

Free - Take One



Shaqah

שפדאן

*“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*

Issue #90

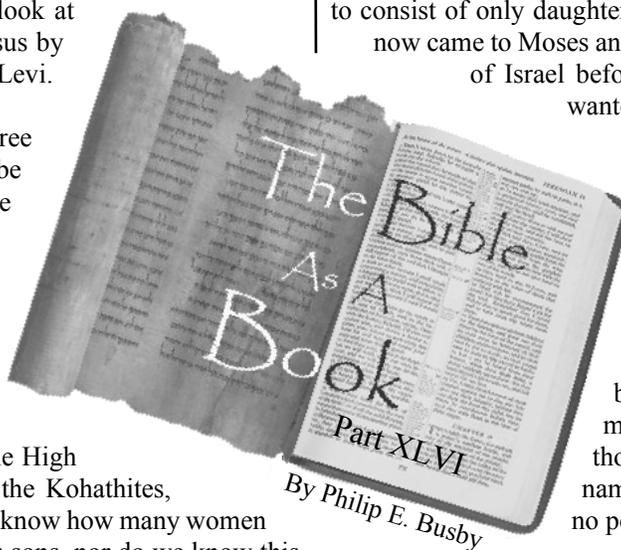
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May & June 2017

As we continue our overview of the book of Numbers, we ended last time by talking about the census God was having Moses carry out in order to count the new generation of Israel which would enter the promised land and to whom the land would be divided. This covered the numbering of all the tribes except Levi, and shows us only the number of those men twenty years old and older who were able to go to war. Of just them, we see a number over a half million. This brought us through Numbers chapter 26 verse 56, and we are ready to start our look at verse 57, which continues the census by going into talking about the tribe of Levi.

The tribe of Levi had three major divisions by which the tribe was separated into groups, and these were named for the sons of Levi. They were the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites. These three divisions consisted of five specific houses, and in a way there were six because the specific family Moses and Aaron came from became the house of the High Priesthood. Kohath, the father of the Kohathites, had a son named Amram. We don't know how many women were involved in Levi fathering his sons, nor do we know this about Kohath. However, Amram stays within his family line very early on and marries one of his father's sisters who was born to Levi in Egypt. Her name was Jochebed. Amram and Jochebed give birth to Moses and Aaron, making them great-grandchildren of Levi on their father's side and grandchildren on their mother's. The important part of this specific branch of the family would, of course, be Aaron who had four sons, two of whom died very early on after the establishment of the tabernacle's services because they did not follow God's instructions in their duties. In all, the tribe of Levi numbered 23,000, but this was all males from one month old and upward without the stipulation they be those able to go to war. This is because the tribe of Levi would not go to war, nor would they obtain a specific piece of the promised land as a tribe. They were the priesthood and belonged to God. Those things they would possess would be things given to God by the nation.

This would finish the census God had Moses and Eleazar take, and out of all the people numbered in this, there would only be two men who were part of the first census that was taken by Moses and Aaron when Israel originally came out of Egypt. Joshua and Caleb remained strong and healthy, because God had granted them favor due to their being the two spies who trusted in God to bring the nation into the promised land as God first wanted them to. The other anomaly in this census was that one house in the tribe of Manasseh had come to consist of only daughters. The five daughters of this house now came to Moses and Eleazar who were with the princes of Israel before the tabernacle. These daughters wanted to make the point their father died having left a significant family, but because they were only daughters there was no male to be numbered in the census. They also wanted to point out that their father was not one of the men who rose up against Moses and Aaron during Korah's rebellion, but died only of his own sin like so many others. Due to all this, they thought it only right that their father's name not be lost in Israel and be given no possession in the land.



Moses would take this issue to The Lord, as only God could tell him what was right and how to handle such a request. The answer God gives would not only bring clarity to how to handle this situation but others like it that might arise in the future after the land was divided. God told Moses the daughters were correct, and this family was to be given a possession along with those families with male representatives. God goes on to instruct that Israel was to know that in the future if a man died only having daughters, it was his daughter(s) right to inherit the family's possession. If in an even worse case the man had no children, then his possession would pass to someone else in his same direct family tree - such as a brother or sibling's children. Further, if a man died with no children who also had no siblings, then it was to be given to a family branching from his father's siblings. Basically, the rule was to follow the family line backward until a branch of the

P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539

(970) 593-9468



family could be found to take the possession, and this would keep each possession within the specific family group to which it belonged in the best way it could. In some ways, this backtracking would simply put the possession in the hands of someone who might have had it in the case the original branch that possessed it had never come about in the first place!

With this new census being completed, God instructs Moses concerning the fact Moses was to end his long earthly ministry of leading the chosen nation through their official formation, and to this place where they would finally enter and possess the land where they were intended to permanently reside. God told Moses he would go up into a mountain named Abarim from which he would be able to see across a great portion of the land God would give the nation. After getting this one last chance to see the land, Moses' earthly life would end not by natural causes, but in a specific place and at a specific moment in time much like his brother Aaron's life ended. God then reminds Moses about the incident which had proven he was being pushed to his human limit in leading these people, and God would not ask him to continue taking on the burden of being the one to lead this new generation into what lay ahead. Moses then shows the spirit was still willing, in that he cared very deeply for the people and was concerned they were not yet ready to be without a specific man to lead them as he had. Showing he in no way doubted God, Moses asks God to give the nation such a man to replace him.

This is where the separation of looking only to the priesthood for leadership guidance would take place for the first time; as God instructs Moses to take Joshua, a man who had stood by Moses for so long but was not of the priestly family, to fill this task. However, Joshua had always believed with his whole heart in the plan of God for the nation, and this made him the right man to be given Moses' responsibilities. Moses was to perform a ceremony of laying his hands on Joshua before the High Priest and in the sight of the nation in order to show this was the man Moses personally trusted, but more importantly the one God had instructed to take charge of the things Moses had cared for, for so long. Unlike Moses, Joshua would not go before God's direct presence, but point the people to what they should always do, which was turn to the priest in order to ask God's instructions. Joshua would go to the High Priest, and the priest would go before God to receive God's wisdom for those things the nation faced. This was simply a man acting on a national level the way each individual in Israel was to come before God on a personal level! By the instructions of God given to the priest and relayed to Joshua, the nation would live and move as a people through the events of taking possession of the land. Thus, Moses performs this ceremony just as God had instructed him.

