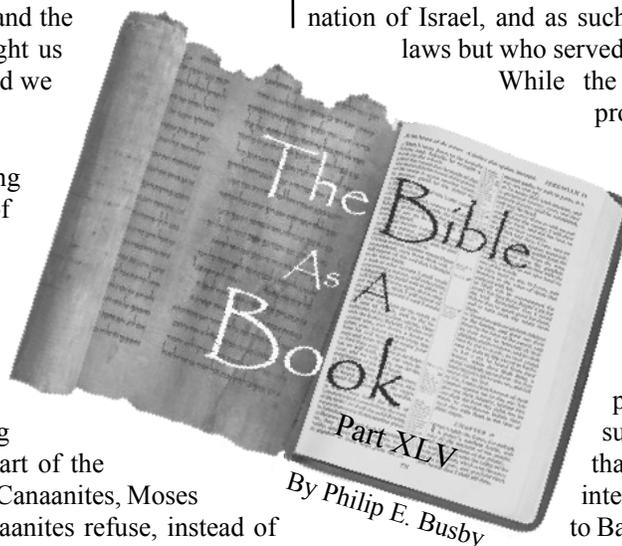
if they had intended to do so.

In spite of this, the Moabite king, named Balak, still believed Israel was a threat to the entire region. Without thinking about how much God was showing Himself to be with Israel in giving them the victory over people the Moabites could not defeat, Balak chose to send for a prophet of God in the desire the prophet could curse Israel and halt their progress. The fact the king knew of a prophet of The One True God shows us an example of how there were still people outside the nation of Israel, and as such, not part of the representational laws but who served God, even in a ministry capacity.

While the Moabite king understood this prophet served God, he does not seem to see the conflict of having him curse the chosen nation of God. However, as the king sends for the prophet named Balaam, the king shows in his message he understands who Israel is. In spite of the fact Balak only refers to them as a people who came out of Egypt, he surely knew Israel was the nation that came from Jacob. One very interesting detail in Balak's message to Balaam is the king's observation that whom the prophet blesses are blessed

and those he curses are cursed. These are the same words God told Abraham would be true of his family in being servants of God. (Gen. 12:1-13)

The elders who go to take this message bring gifts along with them as if God can be bribed into doing what one wants, or it would do any good if one had success in bribing God's servants. When they deliver the king's message, Balaam gives them no immediate answer but tells them they will have to spend the night while he seeks God's will on the matter. When God speaks to Balaam, He asks the prophet to consider the people who had made the request, and ultimately informs Balaam he would not curse Israel because Israel was blessed. In the morning Balaam tells Balak's servants to go home because God will not allow him to go with them to do what



they had requested. When they return to Balak with the news, the king simply tries to send men that were considered to be of even higher honor than those he had sent before. He would also add to the bribe that he would promote the prophet to a high position of power. Balaam assured them he could do nothing beyond what God wants him to do no matter what the king offered him, but he tells them to again spend the night so he could see what more God might have to say. That night God does speak to Balaam and tells him only if the men continue to call for him to come could he go, but only if they understood Balaam would go solely for the purpose of doing what God told him to do.

One can only suppose it was due to the fact Balaam felt he had already made the point about God's will clear that he does not inform the men of these words. However, what is even worse is that he simply gets up in the morning and goes with them, giving them the impression God had given him the all clear to do what the king wanted. Because this is not what God had instructed him to do, God is angry with Balaam and sends an angel to block his path. It would not be Balaam who would see the angel but the donkey upon which he rode, and this causes the donkey to turn off the road so as to avoid the angel. Balaam, upset by this action, starts to strike what he sees as a rebellious animal, and they head down into a walled vineyard where they are then trapped because the angel had again put himself in front of them with his sword drawn and ready to strike. Due to this, the animal tries to turn abruptly and crushes Balaam's foot against the wall. Again, Balaam strikes the animal in anger, and, once again, the angel moves, this time blocking them in even further and leaving them no place to go. When the donkey sees this she simply halts and kneels down on the ground. This angers Balaam even further and he beats on the animal again with his staff.

It was at this point God allows the animal to show Balaam how much he was not following God's instructions in what he was doing, even to being more blind to the seriousness of the matter than an animal. To do this, God allows the donkey to speak. The words the donkey speaks points out that Balaam had stopped paying attention to and/or trusting in anyone or anything but himself. Balaam had ignored everyone from God all the way to the animal who had faithfully served him ever since Balaam had owned her. Amazingly enough, Balaam is not immediately struck by the fact he was now carrying on a conversation with an animal. However, he had little time to take that into account as God opened his eyes to see the angel the donkey had saved him from. In fear, Balaam falls on his face, and the angel begins to confirm to Balaam what the donkey had pointed out about his foolishness, and informs him that while Balaam wanted to kill the donkey, the angel would have killed him and spared her because he was not in tune with God as much as his own animal. Balaam confesses his sin of going with the men and being too blind to the will of God to see the angel. With this, Balaam says he will turn back and not go with the king's men, but the angel tells him to go ahead and go. However, the crucial part of what Balaam had been in violation of was that he had to make clear the very thing he originally told the men about only speaking what God told him to when he got there!

When the king hears that Balaam had finally come, he goes out to him and quizzes the prophet about why he did not come immediately and if he doubted the king could promote him in power. It is always odd that people who need God's help, and even a servant of God to intervene for them in order to get it, believe they are still so great as to have something to offer such a one due to the position of "power" they believe they hold. In any case, Balaam informs the king of what he was suppose to reemphasize to the princes, which was that while it may be a fact he was there, all that meant was he was there to do the work of God and nothing more. The king ignores this and puts out the kind of feast one would for an honored guest; and in another irony, the next day Balak took Balaam out to the high places where the people worshiped the powers of the creation, in order to see Israel. In seeing Israel from this place, the king hoped Balaam would become convinced he needed to do something Balak obviously understood his false gods could not! Balaam, again, a man outside the nation to whom God had given the Law, shows he is a true prophet of God, and using God's number of completion for this creation asks for seven altars to be built upon which he would offer sacrifices to God. Balaam then tells the king to wait by the altars as he went to see if God would give him words to speak.

Balaam goes to a higher point and meets with God in the hope he had pleased God with his offerings, and God gives Balaam the words he is to speak. Balaam returns to the altars where the king and his princes were and makes it clear the king had asked him to come all this way to curse Israel, but Balaam had no power to curse those whom God had not cursed nor defy those whom God had not defied. Balaam goes on to make clear he had seen Israel so it was not that he lacked understanding of what a great people they were, and adds the fact Israel would only increase more with time and no one would be able to number Israel. They also would stand out from among all the other nations of the world as something very separate. He ends his words with the wish that his life could mean what Israel's life was to mean and die in the righteous service of God as Israel would serve. Upon hearing this, the king shows how much he did not pay attention to what Balaam had said about only speaking what God gave him to say, or the king would not have been so astonished that Balaam had just blessed the people he wanted him to curse.