The next part is God telling Moses the words he needed to give to Israel in order to ensure that the handing over of leadership to Joshua, along with the fact this is a new generation in Israel which will live a different kind of life once on their land, does not and will not change what God expects of the nation in serving Him at the tabernacle. To make it simple, it is to emphasize the representational Laws were/are not just for the wilderness journey! Thus, God's words to

Moses starts with the commandment that God's sacrifices and offerings are to be offered as they are to happen at their appointed time without fail. Moving into specifics, God goes over the sacrifices that were to be performed every day, which consisted of two lambs in their first year along with the plant-based elements of flour and oil that went along with each of them. One was to be offered in the morning and the other in the evening. There was also to be a drink offering poured out before The Lord along with both these sacrifices each day.

On each weekly Sabbath there were to be added to these continual offerings two more lambs in their first year with their plant-based elements and drink offerings. Basically doubling the amount of the daily sacrifices. On the first day of each new month there were to be added to whatever daily sacrifices that needed to be offered, on the basis of what day of the week it might fall, two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year; of course, all perfect specimens as every sacrifice should be. Each of these sacrifices would also have their corresponding plant-based offering consisting of the correct measurements required for each type of animal offered along with them. Drink offerings of an amount specific to each type of animal were also to be offered with each sacrifice. Along with these there was to be offered a specific sin offering for the month, which was one young goat, offered in the manner such a sin offering was to be offered, and a drink offering along with this sin offering. Again, none of this took the place of, but was on top of, the other sacrifices the day demanded.

Now, this is where certain days would get very busy at the temple, because feast days also had their sacrifices and offerings that were to be offered on top of what the particular day called for. The fourteenth day of the first month is Passover, and that evening would begin the seven day feast of Unleavened Bread in which no leaven was to be eaten. The first day of Unleavened Bread was to be honored in the same way a Sabbath is, in that no work was to be done. Sacrifices were also to be offered each of the seven days, which were very similar to those offered on the first day of the month. They were two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. All these were again to have their corresponding plant-based offerings, and a drink offering was to be offered along with each one. There was also to be offered a sin offering of one young goat, with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. These were to be offered after the morning sacrifice of the lambs required for the daily offerings on every day of this seven day feast. The seventh and last day of this feast was also to be observed as a Sabbath, in that no work was to be done.

The second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is also the Feast of Firstfruits, and this day started a count of seven sets of seven. When this count is complete, the following day was to be the Feast of Weeks, and this day required a very similar set of sacrifices and offerings as well: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, each with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There was also to be a sin offering of one young goat with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. This day was also to be observed like a Sabbath day, in that no work was to be done;

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we did not really begin our look at Genesis chapter 19, in spite of the fact we had covered all the verses in chapter 18 by the end of the segment before. Instead, we went back and took a more contemplative look at what the last verse in chapter 18 tells us, as well as the overall conversation God had with Abraham about the decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Hopefully, that conversation will help us understand more about the direct story concerning the cities' destruction and God saving Lot from it, which is told to us in chapter 19.

Genesis chapter 19 verse 1 tells us two angels came to the city of Sodom, at evening. In this simple line there are two things we want to keep in mind. First, these are the same angels who stopped with God at Abraham's tent. Many would say this is easy to see, but let's not pass up the opportunity to again look at an example of how, if we allow chapters and verses to be more than reference points within the Bible or fragment the words we are told, one can easily misinterpret the overall story. I have spared no opportunity pointing out how much three men came by Abraham's tent that day but only two went on to the cities, which shows us the third man was God Himself Who stayed and talked with Abraham. Not only is this generally clearer when we do not separate the story of chapter 18 from where we begin chapter 19, but there is another fact in that the angels came at evening. This would make the timing about right. The three men came by Abraham's tent in the heat of the day and stayed to eat a meal. By the time the angels left and continued their travel in the same way any human would, it would be evening before they made it to the valley where the cities were.

The second point in this statement is that only the two angels came. This is not just to repeat God was the third "man," but to point out, while it was clearly God's intent to take a look at the cities from more of our perspective, and even converse with Abraham about the situation before passing the final judgment, God would not go into such a sin-filled place Himself. When we look at the fact God and the angels were walking as men in this instance along with the knowledge that God's presence is technically everywhere, and combine that with the thought of how Jesus came down in human flesh for the express purpose of God being able to freely and directly walk among sinful men, we have a conversation that could take up many segments of this series. However, I will attempt to be basic about this here. We have talked often about God's presence being a matter of degree when it comes to the fact God's presence is everywhere. This is clearly shown to us as Israel travels the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the promised land. God's eye was always upon them; but He wished to be so directly among the nation, there is a physical manifestation of a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day upon the tabernacle, and which led Israel as they traveled.

This is certainly a more direct presence of God than we see in almost any other place for any prolonged period of time. However, this direct presence of God was not without its consequences. When Israel sinned, God's wrath, many times, came down on them very swiftly and consumed many people before actions could be taken to intervene and atonement made that stopped such events. The absolute Holiness of God is why God wants to be with us, but sin clearly prevents it from being as direct and physical as God showed us in the Garden of Eden He desired it to be. In the case of Jesus coming to the earth in actual physical form to live as we live, God was able to walk among us very directly; but remember, Jesus' walking among us as one of us was truly that! He was limited in the same way we are limited. He could only be in one place at a time. We are even told on more than one occasion Jesus physically needed rest. God truly became a man, even to the extent He could be challenged by the devil in the same way a human was/is. Jesus was vulnerable to sin by both the temptations the devil directly brings, as well as those faced in this life, regardless of the devil's direct actions. (I John 2:15-17)

There just are not words to really explain this in a shorthand way other than to say God allowed a part of Himself to be encapsulated in human flesh. During this time, Jesus was afflicted as we are by the reality sin brings. By taking on our same vulnerabilities to sin, Jesus stepped aside from being our judge and gained the ability to directly walk among us. (Heb. 2) However, the fact Jesus endured this trial only furthered God's righteous ability and responsibility to judge each and every one of us for our failures and our choices to do wrong! This is why I also take the opportunity, when it comes around, to point out the devil was not rejoicing as so many wrongly think he was when Jesus died on the cross. Better than almost any of us can, Satan understood that his failure to get Jesus to sin at any point in His life before Jesus' death, made Jesus' death on the cross the ultimate victory for God, not Satan.

Now, when God came in the form of a man to Abraham, walking along with two angels, God was not encapsulated in physical form or vulnerable as we are in any way! God was simply appearing as a man, and even this was not as direct or - shall we say - intense a presence as the pillar of cloud/fire appearance was later among Israel. This allowed God to be with a man such as Abraham, but going into the cities would have demanded their more immediate judgment by God's Holiness, even in this form. As we touched on last time, God also did not desire to make any show of being willing to enter and tolerate such sin. At the time, this likely would only have meant something to Lot and Abraham, but in the long term, it allows us to have this conversation today. This is why God uses angels to walk among us on many occasions, and we use the word "angel" to describe these beings, because it simply means "messenger of God." It might help us

understand this point to also remember Satan himself was an angel who did exactly this kind of walking among men. (Job 1:6-7) The reason he is no longer an “angel” is because he no longer works for God, in spite of the fact he still works to bring a part of God's plan to pass more than he would ever want to admit. If this was not true, God would not have allowed his continuance on this planet; and getting deeper into that would open yet another large discussion.

One other point made in this opening statement of chapter 19 is that the angels came into Sodom, but does not mention Gomorrah or the other city (possibly cities), which would all be part of the destruction to come. In this, remember two more points. First, the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah is like so many references to what we might call a major metropolitan area, where there are big cities that grow and merge with other cities both large and small. In these cases, we tend not to name each individual city unless we need to give a specific address inside one of them. We simply refer to them by one or two of the names of the biggest or most prominent cities the conglomerate consists of. This was the case with Sodom and Gomorrah, and part of the reason it was becoming such a festering mess of sinfulness that would infect the entire region! Like the draw to the city and tower man built after the flood, these kinds of places become not just places where many of the people of a particular region or larger area live, but they set the tone for what kind of lifestyle is considered "the norm," as we say.

The second point about only mentioning Sodom is simply that Sodom is the city Lot specifically lived in. Why is this important? It's important because we need to be clear on the fact the angels' mission was not to evangelize the cities. Their mission was not the task Jonah was given when God, many centuries later, sent him to Nineveh! God had already made it clear in His conversation with Abraham how little hope there needed to be for just a few souls in Sodom and Gomorrah to be saved, in order for God to call the entire thing off. Thus, the only concern of these angels as they went was to ensure a safe opportunity for Lot to get out of this area before the destruction came. One should also note that the angels coming in the simple appearance of men foreshadowed no looming threat to the other people of the cities. There would be no stories or rumors about how two angelic or supernatural beings had come, which pagan minded people might quickly pick out as a “bad omen,” of some sort. One last important point in this is, God was also leaving it up to Lot and each individual in his family as to whether they wanted to leave or stay. This point would become obvious in looking at the actions of Lot's wife later in the events. Simply put, even Lot's family was not compelled by the appearance of these angels that what they said was true, and this means they too would need a certain amount of discernment, or trust, in order to see these angels as anything more than just a couple of strangers passing through with a big story to tell!

With this, we can move on into the verse, because Lot's reaction to seeing these two men shows us, in spite of his living in these cities, he still had a certain amount of this discernment left in him. We are told Lot sat in the gate of the

city as men of important stature, especially those who acted as judges among the people, often did so as to be accessible to the people. There should be no illusion here that Lot was the only such man at the gate these angels came to. What this means is that when we are told Lot gets up and goes out to meet them, bowing his face to the ground before them and calls them "Lord," he was not simply showing the kind of common courtesy afforded every stranger which happened to visit the city! As we covered in talking about Abraham seeing the three men coming passed his tent, these men were not glowing or dressed in a manner that indicated they were men of great importance, and they do not seem to draw the attention of anyone except Abraham as they pass by him. So too, here no one but Lot seems compelled to make a special effort to go to the angels. However, Lot not only is the one to greet them, but his reaction to them shows some similarity with that of Abraham.

In verse 2, we specifically see Lot inviting these men to come to his house in order to stay the night, even offering the customary amenity of washing their feet because that was something one wanted to do after traveling in sandals for any length of time. As verse 1 told us, it was evening, and it was customary for people to stay with someone in those days rather than look for an inn of some sort as would later become the norm. Again, only Lot seems to desire these men to do so, as there appears to be no other offers given to them. In spite of this, the men simply say no, but that they would stay in the street. This might seem odd in light of the fact we just talked about how these angels came specifically to warn Lot. However, God does not do things for no reason, and the purpose here would seem to be to begin this entire encounter with Lot having forefront in his mind just what a sinful place he lived in. One might want to attribute Lot's urging for them not to do such a thing as simply being like Abraham in that he too wanted these honored guests to stay with him, and while I will not dispute there was a certain amount of that, which is shown in the fact that once Lot had convinced them to stay with him he provides a feast, Lot also knew very good and well what came of people who stayed in the streets of such a place!

Verse 3 tells us the angels did, in fact, stay with Lot and eat with him, but in considering that they had first said they would stay in the streets that night, we should also keep in mind these angels wanted to emphasize they were not afraid to do such a thing. It is interesting how these kinds of interactions between men and God and/or His servants often go. Lot clearly seemed to recognize these two men as more than just men, but at the same time, he feared for their safety as much or more than he simply wanted their presence in his home. We often have trouble believing God hears us or that we are important enough for Him to care about, while at the same time when confronted by God, especially the more He comes to us on our level, we quickly lose track of the fact, He does not need our protection, understanding, etc., and nothing is hidden from Him. God desires to be with us and commune with us, but it is an understatement to say this relationship is like a parent wanting to be with their child.