What is most odd though is that Balak was foolish enough to believe a change of venue might resolve the situation. Apparently, believing that somehow it might have frightened Balaam to see all of them, Balak wants to take him to the prominent mountain in Moab, named Pisgah, from which only part of Israel could be seen. Once on the top of this mountain, seven altars would again be built and the offerings offered on each of them. Having nowhere higher to go this time, Balaam simply tells the king he will go off a ways and see what The Lord wants him to do. God meets with Balaam, and he returns to speak God's words before the king and his princes. This time there would be an even harsher rebuke of the king about the fact God is not like man, in that He should just tell one what they want to hear or have his mind changed as if He had made a mistake on the plan He had set in motion. Balaam was only to bless Israel because that is what God had chosen to

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

Last time, we covered how God, along with two angels, came by Abraham's tent on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah and how much Abraham desired them to stop and stay for awhile. This went into the story of God telling Sarah more directly how she would have a son with Abraham and her response to that news. All this led us up to God and the angels going on to the mission that brought them by in the first place, which would take the angels to the cities. We ended with the conversation Abraham had with God concerning what it would take to spare the cities. This brought us to the end of Genesis chapter 18, but there is a little more we want to talk about before we fully move on into chapter 19.

As chapter 18 ends we are told Abraham returned to his home, but we are not told anything specific about exactly where God went after His conversation with Abraham concluded. We are simply told, "And the LORD went his way,..." However, we should feel confident that this was not to say God followed and certainly not that He joined the two angels, because the first verse of chapter 19 clearly tells us only the two angels came to Sodom. We might want to interpret this as saying God went back to what we often call heaven, but we should keep in mind that "heaven," when not speaking in the terms of the place Jesus said He was going to prepare for all those who believe upon Him, is a very general term. We should take this opportunity to not overlook what we've been talking about in how God bothered to come down to the Tower of Babel, and in this incident to see the cities He was passing judgment on. Thus, saying God went on His way is to say He went on doing whatever business God had to do. Whether that was to return to some "place" like that of more permanent residence, which we might generically call heaven, or whether it was to go on to another place on this earth, universe, or for lack of a word, "domain" of any sort is not only something really not for us to know the specifics of, but possibly something outside our comprehension.

At the same time, we really should consider how God bothered to come down to see the city and tower man was building after the flood, and again here at Sodom and Gomorrah. This isn't just for the reasons we have already touched on, but also for the fact that in this situation of Sodom and Gomorrah these were not the only people on the planet. This story is preserved for us because it affects the specific plan God was working, to develop a chosen nation through Abraham, and more specifically the land God was going to, one day, give to that nation. However, in general, it serves as a great study into the very nature of The God Who created us, and that has a lot to do with why it is preserved for us as well. In reading about it, we must consider that we do not know at what other times and places God might have taken actions we are not told about. To be clear on this point, I'm speaking to the idea that God took actions on this earth among other

people which may or may not have so directly affected the development of the chosen nation. Just as today we do not know exactly how and when God is intervening in the lives of individuals and larger groups as well; so too, we do not know what all actions God may have taken in the past. As I mentioned, it may not be any of our business, to be blunt, but this fact speaks to why God created a chosen nation. In many ways, they became a witness, whether good or bad, and for that reason we are told of many items that concern the nation which among other people might have been kept more out of the view of the larger world and certainly not preserved for future generations to know.

Now, I don't bring up any of this to start some conspiracy about God working among other people all over the world to do the same things He did with the chosen nation, and it's just the chosen nation we are shown! What I'm trying to speak to is the simple fact God did not limit Himself to only deal with the chosen nation on items that have to do with mankind's general development. For that reason I want to be clear I'm talking about the generality of God making the judgment that the end of Sodom and Gomorrah had come before Him in the same way the end of all flesh had come before God at the time of the flood. Of course, we do not know if God ever took such drastic actions against any other group, city, or the like, and this is all speculation. However, it is good speculation on the basis that it is part of meditating on the Word of God. We should understand that while God wanted to deal with these specific cities because they affected the chosen nation and its land, the story itself shows us the working of God among men, which when we see it at the Tower of Babel it was very universal to mankind. The flood before it and, of course, the actions taken by God at the time of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden also fit into this universal category. However, just because we are talking now about a time when God was laying out His plan for salvation in putting together a chosen nation, to whom He would eventually give the Law and send The Messiah through, does not mean God's efforts and judgments all of a sudden became exclusive to them.

Quite the opposite is actually what we should take from the overall story we see here, because God's purpose in setting a plan in action for establishing a chosen nation was to save all of humanity! It did not just become God's will that none perish and all come to repentance after Jesus came to this earth. That has always been the will of God! (II Pet. 3:9) Many times in reading the Old Testament we forget this. Maybe we don't forget it on a level of ever saying it is part of our doctrine, but it becomes part of how we generally interpret what we are reading. When we do this, we end up thinking in terms of God picking a certain people to be His chosen nation as a way of hand picking who are His people and who are not. That's a mistake! God forming a chosen nation was a way for us to be

sure we were/are seeing The God Who created us all working the plan of salvation people such as Abraham, Job, and the like, knew God would provide long before the nation was formed and the Law was given. Having chosen people has always been about the rule of whosoever will come to God, and the fact that we do not choose God, He chooses us. (John 15:16, Rev. 22:17) Is there exclusion in who will ultimately make it to heaven and who will not? Of course there will be, but we must quantify this in our heads and get it correct as to why.

God's will is that none perish, meaning He has chosen every last one of us to be His people. However, God gave us a free will, meaning He will not force us to be His people, and that is why we say it's not God's will that any perish instead of saying God won't allow anyone to perish! That is an important distinction to make and one to keep firmly in mind as we look at the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. These facts are where we get the back and forth about whether God chose us or we chose Him. It might seem complicated but it really is not. God does not want us to be without Him, and that is why Paul tells us he is convinced nothing can separate us from the love of God. (Rom. 8:38-39) God so loved not just a specific people but the world as a whole that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us! (John 3:16) However, in the end result it is still up to what we want in life and out of life that dictates what we are going to be and where we will end up for eternity. Because judging each individual's life and intentions on the basis of what each one knows, understands, and has desired to know and understand, is a complex thing only God can do. However, this is why we are told that on Judgment Day the books will be opened and each of us will be judged according to the things in the books. (Rev. 20:11-15) How real these books will be and how metaphorical this is, is not important. The point is, God knows everything we've done and only He sees our heart. (I Sam. 16:7)

No matter what people say or do in their life, only God knows the real reasons behind each individual's actions. Thus, motivation is a big part of what we will be judged on. Now, God does give us a list of things in I Corinthians 6:9-10 and Revelation 21:7-8 which points out the kind of people who all have a place - shall we say - reserved in the lake of fire, but this is not so we may judge the lives of others. It is there for three specific reasons. First, it is there so we may judge ourselves. If we want to make it to heaven we cannot be the kind of people, doing the kind of actions that are listed there. Does this mean one mistake and you're done? No, it means this can't be the lifestyle you take on and/or a pattern in your behavior if you want to have any hope of making it in the end. You also need to understand that when we find these things in our life, we need to ask for forgiveness and move forward not continuing in these actions or ignoring them with the excuse that, God gives us all grace.

The second specific point for which this list exists is to help us instruct others. Now, this is where we often get into that accusation of being judgmental, but understand there is a difference between informing people about what God has made clear and passing the final judgment on their life. The

verses that say we are not to judge are there to tell us not to think we have the power to judge anyone but ourselves, and in turn this means it should be clear no one else's judgment of us is a reason to give up or change something we feel God has told us to do or not do. Only God can and will judge us in the end! This last point is what really helped Job through his trial as he was told of how he must have done something to displease God in order to bring on such bad fortune. His wife told him to just curse God and die. His friends continued to push for him to repent of things he was not guilty of as if God was some pagan god that could be appeased by simple groveling. Job had to hold strong to the point that no matter what they all had to say, this issue was between him and God alone. (Job 13:13-18) Job turned out to be right in that God was allowing Him to go through this not because Job had done something specific to displease God, but because none of us are perfect and this was an opportunity to take Job even further down the path of righteousness than he had already made it.

As for the list of the kind of people we cannot be and make it into heaven, not only is our second point about warning and informing others not about passing judgment, but, in truth, it is our responsibility. After we have told others what God's Word tells us, it then becomes the responsibility of those who have been told. Just as was the case with Job, it is up to the individual to do with the information what they choose to in spite of what others think. People choosing for themselves, and only for themselves, brings us to the third specific reason this list exists, and that is to comfort those who do choose to serve God. This point is a delicate one and one I hope to convey in a way that brings understanding. This is because I do not want anyone to believe this has to do with being arrogant or self-righteous, and if we are not we should easily see what I'm about to say. We live in a world of sin, and as we go into the story of the two angels' journey into Sodom and Gomorrah, we see clearly how bad that can be for those who attempt to live righteously! Even later in II Peter 2:6-8 we are told that Lot living there caused him to be vexed day in and day out. The simple truth is that as those who strive to live for God are vexed, persecuted, and even killed for their beliefs and lifestyles, it is comforting to know that the kind of people who cause true believers these troubles will not be something we have to deal with for eternity. When God takes us to that place He is preparing, it will not be just a repeat or reset of anything we have here. It will be a new beginning guaranteed to be devoid of these troubles.

This brings us to the God choosing us part versus us choosing Him. He chose us before He ever created humanity; that's the point we already covered about God's will. However, not everyone chooses God. For those who clearly reject God in their words and refusal to listen to anything God tries to tell them, this is an obvious thing. However, there is no shortage of people who claim to serve God, and in this group the range and extent to which this shows any truth in their lives is vast, to say the least. As I said before, only God can judge who out of all these are truly attempting to serve Him with their whole heart and who is just claiming to be. However, this also has to do with exactly why we say God chooses us. We can go around telling everyone how much we love, serve, and want

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XIX

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."

In our last segment, we stepped aside from moving directly forward in our historical look and took a broader look going all the way back to the time of the Judges and forward to the time of Christ. We did this in order to talk more deeply about the consequences of the Jew's decision to establish the Maccabees as the high priests and rulers until a faithful prophet should arise. Hopefully, this gave us a better understanding on the point of how much this might have been a good decision at the time; but with that said, there is the truth that even good choices can lead to bad consequences, especially if the intent of the choices is not followed. For awhile now we have been hitting on the larger subject of the religion of Judaism, and these historical accounts of the nation show us how the pieces fit together. What we see is that a religious mindset became more and more established in the nation. Why? Because there was an ever growing fear that the nation as a people would lose their identity if they did not hold tight to the Words God had used to establish them.

This kind of fear in and of itself can be a good thing, but only if it drives us (and by "us" I'm talking even in more general terms across all true believers both Jew and non-Jew) to seek God Himself and the deeper reasons He gave the Law. Even for the non-Jew there is great value in understanding the letter of the Law, which is something so misunderstood among Christians today and for many centuries now. However, if the letter of the Law becomes our god then we have a problem no matter who we are. That is really where this entire argument about God rejecting the Jews as His people comes down to. People misunderstand this very point. They look at the ways in which the Jews established a religion and how that religion caused them to react the way they did toward The Messiah, and from this they conclude there is no way God could continue to use such a people. What we do not see through all of it is that this is being human. Christians are no better, and the proof of that is something I write on quite often, not as an indictment of Christians but as a warning!

It is a human thing to get caught up on religion and forget to follow God directly! I know many would say I'm being way to light on the subject, but the simple truth is, that is all the Jews are guilty of. We are all so arrogant to believe we would do so much better as Christians; and again, I believe there is plenty of proof that shows we would not and have not. I don't say any of this to simply bounce back and forth between blaming Jews for being wrong and then accuse Christians of being wrong, as this is exactly what leads so many people to debate back and forth as to whether they should be more Jewish - as in follow the Jewish ritual laws and the like, or to reject all

things "Jewish," even to the point of rejecting the very study of the Law. One day we think the Law is of no effect; the next, we believe it is very important and we are not living right because we are not following it. What we should see is that we are individuals. Individuals are born into different circumstances, and in the end it won't matter what people/nation we are born into, only that we served God in the way He expected us to as the individual we each are.

If you are a Jew, this means the Laws, in action, are for you. However, how much of that Law can be followed on the basis of how much of it is impossible to is not in your hands alone, because the full representational Law cannot be enacted without a nation, on its land, with the temple, and the priesthood in full operation. As a non-Jew, the representational Law is for observance and study but not enacting. How much of the dietary laws and the like you choose to follow is strictly between you and God, or is a personal choice on the understanding God's Law is, of course, based in how He established the world to work. For example, the dietary laws do not return us to the the true fruits and vegetables only diet given to Adam and Eve. (Gen. 1:29) However, they are a fantastic guide to get us away from the just eat everything you want diet (which is the unhealthy lifestyle of many eating patterns), while taking into account the fact it is not always possible to eat just what Adam and Eve's diet would require us to restrict ourselves to. Sin has destroyed our world, and this is why God Himself told Noah people could begin to use animal products and eat animal meat after the flood. (Gen. 9:1-7)

Now, in truth, even the Kosher diet of the Jews is not always an easy one to follow, depending on what there is available to eat in one's location and considering one's financial circumstances. This becomes even more true when we see the religious interpretation of the Kosher diet that is imposed on many Jews by the more Orthodox thinking. This is not to scold any Jews or those who teach the Law among them, because it, again, is up to them to interpret, but it does make the point that I started out making, which is - individuals must work out their own salvation in fear and trembling. (Phili. 2:12-13) What we fail to see is, this is not to be a fear of man's religious establishment and its demands, but of God Himself! If we believe following any group, person, etc. is what puts us in the right, we couldn't be more wrong! I made the statement in our last segment that even when we do wrong things that we will not be held accountable for because we did not understand they were wrong, those actions still have negative consequences. Well, the opposite is also true in that doing right always has positive consequences. However, just as we are not held accountable for doing wrong when we don't know we're wrong, doing right for the wrong reasons is something God sees as well!