Verse 4 begins the story that shows us just how much

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XX

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 couple of segments we left our step by step covering of history, and instead talked about how the events that culminated in 141 B.C. had a lasting impact and also an inevitable outcome in many ways. Thus, we covered a broad look at history as well as some of the reasons religious thought, which is human thought, interfered with the nation really getting back on track in the way they could have. All this spoke to the impact this had not just on the Jews but the non-Jews, in particular how those who became Christians have come around to thinking wrong about the Jews as the chosen nation. While, again, we have taken a good look at things that cause us to more clearly see the answer to our question, we do not want to end our more detailed historical look here, as it is important to our understanding that the chosen nation is not about the human leadership, but about the individuals of the nation striving to be a group tasked with enacting God's representational Laws in their everyday lives.

In this segment, we will attempt to get back to a more step by step historical look of what happened after the Maccabees became both the secular leaders as well as held the power of the High Priesthood. I have mentioned many times the fact this decision to establish what became known as the Hasmonean Dynasty came with the declaration this would be the way things were until a faithful prophet arose who could set it all straight. This statement is, of course, important because no matter what the nation chose to do from there, this declaration was - for all intents and purposes - asking God to correct the situation in His timing, and that's exactly what set the stage for not just The Messiah to come, as was prophesied He would one day, but also how He would not come in force, but offering Himself to be the leader the nation should have been waiting for! All this shows us how much God does not set us up for failure, but at the same time knows we will get ourselves in deeper and deeper trouble the more we exercise our free will without yielding to Him. The history that takes us from this moment we have made it to in our historical overview, up to the coming of The Messiah, continues to show us God was allowing the nation to do what we all as individuals get to do, which is choose for ourselves whether to look to God or go our own way.

The important information about what has happened in the lead-up to where we've made it in our historical look is the time Judas Maccabee knew the Seleucid army was something he could not hold off forever on his own, and had asked the Romans to intervene. As we covered, the Romans did not send an army or anything directly helpful in the Maccabee's struggle against the Seleucid, but they did make a

determination that would stay in their minds. At the time, the Romans very much liked the idea of using Judea as a wedge - or buffer - to keep the two remaining powers of the Greek empire that still had any significance from being able to meld together. One could say it took the Romans as long as it did to get directly involved, on the basis that the events taking place in Judea were creating this situation without Rome having to expend any of their resources to make it happen. Due to this, the Romans would stand by and allow events to unfold in Judea. They would eventually officially recognize the Hasmonean Dynasty; but when the time was right, they would more directly intervene to basically add Judea to their realm.

Realm is actually a good term when talking about the Roman empire, and this is what makes a study of the string of empires shown to Daniel so interesting. As each one progressed we see how they were well represented in the statue the king saw in his vision, and which Daniel interpreted. (Daniel 2) The Greeks were the brass, which is a metal very useful for many things, but at the same time has a more pleasant appearance like the precious metals of silver and gold that preceded them in the statue. The iron that represented the Romans shows how much Rome was really focused, not on any real purity in culture and beauty, but a focus on the workability of an empire. They were trying to connect the world together in whatever way it was possible to do so. This they did by building roads and creating a system where people would become Roman citizens, while others under their rule were not forced to. Rome would not care so much about things the Greeks held in high regard, which would win people over through the beauty of their culture, but more by the prestige and privilege that came with being a part of the greater group or the "greatest civilization."

When we understand this, we should see why the Romans were not immediately interested in anything but keeping those powers which could be a threat to them, from remaining one or becoming one. As much as we tend to look at the Romans as brutal and powerful, the truth is, overall they didn't care to destroy, consume, or replace individual cultures when they didn't see it as necessary to maintain control. Their interest was in making all the pieces of their realm work together in a "profitable" way. As they took direct control of a region, they would use force when it was necessary to show they would not tolerate rebellion or unrest in general. However, before taking over a region, it could work in their favor to pit cultures against each other as a way to weaken them. In many ways, this is what we are seeing at this point in the lands held by the remaining pieces of the Greek empire. In short, it was not to Rome's advantage to use resources to stop the civil wars among what was left of the Greeks. The Greeks had a beautiful culture which the Romans could borrow from and overlay in order to add to the prestige of Roman existence, but beyond these kinds of things, Romans had little interest in the cultures

they ruled. As the Greeks weakened, the time would come when it would not take much effort to simply annex the entire region.

As far as the humanistic view of things, the Jewish nation was simply one of many cultures and peoples intermixed with the events of all the Romans were keeping an eye on, but remaining very hands-off until the time was right and/or it served their interests. We later see a micro version of this attitude in the Roman mind as Pilot deals with Christ. It is the Jewish religious establishment that brings Jesus and asks for capital punishment. As long as the Romans saw no threat to themselves or the general peace, it was not really their desire to get involved. Pilot certainly did not see in Jesus a threat to the empire, so what ultimately led him to give in was first, he didn't really care to save the life of what he saw as an insignificant Jew; and second, sparing Jesus or prolonging the process of His trial seemed to be building a threat to the peace. This Roman attitude becomes important in looking at the time of the Maccabees taking power in Judea and even growing it to take in territory the Seleucids had once indisputably held. The Romans would not be worried about the Maccabees until it came time to control them in some form so as to annex the region, especially if they could continue to be a thorn in the Seleucid's side. This brings us to a need to look at what the Maccabees became, and the first steps in this are to look at the way the Maccabees name/term gave way to the title "Hasmonean Dynasty." This is not so much because we can with certainty nail down the name "Hasmonean," but because the Maccabees, which were leading the people to fight for the religious freedom they needed in order to follow God's Laws, became a true ruling dynasty!

We've already covered how the five sons of Mattathias had come to only one surviving son by the point the Maccabees were put in charge of the leadership and High Priesthood while the nation waited for a faithful prophet. This son's name was Simon, and he had three sons. As with many families, names were passed down to later generations, and so one must not be confused by the reuse. Simon's sons were Judas, Mattathias, and John who was known as Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus would be the one to go on in importance to the dynasty. Simon would rule for about eight years in total, but at this point Simon stood in the place his father Mattathias was when the family made their first moves against the Greeks, in that Simon was now the one becoming too old to directly lead the army himself. Thus, during most of his time in power, it would be his son Hyrcanus who would lead the army into battle while Simon focused on diplomatic affairs. As with so many actions of the past, it can be easy to label Simon's actions as a mistake, but without being on the ground at the time this is truly unfair.