This is precisely why I keep reminding people,

especially Christians who have been exposed to years of being taught the Golden Rule is to love others as yourself, that the actual Golden Rule is to love God with everything you have and are! All our physical actions could be righteous, but if we are doing them because someone told us to and not out of a love and respect for The God Who created us, then we are not following God. In these cases, we are only following our own righteous set of rules no matter how truly righteous or unrighteous our rules are. This may make the world a "better place," but it will not help us stand before God, because all have sinned and fallen short of God's perfection! (Rom. 3:21-31) The point is simple, it is up to us as individuals to do what is right and to do it for the right reasons. We need to keep in mind that there are plenty of people who seek to be good people, but that doesn't mean they want to have anything to do with God. There are also plenty of people who say they want to serve God but fall into the belief that being a good person for the sake of being a good person is the way to do that. Both are wrong!

In many ways, this is what leads to religion, and our churches are full of those from both groups. There are those who use church as a place to learn how to be a good person and/or simply find it a place of encouragement to continue being a better person and/or that it keeps them on track in being so. Both groups can use church for this reason. The first group does so without care for the eternal, and the second does so with legalistic thoughts about how to make it to heaven. The fact so few have a true focus on even wanting to do good because a relationship with God leads us to do so, in causing us to strive to learn right for the very purpose of gaining a closer relationship with God, is why our churches can be very legalistic yet very liberal. People tend to think legalism is just about being strict, but that is not the case. Legalism is what I have been talking about, doing what you do, whether white, black, or any shade of gray in-between, for the wrong purpose.

The reason we end up with so many liberal churches is because legalism does not dictate we be righteous. It only dictates that we follow rules, traditions, and the like. You can do this because you believe it is what makes you a good person for the sake of being a good person, or you can do it in an attempt to get into heaven, but the real problem is that it becomes a group decision or the decision of a leader(s) that dictates what the rules are. Even in the case of a leader, or small group of leaders, making the decisions, it is still a group decision because we all have a free will to follow our own thoughts. In truth, we are following our own thoughts regardless of if those thoughts are something we want to formulate based on what we believe, using our own reasoning, or thoughts about just wanting an easy way of not having to think so much for ourselves. In either case, if we believe there is safety in numbers, there is not! As to the point of being strict or liberal, both will cause us to reject God because He is not the motivation behind what we do. Those who are strict will often find fault in God's judgments, especially in the ways He shows mercy to the sinner, because it does not conform to our religious thought pattern of what is necessary. This is what we see the Jewish religious establishment doing to Jesus as He was often accused of being too willing to be among the sinners. Thus, we see this side greatly exemplified in the Gospels and use it as the definition of legalism. However, the liberal side

will also reject God because as God attempts to bring us into righteousness and correct our wrong, we get upset that such ways are just being overbearing, restrictive, and we don't think it's necessary, especially with the way we interpret Jesus' actions which drew criticism from the very rigid Jewish religious leaders.

I must continually go back to the point this study is about, which is, have the Jews been rejected as God's people? The answer is no, and the most simplistic explanation as to how we know this is because a group of any size is always going to end up on the wrong side of things eventually. This is what the Bible shows us, and why the very first instructions God gave to man was not to take on the responsibility of good and evil for ourselves because in the day we did it would bring death. (Gen. 2:15-17) Man believes he can build a utopia in some way, but Revelation ends by showing us the total destruction and passing away of this earth and universe. So I repeat, any group of people, no matter how good a person the group might start out from, such as Abraham, or how good the initial group is led by a man of God, such as Moses, will eventually go bad. Why? Because an individual can be lifted from the miry clay, but as a whole, men are on a path of destruction. (Ps. 40:1-3, Prov. 14:12) God knew all this when He established the nation of Israel, and only if we believe God is a God Who sets us up for failure, should we fail to see how God set up the nation to serve a purpose in spite of this truth! The very core of the argument for why people believe the Jews have been rejected is because God has punished them as a nation. However, because of what we just covered, it should be clear to us God's interaction to correct the nation, and in many cases even restrict them from doing what He wanted and still wants them to do, was/is a forgone conclusion of something that would be necessary in order to maintain a chosen nation from the very start.

When we look at how the nation, and in particular the religious leadership, ended up treating The Messiah, we should not see a nation that went too far to be saved from their mistake. God gave His life willingly for the very purpose of saving us all! If this was not true, The Father would not have allowed The Son to endure the cross. What the Jews show us is our human nature, which demands we each have God's continual intervention and correction in our lives, and no greater example of that exists than when the chosen nation's religious leadership crucified The Messiah! Instead of fighting over the argument of saying the Jews are no longer God's people, we should continue to look to them to see the lessons we can learn from. We should understand that allowing the Jews to crucify The Messiah was not a course God took because it would lead to their rejection, but because it would lead to the ultimate salvation of all who seek the truth, both Jews and non-Jews. In a move only God could accomplish, He allowed people to do something for all the wrong reasons that held eternal positive consequences!

In this, we have the glaring light of where our human mistakes take us, but how God ultimately used it to bring about our ultimate salvation! Instead of seeing this, what calls itself the church attempts to judge the Jews for why they did what they did, all the while demanding Christians become a microcosm, if not a bigger monster, of what the Jewish religious establishment became. It's just astonishing how even

in doing such a foolish thing, we are arrogant enough to believe and teach that our choice to create a group can replace and do better than the one God Himself established and clearly defined the leadership of. We go off and create a group(s) and/or religion we depend on above our personal walk with God, which is made after our own thoughts! How could this not be a formula for our destruction? Groups, as a group, do not make it to heaven. Only individuals will ever accomplish that through their individual faith in God. Groups can be good at times and even make the best choices that can be made at the moment for maintaining the group, but whether they go up or down from there is all up to whether the right wins out over the wrong during any stretch of time, and what we judge the chosen nation on shows us the answer to what wins over and over.