You see, the rightful heir to the Seleucid throne had awarded Judea its virtual independence in exchange for the support Simon gave to him as the Seleucid civil war raged on. In spite of this, Simon had good reason not to trust the Seleucid throne, and even as Judea had/was seeing successful expansion by taking back the territory the southern kingdom once consisted of, he would turn to the Romans, as his brother had, in an attempt to strengthen the relationship with that power. This was the real beginnings of what had started out focused on

gaining the freedom the Jews needed in order to administer God's Laws, turning to being about secular affairs that any king might look after. If there was a "mistake" in Simon's thoughts, this was it. However, what most people are talking about in accusing him of making a mistake is that when Simon contacted the Romans, they issued a decree among the people of the eastern regions proclaiming a league of friendship with the Jewish people. This, as with other actions Rome had taken, was nothing but another inroad to the region for which Rome had to give nothing in return. At the time, the only power the decree had to advance the Jews was the hope it would frighten other powers into not coming against Judea. In the end, it would seem just the opposite is actually what happened, because as Antiochus VII took the Seleucid throne in 139 B.C., he chose to exercise power over Judea, once again, by withdrawing rights and privileges he saw as only existing due to choices made by his predecessors. This is what Simon had feared.

In Antiochus VII's eyes, Judea was not truly independent but only as free as the Seleucids allowed them to be, and he would send an army to Judea to back up what he had declared concerning the change in attitude. This army's main objective for coming was to collect what the Seleucid throne saw as back taxes owed by Judea. Two of Simon's sons, Hyrcanus and Judas, would lead the defense against this army and defeat them. The fact this all arose in the first place is often blamed on Simon for seeking closer ties with Rome; but the question is, was it because of Simon's actions this happened or because Simon was wise enough to know such a thing would happen that he was hoping to gain Roman support? Another question, of course, we can ask is, should he simply have trusted God for his defense? The answers to all this we'll never truly know. All we do know is that Rome, once again, left Judea to defend itself likely hoping ongoing battles would keep both powers weakened. The bigger problem that came upon Simon was an internal one. As with all the other powers of the region, this time in history was very much a time of constant survival for only those leaders who were alert to everything going on, on every side of them. Simon was attempting to get Roman help against the Seleucids, but his biggest problem would come just as it so often did among the Seleucids, it would come from within his own house.

The fact Simon was the last son of the original Maccabees did not matter to his son-in-law, who likely was married into the family due to the humanistic view of the right way to build political ties. This son-in-law would assassinate Simon, along with two of his sons, in 135 B.C. This man's attempt to take power would not be successful, as Hyrcanus was not there to be killed along with his father and brothers. While a separate attempt was made on his life, Hyrcanus would eventually prevail and take his father's position. While Judea could breathe a sigh of relief that the first direct internal threat to the Maccabees' leadership was overcome, the overall fight for the survival of Judea's freedoms had been made more difficult. Hyrcanus would have to take the direct leadership of Judea just as Antiochus VII sent yet another army against it. Not in a position to focus on meeting this challenge, Hyrcanus' only recourse was to make his stand at Jerusalem itself. The city was besieged, and he made some specific choices during this siege that caused him to lose favor with the Jewish people. The

situation became so desperate in Jerusalem, Hyrcanus was finally forced to end it by agreeing to terms with the Seleucid power. Heavy tribute would be asked for, and Hyrcanus' way of funding what was owed added to his unpopularity, as it is said he raided the tomb of King David. Also, the fortifications of Jerusalem would once again be torn down, and Hyrcanus had to agree to help the Seleucids fight the Parthians.

Hyrcanus was now left in no position to do much of anything but fulfill his obligations to the Seleucid throne. These conditions continued until Antiochus VII was killed in battle in 129 B.C. The fact transition in power was never easy among the Seleucids is something Hyrcanus could take advantage of. Hyrcanus would not accept Judea was nothing more than a vassal of the Seleucids, and this is where we really see secular rulership taking shape. During his reign, Hyrcanus would again try to further a relationship with Rome and send ambassadors to them. As usual, the Romans would be all talk and no action, but it shows the diplomatic ties he wished to further. Among the Jews, Hyrcanus would again choose a very unpopular course of action and hire an army that would answer strictly to him. This would, of course, cost more than Hyrcanus had available; he also knew he could not raise the money through taxation of the Jewish people, so he would fund this endeavor by again raiding the tomb of David. Allowing no Jewish criticism of his actions to change his mind, Hyrcanus' new army would have great success. His success would also be furthered by the Romans, but not because they directly helped him. The Romans were taking the opportunity to attack what was now a truly decaying Seleucid power. The Romans likely became particularly interested in further inroads to the region because what had once been the eastern part of the Seleucid Kingdom, which had indirectly helped the Jew's cause at the time the Maccabees first rose in revolt, would once again help by also taking advantage of the Seleucids. The Romans no doubt did not want what came to be known to history as the Parthian empire to simply become the new power over what the Seleucids once were.

All this allowed Hyrcanus to begin expanding his power, and once again establish a truly more independent nation. He would take the area to the north and destroy the false temple the Samaritans had built at the time they were told they could not take part in the new temple being built at Jerusalem by the Jews returning from Babylon. He would also push southward into what had been the territory of the Edomites and take the land that by then was known as Idumea. All this, of course, angered what was left of the Seleucid powers, but their final days were upon them and their armies were permanently recalled from fighting Hyrcanus. As we near the end of his life, we see Israel had truly gained an independence and freedom that made them a land-holding nation again in a way it had not been since before the first attacks of the Babylonian empire. In all, Hyrcanus would rule for about thirty years, and there is little doubt he began to truly see himself as a king.

As was mentioned, during his time Hyrcanus had made choices that had displeased many, and at other times pleased the people in serving as both the ruler and acting High Priest. On a religious level he had been ideologically with the Pharisees, and late in his life sided with the Sadducees. By the

end of his life he was able to leave his son a considerable nation, but he had also successfully turned the Maccabees' cause into a new ruling power over Israel that did not really match up with or prioritize looking outside its own power and ability for God's help, and the faithful prophet the nation was to be looking to arise! As for the name of this dynasty, there are many debated explanations. Some say it went all the way back to the great-grandfather of Mattathias. Others believe it references the name of a place, and there are other thoughts on this as well. However, where the name came from is not as important as the fact there came about a dynasty that ruled in Israel, which was not of the line of David, but which began to see itself as the rightful rulers of the nation. The question at this point becomes, was Israel, as the chosen nation of God, really in a much better position than it had been while under other secular rulers? To this, there are many arguments we can look at. First, it is true this was still the family whom the Jews had chosen to hold power; and as we have touched on, it seemed inevitable that if it lasted any time at all this setup was going to become a power of its own. The fact this is exactly what happened is where a lot of the trouble begins, but certainly not where it ends. The second factor is that the Jews did enjoy great freedom to set their own course, which they had often been deprived of by the other secular powers.

This opened the door to go forward with the worship of God in a way that was fairly unhindered by outside influence, the ramifications of which are a big part of where we want to get to in order to understand why conditions were what they were by the time of The Messiah. The problem was that the Maccabees had been named both princes and High Priests until God replaced them with what was right; and while it's true Mattathias was a priest to begin with, by the time of Hyrcanus the religious goals of this agreement being to truly restore the nation as one that lived by the Laws of God seemed to be lost in a tumult of secular power struggles and expansion of territory. When it came to the dynasty's actions, this might not have been such a bad thing, but the fact the knowledge of who was the rightful High Priest had mostly been lost, meant focus on secular power left a religious vacuum in general! This was only made worse by the fact Hyrcanus had achieved what he had through methods that were by no means as democratic as the choice to put his family in power had been. By hiring an army, he took the struggle that was very personal to the Jews and made it one that seemed no more than what every other power player in the region was looking for. Funding the endeavor the way he did was not just unpopular but a symbolic blow to the idea the Maccabees had been given a position of trust.

It was as if stealing from David's tomb to pay for an already unpopular choice, set a tone for a future that not only would not yield to the past but showed blatant disregard for all they started out trying to defend! Upon his death in 104 B.C., the events leading to how the eldest of Hyrcanus' five sons, named Judah Aristobulus I, took power is where we see the dynasty take a hard turn in acting in the same way most other ruling parties of the day/region went about their business. Aristobulus I would be the first in the dynasty to truly hold the title of king of Israel, a title that was never really to be used to

describe anyone not of the line and lineage of David! Aristobulus I would also officially take on the title of High Priest; and while this may seem a technicality in that this family had already been given the stewardship of the position, taking on the title itself was another indication of disregarding the truth of God's Law. When all was said and done, Aristobulus I's reign was short, but the reasons for it being short are worth looking at in this study. The simple fact that by Simon's grandson the Maccabee's line had become so unpopular with the Jewish people, who had made the agreement for them to hold this power, is in and of itself so telling of how much secular power was never something God wanted the nation to be focused on, one hardly knows where to start. Thus, we can only continue to see all this as an example of what happens when men choose to follow their own thoughts instead of seeking God on a continual basis.

When Hyrcanus died, he actually did not leave the rulership of the nation to his son, but had declared his wife, the mother of Aristobulus I, as the nation's leader. He had declared his son would be in charge of the High Priesthood, but Aristobulus I did not agree, and with the help of his brother, who had the familiar Greek name "Antigonus," put his mother in prison where she was allowed to starve to death. With the exception of Antigonus, he also imprisoned his brothers. During his short one year reign, Aristobulus I did succeed in expanding the nation further north by taking the area on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. This, again, set the precedence that this region where Jesus would grow up and begin his ministry was a rightful part of the nation of Israel. However, the more shocking part of the history of this era is that it was becoming a common practice to act in yet another way, just as the Greek overlords the Maccabees had originally fought to cast off. When territory was taken there began to be forced conversions to Judaism. While the Greeks had attempted to outlaw circumcision, the Hasmonean Dynasty began forcing it on the people they ruled. This was certainly not in God's plan, and it is a pure example of how much religious thought patterns can be so very corrupting!

The fact God did not bless and allow the continuance of this kind of action among the Jews should have served as a clear warning to the later group(s), which called themselves the church, that attempting to use force to convert people to be "Christians" was not an acceptable way to go about spreading the Gospel! This is certainly true in light of the false idea, which prevails in the church, that before Jesus' sacrifice on the cross the way to be saved was to become a part of the Jewish nation. If God was not in favor of using force to make people follow the representational Laws He gave the chosen nation during the time before Christ's first appearing, whatever would make one believe forcing Christianity as a religious practice upon people had/has value? To this point I'd also like to add the fact, the history we are covering here was not just more recent to those in the Christian religion who first attempted such stupidity, but also that the authority of the Christian religion perpetuating these actions, then as well as now, believed the books known as the Apocryphal were/are of the same level of divinely inspired Scripture as the Old and New Testaments. While many who are not of a Christian religious branch very closely related to

Catholicism do not know well, if anything at all about these books, they cover much of the history where the Jews tried such things. This leaves no room for the excuse of being ignorant to the fact Jews had once taken on this practice.

Getting back to the history at hand, in spite of his "accomplishments," Aristobulus I was not in good health, and this may have had some to do with why his father did not name him as successor, along with the idea of getting back to having a separation in who was leader and who was concerned with the High Priesthood. In any case, Aristobulus I's health led to a small group, which included his wife Alexandria Salome, being in charge of the daily affairs of running the nation, and we see again how much power corrupts. Having this power was not something Salome wanted to give up, but Aristobulus I favored his brother, and had already given him a share of the governing power. Salome knew this meant Antigonus was set to take charge when her husband died, so when it became apparent Aristobulus I's life was not to last long, she began to convince him that his brother Antigonus was plotting against him. When she felt the time was right, Salome told Antigonus that Aristobulus I wanted to see him, while she told her husband his brother was coming to kill him. When Antigonus came in to see the king, the king's guards killed him before he could reach his brother.