Don't we ever wonder why the part of Jewish history we are covering in this study right now is not included in the official canon of scripture? While some accept certain books as being scripture, which do cover some of these events between the Testaments, this, in spite of the powerful organizations which do so, is not the consensus. Jews certainly do not hold the books outside what most of us know as the Old Testament as scripture, and a vast amount of those who call themselves Christians do not care about them. Why would they? Books covering the history between the Testaments are not of any great value to most Christians because they have a hard enough time believing there is a lot of value in the Old Testament, especially compared to the New. However, do you ever wonder why so little about church history is covered even in the New? Both the question of why the information between the Testaments is not canonized, as well as why it was/is not important to record any more of the history of the church following Christ are answered by the point that we have seen it repeated time and again. Daniel sought to see the end because even in his time he had seen enough to know there would obviously be one! Thus, the New Testament finishes with a fulfillment of Daniel's request to see the end in more detail by God giving the Revelation to John.

This brings us back to the historical point of what the Jews chose in 141 B.C. The choice to establish a family to be leaders until a faithful prophet arose was just another in a long series of events that confirm to us what the stories contained in the Old Testament showed us was going to happen. The Jews choice at this time was one meant to put the nation's foot on a path of reform. This is why I say, it was a good one at the time, but what went wrong after that is the faithful prophet was not sought for day and night by both the new leadership and the people. Because this was true, the new leadership would eventually grow into an establishment who could not stand the thought of giving up the power it had gained to step aside for the faithful prophet or The Messiah Himself when they came! In looking at what calls itself the church today, I am confident this is the same exact problem many who claim to be Christians will have when Jesus returns to take the reins of this earth. What calls itself the church very closely mirrors this time in the Jewish history, in that long ago it established itself as a group with one of its main purposes being to wait for the return of Christ! As we draw closer to the end, this becomes more and more like the state the Jews were in when determining they did

not know when or how God would set it all straight for the nation, but they would look for God's faithful prophet and establish an authority to continue the nation until such time.

The major difference between what calls itself the church and the chosen nation is that the chosen nation had a calling as a group and a template in the Law for what they were suppose to look like. The church, as an organization, has no such template. This is precisely why Catholicism made up a story, which is not in nor supported by scripture, that tells us there was/is a line of succession from Jesus passed to Peter and so on through the centuries which carries the authority of The Messiah. This line or position has for a very long time now simply been known as the "Pope." Unlike both the High Priest's or the King's position in Israel, there is no heritage or dynasty to determine who the rightful person for this job is. There are no set rules, other than those conveniently made by man, as to who this person should be. Why? Because nowhere during or after the time of Christ do we have God giving us a new Torah! Jesus made it clear He did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. (Matt. 5:17) If His point was to fulfill it, then the Law does not become irrelevant as so many claiming to be Christians foolishly try to argue, it makes it more important than ever that we understand It!

Another point I have often made in the studies I write is, what a misleading thing it is that we refer to the two major separations of the Bible as the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is to say there is an old covenant and a new covenant. In truth, there is the original Hebrew Bible, which while its arrangement is not exactly what Christians call the Old Testament, for all intense and purposes that's what the Old Testament is; and then there are the Gospels, which show us what the Law was established to point us to all this time. We can't understand that the Gospels have any relevance higher than any other religious philosophy in the world, without the original Law! The existence of this heaven and earth had a beginning, then a middle, and there will be an end. We certainly are not at the beginning! The Hebrew Bible makes that clear, but we are also not at the end. How do we know this? Well, just look around! This heaven and earth are still in existence; people are still being born; and Judgment Day is still in front of us. So where are we? Without the Law we cannot even begin to answer that question! Without the understanding It brings, we do not know at what point in the time between the beginning and the end we are at.

The Gospels are not the new Torah or anything of the like! The Gospels are just what the word means. They are the good news that all we read and learn about through study of the Hebrew Bible is true, and The Messiah has come! As we look at the Epistles, we need to understand the book of Acts is actually part of the Gospel of Luke. Those who put the canon of the New Testament together simply found it convenient to separate Acts and put it after what they saw as the neat package of having four Gospels which all covered about the same time period. Thus, the true teaching of those originally and directly called by Jesus to take forth the good news (this includes Paul as the true replacement of Judas as part of the twelve, which I will not take time to go in depth into right now), along with a

few words from early preachers who saw the pitfalls the church was already headed for, are encapsulated in the Epistles. These teachings were preserved for us so we might have help in seeing Jesus truly was The Messiah according to what the Hebrew Bible had shown, and this is why twelve Jewish men, not non-Jews, were called to be Jesus' apostles. These books also deal with a great amount of the bickering that took place as to whether non-Jews should have to enact and/or follow and/or become Jews in order to be saved, and the answer is no!

Beyond these books we get one last revelation which, as I said, is the fulfillment of what Daniel had asked for. When Daniel was seeing the vision he had so diligently sought for, there came a point where God told him, in spite of the fact he was worthy, Daniel had seen enough for the time being. This is why the rest of what Daniel wished to see would be shown to John, and give us a much more detailed look at the events that the end of Daniel's vision only skimmed over at best. In this fact alone we should see how much the New Testament is not a new Torah, which for the sake of this study is to point out that it in no way was intended to establish a new thing! Where we so often get tripped up is on the point that, of course, the fulfillment of many things in the Law and prophets meant a whole new understanding and viewpoint for those who live on this side of Christ. The new covenant Jesus spoke of was only in the fact that the generation living from there to the point of Christ's return would live being able to pair up much of what the Law had shown only in representation, directly with what now we see as historical facts!

The new covenant did not establish a new organization or group to take the place of the chosen nation. The new covenant did not destroy the chosen nation, dismantle it, hand its responsibilities to others, etc. The new covenant is what the chosen nation had been looking for not just in those who understood how the Law told them The Messiah would come, but even in this determination made at the time of the Maccabees that the nation would look for a faithful prophet to arise. The fact the nation did not accept the faithful prophet or The Messiah in a way that allowed them to get their nation back on track, only means the Jews, as a nation, were left in much the same place they had been in for a little over a century before Jesus came. They now have to wait until the return of The Messiah, which is something Christians hold dear but disconnect from the truth that the idea of waiting for The Messiah is not a Christian thing, it is a Jewish thing!

Now, before everyone goes all crazy on me over that last statement, stop to think about what might make you think badly about such a statement. It has to do with the very attitude we've been talking about when saying the Jewish religion and man's thirst for power is what caused the rejection of The Messiah the first time around. In many ways, the desire on the part of what calls itself the church to reject the chosen nation and insist they have been displaced by the church is the same attitude that killed The Messiah. Sure, there are those who will make the argument they are only upset with the Jews for pushing their religion, which does not recognize Jesus as being

The Messiah, and in doing so hurting the message of the Gospel. However, this has been true from the very start. The apostles, who were Jews, did not go out and for the most part get persecuted by the non-Jewish world, though there would be plenty of that. The greatest and most immediate battle faced was between Jews who did and Jews who did not accept Jesus as The Messiah. The fact the religion claimed by a majority of Jews today is still on the side of rejecting Jesus does not change anything from where it all started. The only real difference is that the church which holds Jesus was/is The Messiah, in no small part due to religion, consists of far more non-Jews than it does Jews.