Aristobulus I would die just a few short days after this in the year 103 B.C., and the Jews at large took his death as a sign of God's displeasure with him. Salome would release her husband's younger brothers from prison, and his half brother Alexander Jannaeus, being the next oldest, had the right to both the throne of Israel as well as Salome to be his wife. As marriage and power were often even more importantly connected in days gone by than they are now, Alexander Jannaeus would marry Salome, and it appears she would get what she desired, at the very least, in continuing as "Queen." As Aristobulus I and Salome had had no children, there was no threat to Jannaeus from an heir of his half brother. This meant he and Salome had a clean slate - if you will - to continue the dynasty fairly undisputed. One would think this would settle things down a bit, but, in truth, even more troubling times lay ahead.

Alexandar Jannaeus would turn out to be a very cruel leader, and this would further that question of whether the Jews were really better off having the Hasmonean Dynasty as their leaders than they had been under other secular powers. Jannaeus and Salome would also go on to have two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. The later events of Jannaeus' rule, and those following concerning the actions of his sons, would in many ways make the years of prior war, conflict, and struggle seem very righteous and almost subdued in comparison!

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

Lot, as a man, had reason to fear if these men truly had no more capability than your average person in defending themselves. It also shows us just what a wicked place this city was. It would seem that while these men had no reason to be individuals anyone would interpret as being a bad omen, the word had spread that they had come to the city, and now the men of Sodom surrounded the house in order to demand Lot allow them to see the strangers for themselves. This part of the story has many aspects to it, most of which pivots around the question of what motivated the men of the city to make this demand. In most people's mind it is easy enough to relate this to their desire to have physical relations with these men in an abusive manner. This thought comes because the men of the city tell Lot they want to "know" these visitors, and when phrased in the way it is here, it is often a word used to describe physical acts. The thought this is what they wanted also seems to be confirmed by Lot's offer to give them his daughters instead. However, before simply going with this thought, let's acknowledge that the "know" here is still a very general word.

This is true not just in the English, but also in the original language from which this comes. In the original language, the word is a root word, and it doesn't get more general than that. It would seem that we should get more out of this than just the thought the men of the city wanted to abuse these two men staying with Lot. If we stop to examine it, we should also consider the simple fact Lot was particularly interested in these men, which was witnessed by the others who set at the city gate as they came. This brought concern to those who lived in the city because no doubt Lot, while not being as righteous as Abraham, was known to the people of the city as not being one of them either. Lot had made a foolish choice in even wanting to take his possessions into the valley where these cities were and live in his tent there; but by this time, Lot had not only moved into a house in Sodom, but his being at the gate indicated he was taking part in the municipal affairs of the place. It is easy to judge Lot for his foolishness, but let's take a look in the mirror as we do so.

A story I have related at other times and/or in other writings is the fact, my parents worked hard to put us in private Christian schools, even turning to home school for myself long before homeschooling was as accepted as it is today in the U.S. They did this for various reasons, but their main reason was so we could learn in an environment more inline with our values and beliefs. At the time, myself and my family were subjected to criticism for doing this. There were, of course, the ridiculous accusations that my parents thought we were just too good to go to public school; but the one I find most interesting was being told it was wrong for "good people" to take their children out of a place where they could be a witness among their peers. First, we did not go to prestigious private schools. Instead of being pampered like rich brats, we learned how much our education really cost! As to the second argument, this is an attitude I find hard to grasp as to why so many people fall into the trap. I often wonder if this is not one of the most believed, and therefore, at least close to the top of the devil's most dangerous and destructive list of lies!

In truth, I've never really believed that most people buy into this lie as much as it gives them a righteous sounding excuse to do something that is convenient for them, and/or involve themselves in something they know they should not be involved in. This has been confirmed to me as in the course of being a minister I have seen people use this very same excuse in churches. Especially when an organization of men begins to go wrong. Whether it be a church or entire denomination, you will hear people say things such as, "If all the good people pull out there will be no one to correct the situation, and it will surely fail." This makes me feel like using a line similar to a character that within the context of the story is very mean spirited, for it comes from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol"; and that is, "Then let them die and decrease the surplus population!" Now, I am in no way saying this is true of any individual, but when it comes to groups and organizations established by men, we can only hope they die when they turn from doing good and become bad!

My real point is, far too many people have drowned in this sinful world with the excuse they were trying to be a witness to a dark world in a dark place where they had no business being and/or remaining. Am I suggesting believers become isolationist? Absurd! We are in this world, and doing that is almost an impossibility in any case. However, the Bible tells us there is a time and a season for everything. (Eccl. 3:1-8) When we send our children to school to learn, it is not for the sake of making them missionaries to the lost, it is so they may learn reading, writing, arithmetic, etc. What we seem to forget is that this basic knowledge, which we all need to function in this world, is not as separated from knowing the right way to live before God as many believe! I must say, at those times I was in a secular school, I believe I learned very little. There was so much to be fought against in what was being taught, and it was only with God's help that I knew enough to fight it instead of simply accepting much of it. You see, there is a time for learning and a time for social interaction for the sake of witnessing to others. In short, if God calls you into a place to do the work of the ministry, then go; but making the choice to involve yourselves in worldly activities and exposing yourself to sin-filled environments, with the excuse your very presence will make a difference, is foolish!

Again, I fear I have opened another subject on which I could easily write a book, but this is what we are seeing in the circumstances of Lot's life. When Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen found themselves fighting for resources, Abraham proposed they split up so as to not interfere with each other all the time. Abraham was gracious and gave Lot the choice as to which land he wanted, and it was Lot who did not simply pick a location so they may be far enough apart to stop the interference, but specifically used the opportunity as an excuse to move to the most rich land of the region, which took him near these cities. It was Lot's desire to be a part of the affairs of these cities, which caused him to move into town instead of simply remaining in his tent outside the cities. To blame any of where Lot had come to on the excuse he was trying to be some kind of missionary to the lost, is something most people would accept as very ignorant. However, I propose that the kind of thinking I just covered had a lot to do with how Lot

justified in his mind the choices he had made to end up in the position he faced that night the angels came to him, and the wicked men of the place surrounded his house demanding he turn over the two strangers to be “known”!