However, on that point we should consider something simple, which is the fact this was always going to be the case if the chosen nation had any success at any point when it came to presenting The God of creation to the world. How blind as Christians do we have to be not to understand, the Jews are only one nation? It is beyond foolish to believe Jews can not be saved. Thus, the only logic to even debating about if the church has replaced the Jews or if the Jews have been "rejected" is to hold fast to a false belief such as saying, the only path to salvation before Jesus came and after the Law was established was that one had to become part of the Jewish nation. If that was true, then God's plan in giving the Law in order to establish a chosen nation failed miserably from the very start! Due to the fact you will find in the Law far more ways to be cut off from being considered part of the nation than you will ways to become a part of it, it is as if you're arguing God originally set up a plan that made it very hard to be saved. A plan that almost barred the door closed not opened it up!

Is this the kind of God you believe we serve? If your answer is yes, then you must believe we serve a God who changed somewhere between the Old and New Testament, and that makes you a Gnostic Christian for all intents and purposes, as well as one who rejects the scripture, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." Hebrews 13:8 Because it sure seems to me that to most Christians the ease of receiving salvation on this side of the cross is what they interpret as the "good news." Now, if your answer is no, then one should have always understood true believers in God who were outside the chosen nation would almost always have outnumbered those who were part of it, so nothing has really changed. These are all points I think those who claim to be Christians must stop to deeply consider, especially in light of the fact we grow ever closer to being the generation that will live to see the Second Coming of The Messiah we claim to be waiting for!

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

God, but that does not mean we really care. There are those who say big things with their mouths that they know very good and well are not really true feelings of their heart. These people will often be very guarded in the actions they take in the sight of other people so as to appear to be what they claim, but God knows the truth no matter what!

The part that should cause all of us to be working on our salvation in fear and trembling is the truth that even if we fully believe we are not one of the people I just spoke of, this also does not make it true! Far too often no matter if people start off in the right direction or not, they come to some place where they feel comfortable living and allow their growth in God to stagnate. In reality, there is no stagnation when it comes to our walk with The Lord. Our growth can be very slow, and at times we can feel we are not growing at all, even if we actually are. However, faith is a relationship and a relationship must be maintained. Unlike human family and friends who may be a great distance from one another or get very busy with no real time to spend with one another, this is not the case with God. With human relationships we can say that true love keeps the relationship strong no matter how little or much we can actually see one another, and I'm not saying this is not possible, but the point with God is that He is never far from us unless we push Him away!

It can be bad enough for us to stop taking the time we once did, or maybe never did, in seeking God without distraction, but it is very easy to go from that state to the one where we do not even listen to God as we go about our daily lives no matter how busy we are or are not. This is why I say there is no real stagnation when it comes to true faith. We either make God a priority in our daily lives, which is something we have no excuse not to do on the basis He is just not available to us, or we choose not to. Friends can be very busy, but that does not mean they do not directly maintain their relationship when they have an opportunity to work side by side day after day. This is why it is so much easier to carry on a relationship with someone you go to school with, work with, or see for some reason on a daily or close to daily basis than it is to maintain a long distance relationship. We can love someone very much, but if we can not be with them regularly it is just a fact we do not know what is going on with them, and when we do see them time has to be spent "catching up." Yet even doing this still means we have not experienced their lives by being there with them through the events they go through. Again, we never have to do this with God. He sees us on a daily basis, it's just up to us whether we pay any attention to Him and what He's trying to tell us, show us, lead us to, etc.

Because this is all true, we can claim that we have chosen God and know full well we don't really care, we can claim we choose God and believe some simple formula is what will get us into heaven, we can claim we choose God and believe our definition of being a good person is good enough, or we can claim to choose God and really believe we are doing what we should. However, in the end only God can choose those who truly walked with Him in faith because that is the life they really desire, and yes, I mean desire as in present

tense not the past tense of desired. Why? Because God is looking for those who find the path of righteousness and are attracted to it not just because of the reward they believe it holds at the end of their life, but because they see it as the most desirable way to live! These are the people God will populate heaven with, and God's mercy in giving us the opportunity to find this path and figure out this is what we want is shown in this story about Sodom and Gomorrah. In the first place, God comes down to see the situation close up. God then allows Abraham to plead for the cities on the basis there might be a few righteous in them. To this point it is important that we see, Abraham was not asking for the cities to be spared on the basis there might be a few righteous people in them who did not deserve to die! How do we know this? Because to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phili. 1:20-26)

As we covered above, it is vexing to the soul of the righteous to have to live in a world of sin. It is even more vexing to live in as sinful a place and/or with sinful people directly as Lot did in living in these cities. It was foolish for Lot to live there, and discussing why he and his family were given the opportunity to be spared is something I'm sure we will get into as this study goes along. That aside for now, the point is that if there had been even the lowest number of ten men in these cities which Abraham asked God if He would spare the cities for, these ten, if not rescued from the place as Lot was, probably would have welcomed being destroyed along with the place so they might go on into eternity with God instead of living in this sinful world. If we grasp this understanding of what the truth in life is about, which is that "heaven" is not just a reset or continuance of the same pitfalls and suffering we experience here nor about the consequences of bad actions simply being removed in some magical way, but a place of life lived among only others who all desire only righteousness, then we see Abraham's question in a better way.

What we see is that Abraham was asking God if it would be worth sparing the cities if there were just this many or that many, all the way down to only ten for whom there was - hope of salvation. It is to this inquiry that God answers yes it would be worth sparing all the cities with all the destructive influence they had on the entire land. God would have spared them if there was hope for even just ten to find and desire the path of righteousness. This is an astonishing thought in regard to how much God wants us to choose our own way without major interference on His part, and it should both comfort us and terrify us at the same time! If we think again about how God is The One Who chooses us, we can be terrified by the feeling of insecurity in having no assurance we are saved, but that's the point - we are not! Until we have passed from this life and found ourselves called unto Jesus' side, we are not saved. We still live in this world which vexes us. This means we are also still in a world full of temptation to step off of the path of righteousness and/or lose sight of how much righteousness is what we understand to be the best way to live. Does that sound like salvation?

The only thing that assures us day by day that we are going to be saved is our direct relationship with God, Who has promised He will not leave us nor forsake us. Faith is the

substance of the salvation we hope for and the evidence of the salvation we have not yet experienced. (Heb. 11:1) That is our assurance, but it comes only in us walking a path we choose to walk and continue to walk through all the sinful vexing this world throws at us. This is why we must have God's help to find true righteousness, but we must find our own way without God's major interference to push us into it. A truth I have known since I was a child and have come to know in a deeper sense as I've gotten older and older is that it is when the devil stops bothering you that one should get worried. You see, unlike God, the devil cannot be everywhere at all times and neither can those angels who followed him in rebelling against God. This means they have to pick and choose when and how much effort to put forth in attacking the one who is a true believer or on the brink of finding the path of righteousness. When the devil no longer finds it worth his time and resources to attack you, it means he is not worried about losing you to the other side and/or he's certainly not worried your efforts in life are leading others to God, of which there is no activity one can do that runs more contrary to the devil's desires!

On the other hand, we go back to the truth God is always with us and this is not effected by how much or little He is with anything else He deals with. If we combine this understanding with the truth that God's presence in our life is the substance of what salvation means to us here and the evidence that we are on the right track, it means that for God to be taking major interventive steps to lead us to salvation would, in the end, make it seem we are on the right path when we are not. It would seem He is taking us to salvation in spite of the fact we have not made the choice for ourselves. This would be misleading us, and God is not going to do this. This point is just another reason why God Himself did not follow the angels into Sodom and Gomorrah. For all the other reasons He would not, even Lot needed to know that God only sent angels to lead him out of the cities he had so foolishly chosen to live in. I believe Lot, being who he was and knowing who Abraham was, understood pretty well that even the truth that angels came to lead him out had to do with the righteousness of Abraham and not because even Lot deserved it. This is an example of what I'm saying.

None of this is to say God is not taking steps in the lives of many people, and in various ways the lives of all people, to ensure they have a chance to find the path of righteousness and choose it. This is seen in all the stories I just keep hammering on, like the confounding of the language at the tower, the sending of the flood in Noah's day, and the actions God took after Adam and Eve sinned, as well as the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, as we just covered in talking about Lot, there is also the truth that when there are those who serve God, intervening on your part to God and asking for Him to work in your life, one will see God's hand and work more prevalent than when we do not have such people. Now, this does not mean you will like what you see. If your desire is to resist God and His ways, you may find this a constant bother in your life, and that should be very good

evidence to you that you are not on the right track. If God intervening in your life is something that upsets you, it goes without saying you are not desiring righteousness nor on the path that leads to salvation! On the other hand, if you are someone who desires the righteous path, your walk in faith may not start out with any - to use an expression - "fireworks" at all. You may simply find yourself serving God as if it was something you were born to do, which by the way, it was/is!

Now, some might argue it is unfair that there are those who have intervention for them and those who do not, but understand God is a just God. In the end, God gives to every person the opportunity to find and follow the path of righteousness. To explain what I just did is not to talk about God being a respecter of persons, for the Word tells us He is not. (I Pet. 1:15-21) It is simply to say that some may see more prevalent intervention while others are not as aware that God is working for their salvation. To those who desire the ways of righteousness, seeing this will, at the very least, someday be something they look back on and are very grateful for; but for those who do not ultimately choose the path, no matter if they do so for a time, they will find it to be anything from a bother to just plain useless. I think where more often than not the real difference comes in for those who have someone intervening to God for them, probably has a lot to do with at what point in your earthly existence you get the opportunity to start walking in the faith that makes you feel secure you're on the right path. This, of course, can also affect how much you might be able to work for God in your lifetime. This is why being raised in a true Christian home can be a great advantage. There can be far fewer wasted years of you looking for the path and feeling confident you're on it. In either case, none of this hinders anyone who desires true salvation from obtaining it, and having a better opportunity to find the path can in some way be just as much a disadvantage for some as it is an advantage for others. We are all unique individuals!

As we look at our study here, this is what the conversation Abraham had with God about sparing the cities had to do with. God was not sending angels to preach throughout the cities in order to give them an opportunity to repent in a like way God would later send Jonah to Nineveh when that city faced the same kind of judgment. No matter how many people there were in the cities who may have believed they were good people, there was not even ten who would have responded to the message of repentance or God would have let nature take its course in the lives of all those in these cities. God's intervention in destroying these cities would be for the sake of those outside the cities who did have hope of finding and following the path that leads to salvation, a hope which Sodom and Gomorrah's continuance would have stolen from them!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

do, and for that reason God had brought them out of Egypt. He also points out one day there would be a king among Israel, which confirmed they were not going to be a loose knit group of wanderers. No amount of magic the king or others believed they could use against Israel was anything but foolishness as God was always going to be greater. Israel simply could not be stopped from doing what God had called them to do!

However, the king just could not get it out of his mind that Balaam must hold power to do something other than speak God's words about Israel. Balaam reminds Balak that he warned the king this was all he could do, but the king again insists on giving it yet another try. Thus, they go to another predominant mountain, and the cycle of seven altars with their sacrifices is accomplished again. What was different this time is that Balaam did not bother to go away and seek God because his eyes had been opened by God's words, and so he does just what the king wanted him to do, which was use his own words to speak of Israel. The problem for the king was that while he got what he wanted in Balaam speaking his own thoughts, Balaam's words were now perfectly in line with God's will! Balaam looks out on Israel and begins to prophesy about not just what Israel would mean in the short term but what the nation would mean in the long term. He spoke of all the affects they would have on the various nations of the world and how they would prevail as God's chosen nation until the end of this earth. He even adds the words of how Israel would be the one upon whom curses and blessings would come according to whom they cursed and blessed. When the king heard all this he was enraged, and began to rant about how the prophet had denied himself great rewards by listening to God instead of doing what the king wanted. To this, Balaam reminds the king one more time that he had told his princes when they first came to him that he could only do God's will.

Balaam shows no fear of the king, and before he goes tells Balak what else he knows about what the future holds for Moab and the surrounding region because of Israel. Balaam tells Balak how it would not be the immediate future he should worry about being a danger to Moab, but further down the road Moab would be ruled over by Israel. Not only that, while Israel would go on into the future, the Moabites would eventually cease to exist as a people. Edom would suffer much of the same fate and its great stronghold would become the possession of others. Balaam goes on to look across the Canaanites and speak to how they were the prey of Israel in spite of the fact so many of them, unlike Balak, felt secure in their ability to face Israel. He concludes by speaking to the point there was really no hope that any of the people of the region could maintain long-term survival as a people, because many other people beside just those Moab normally dealt with would become involved in the region. Because Israel was in God's plan to be used as His chosen nation, they would go on to be involved in all these future events; but the people Balak thought were so important would not! With this, Balaam would go home and Balak would return to his seat of "power," having gotten a much different outcome than he had hoped for.

The events of this story are very appropriately

followed by the next events we are told, which are that of Israel involving themselves with the Moabites and Midianites in the practice of their false religion. What is interesting about this is that in one instance the king of Moab along with the princes of Midian are desirous that a prophet of God curse Israel for them because they are afraid of them. In the next instance we see those very same people being friendly with the Israelites and seducing them into taking part in their pagan practices. This is not to excuse Israel's own choice in involving themselves, and the story shows us God held them directly accountable for their actions. However, it is reasonable to assume that Moab and Midian decided to change tactics and go right along the lines the devil would use. It was as if to say, if God won't help us then we will destroy Israel from within by getting them to turn away from God, and long term it might have worked had not God and those zealous for Him acted to turn back this activity and punish those involved.

Basically, the Moabites' main religion involved worshiping a set of false gods which hold or represent the powers of nature as there is in almost all cultures. Almost without exception certain of these gods end up being held in higher regard than the others in any culture's particular set. While it is not clear just which specific god might have been worshiped in this incidence, one can speculate that it was a god mentioned later in the history which Moab held in high regard. (I Kin. 11:6-8) In any case, the verses here simply referred to it as Baal-peor, which basically is to say the god(s) of the mountain Peor. In Greek terms this might have been to say they were joined in the worship of the gods of Mount Olympus. This means it really did not matter which specific god there may or may not have been a high feast for at this time, it is only important that a false god or gods was being worshiped. Whether those Israelites that joined in on this did so in order to worship false gods or just for the revelry of the celebration is also not important. This was a personal affront to God, and it would seem it included some very lewd and promiscuous acts between males and females, as so often pagan festivals do.

For this, God told Moses those who were involved were to be put to death by hanging them facing the sun. In almost all cultures the sun was considered one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of their gods, and hanging these individuals with their faces toward the sun made an example of how much this kind of activity would not be tolerated among Israel. It also represented how much these would not live to see another sunrise. Moses instructs those who were appointed judges in Israel, for the sake of taking some of the burden off Moses, to go out and be sure the sentence was carried out for all those under their jurisdiction. However, due to this same sin, a plague had also begun to move through Israel, and those who had not taken part in this sin had gathered themselves before the door of the tabernacle to weep and pray for God's forgiveness. In a blatant disregard for this, we are told one of the men of Israel who had joined in the pagan festivities actually brought a Midianite woman back to the camp of Israel. As bad as it was to go out of the camp and join others in the worship of false gods, bringing the activity into the camp of Israel was an even higher offense, as this entire incident brings to mind the time before the flood when those who served God

began to take wives out from among those who did not serve God. (Gen. 6:1-3) Before the flood, such activity brought an end to the distinction between those who lived for God and those who rejected Him until the entire world came to such a corrupt state the end of all flesh came before God. In a more isolated way that is the threat this kind of activity brought directly into the nation of Israel.

Another fact we are told about this particular couple is that both the man and the woman represented leadership among their families. Thus, this was not just about a couple of foolish young people choosing to have a fling. The joining of this couple would represent a joining on a political level between Israel and Midian. This was exactly the kind of connections with the people of the land God had warned Israel not to make! For this blatant act, Phinehas, the son of the High Priest, rose up, got a spear, and went into the couple's tent. There he drove the spear through them both, killing them and making it clear that no such connections would be tolerated in Israel. What is important about the fact this was a man in the direct line of the High Priesthood who took this action is that in any normal circumstance the act of killing another human for any reason would be something God did not allow the priest to be involved in, if for no other reason than to ensure the priest could remain clean in order to carry out the ordinances of the tabernacle. Another reason is so the priests would not have blood on their hands in general. The idea of not believing the priesthood and service of the tabernacle was established through military might is exactly why, later on, God did not allow David to build the temple but left it for his son Solomon to do once Israel was in a time of peace.

However, in the case of Phinehas, we see a man who was overcome with the righteous zeal for the purity of Israel and punishment of sin. Not only did this not bring any punishment from God upon him but a blessing instead. In the end of it all, 24,000 in Israel died due to the plague and those executed for their sin as God had commanded to be done, but Phinehas' actions are what God said He stopped the plague because of. Thus, God speaks to Moses specifically about how this action by Phinehas had made an atonement for Israel's sin in this matter, and due to that it would secure God's favor on his house, and his family line would go on to be perpetual priests. God also affirms to Moses that the Midianites did this as an intentional act to undermine Israel, which is what made Phinehas' actions so appropriate. For this, Moses was to specifically vex the Midianites. As was covered before, God was using Israel to destroy the Canaanite population while leaving those descended from Israel's same family line alone. While there is more than one group of people known as Midianites, this particular group, which was nomadic and living in the same general region with the Moabites, would appear to be one descendant from one of the sons of Abraham through Keturah. This is why God makes it clear to Moses he is to vex them. They would have been part of the groups Israel would have left intact and not bothered, but that would now change. Though one important note on this is that vexing is still not an order to utterly destroy them as God had/would

command to be done to the Canaanite populations.

Next, we have the record of another census being taken in Israel much as was done early on after they left Egypt. However, this would be a census of a new generation in Israel, and it is confirmed to us this took place after the plague which had killed many thousands. Moses and Eleazar are told to count all those able to go to war who were twenty years old and older accounting for the numbers that belonged to each house. This would basically go down the lines of the tribes, but family groups inside each tribe are named. Among Reuben there were four major houses, and altogether they numbered 43,730. It is also pointed out that this tribe was diminished by the incident where Dathan and Abiram, along with Korah had come against Moses and Aaron. While Korah's family group, who was of Levi, survived; the houses of Reuben's tribe that were involved did not.

Next was Simeon, of whom there were five major houses, and in all they numbered 22,200. Gad consisted of seven major houses, and in all they numbered 40,500. Two of Judah's sons died before Israel even ended up in Egypt, but the tribe went on to consist of three primary houses and two more notable ones that both grew out of one of the three, giving five major houses in all and a total number in Judah of 76,500. Issachar consisted of four major houses, and in all they numbered 64,300. Zebulun consisted of three major houses, and in all they numbered 60,500. Joseph became the two tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh consisted of one primary house, out of which came another notable house, and from that one came six more notable houses. For reasons which become apparent later on, it is also noted here that a part of one of the houses within these last six consisted only of daughters. However, in all, Manasseh consisted of eight major houses, and in all numbered 52,700. Ephraim consisted of three primary houses, and out of one of these came one more notable house making four major houses, and in all they number 32,500.

Benjamin consisted of five major houses, and out of one of them came two more notable houses making seven houses, and in all they numbered 45,600. Dan consisted of only one major house and numbered 64,400. Asher consisted of three major houses, and out of one of them came two more notable houses. Asher's daughter Sarah is also mentioned here, but this made for five major houses, and in all they numbered 53,400. Naphtali consisted of four major houses, and in all they numbered 45,400. This would cover all the tribes of Israel, leaving out the tribe of Levi. In all, these tribes numbered 601,730 of those able to go to war, twenty years old and older. It would be unto these groups the promised land would be divided. Bigger groups would get bigger plots of land and smaller groups would get smaller plots. However, no favor would be shown in giving bigger or smaller groups land that was more preferable than another. To keep down any arguing in this regard, a random drawing system would be used to choose which group's plot would be mapped out one after the other.

Let's stay in God's Word!