Lot had held on to enough of his Godly character that the people of the city knew him as a man who was not exactly like them, or at least in total agreement with them. The fact he had so eagerly took these men into his house is what made them a point of interest to those in the city. No matter what the word “know” was intended to mean, Lot understood it was not good. He implores the men not to do this wicked thing; and while I agree they wanted to physically abuse the men, if for no other reason than to show Lot he did not demand the kind of respect he might have believed he had in this place, Lot offering his daughters was an attempt to entice them to go off and have a good time, in a way they would no doubt have found appealing, rather than do anything to the two men. Lot was in the middle of this snake pit, and showing his immediate understanding of how wicked these people were, proves he had no success in “winning the lost” by choosing to live where he did; and thus, no justification for his continuing to be there. This is why I say, if God sends you, then go without question, but if He does not, then do not, especially without asking God if He will give you the means, and if it is worth risking your very soul to be exposed to such wickedness. It might be that just as it was in Lot's case, you are simply sending yourself and/or your children into a place so wicked God has already marked it for destruction or, at the very least, turned it over to a reprobate mind. (Rom. 1:24-32)

Again, we should remember God did not send these angels to the cities to attempt one last evangelistic push to save their souls, and what the men of Sodom desired shows us why. We are told this was not some small renegade group of the city's population, this was all the men from every part of the city who came that night, and both their desires, as well as what Lot offers them as a compromise, is nothing short of sickening! Lot might have been known to be a man not after the same mold as those living here, but the idea he would offer his daughters as appeasement to these men shows us another incredible part of just how little Lot understood the power of God, and the corruption he himself had suffered. If Lot knew these men were so important that allowing them to be abused by the people of the city was something that needed to be avoided at any cost, even the lives of his daughters, then why did he not understand how much God had sent these men to take care of him, not the other way around? If Lot had studied to show himself approved, instead of indulging himself on a daily basis in the amenities living in such a place could offer, he would have known the right thing to do was turn to these angels for help. When we see Lot does not have that wisdom, we must ask, who's the missionary and who is the one in need of a missionary?

Fortunately for Lot, God had sent these angels to him because God in his determination to destroy these cities had also determined Lot was one man for whom there was still

hope. God's solution was not to spare all the people for Lot's sake, which God had told Abraham He would do for only ten, but to remove Lot from the situation he had gotten himself into. This brings us to another point which is true, but at the same time so often gets overstated we do not see the other facets of what we are being shown. Lot was no doubt being spared because Abraham had basically taken charge of Lot upon his father's death, and Abraham prayed to God everyday for his nephew. This is not to say Lot was Abraham's responsibility, especially by this point in time, but it's true Abraham would have been very crushed to see him perish along with the wicked cities. That being said, this story is not just about Abraham, but about God's overall plan, and the fact there was hope for Lot and his descendants. As the nation God wanted to bring through Abraham came back to this land from Egypt, we find Lot's descendants were by no means a righteous group of people. However, they did serve as a stopgap to the growth of the Canaanites whom God knew would one day need to be totally wiped out, and this story gives us a very early example of where the Canaanites were headed.

This is not to suggest God did not care about individuals among Lot's descendants and was just using them as pawns in His greater plan. We know God cares about individuals, for, again, Abraham showed us God would have spared these cities if there could have been found just ten righteous. Then there is the great example among Lot's descendants themselves which shows us how much God cares about any individual who seeks and desires Him. Two Moabite woman, who lived far into the future from Lot's time, were following their Israelite mother-in-law as she returned to Israel. All three had at this point lost their husbands, and the mother-in-law told her two daughters-in-law not to follow because there was no future she could offer them. While one would turn back, Ruth does not. Instead, she tells her mother-in-law that where she goes she would follow, and the God whom she served, Ruth would serve. (Ruth 1:14-17) This, Ruth said not just out of a love for her mother-in-law, but in abandoning all in order to join a nation from which the family Ruth had married into had originally left, due to the hardship there. Ruth saw, in what they believed, something that lacked in her own people.

Ruth did not desire to turn back in order to be a witness to her own people, she desired to be a witness by coming out from among them and living for God among the chosen nation of God. This she chose, no matter how much more comfortable it might have been to return to her own people, and no matter what lay ahead for the two childless widows in Israel. How did that turn out for her? Well, the fact she ended up being the great-grandmother of King David would say enough, but the fact that truth also put her in the direct family line that led from Abraham to The Messiah, is an honor above any even most of those born into the chosen nation could have only hoped for!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

and all these offerings, again, were not to displace the offering that the day would normally demand.

The first day of the seventh month would be a very busy day of sacrifices and offerings, because on top of being a first day of a month, which required many offerings, it is also the Feast of Trumpets. This day was to be a day of sounding trumpets as the nation called out unto The Lord, and the day was to be observed like a Sabbath day, in that no work was to be done. Added to the offerings this day would be a similar set of sacrifices, but in this set there would be only one young bull with the one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, all with their corresponding plant-based offerings and a drink offering required for each one. There was also to be a sin offering of one young goat with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. Thus, this day was to consist of the two lamb sacrifices a day called for, and two more if it fell on a Sabbath day. As the first day of the month, it would call for two young bulls, one ram, seven lambs, and a ram for a sin offering. As the feast day, it would also call for another young bull, a ram, seven lambs, and a young goat for a sin offering: all these sacrifices with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings.

The tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement. This day was also to be observed as a Sabbath day, in that no work was to be done, but also a special day of focusing on repentance from sin. This feast day, as a feast, called for some very specific sacrifices, offerings, and ceremony which represented the yearly cleansing of the tabernacle and the nation as a whole. However, this day would require the daily sacrifices and offerings any day of the week would call for on which it landed, on top of those specific to the feast. Being a feast in general, this day would also call for a set of sacrifices consisting again of one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, all with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings required for each one. There would also be one young goat for a sin offering with its plant-based offering and a drink offering.

The seventh and last feast of the year started on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and lasted seven days. The feast cycle as a whole was marked by adding an eighth day of observance at the end of these seven days, making it a seven day feast plus one. The first day of this feast was to be observed as a Sabbath day, in that no work was to be done; and on top of the daily sacrifices, a great deal more sacrifices would be offered on each day of this feast. The rams and lambs would be doubled, and there would be an interesting decrease in the amount of bulls as the days progressed! On the first day, there were to be offered thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year. Every one of these animals was to be offered with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There was also to be offered one young goat for a sin offering along with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. On the second day of this feast the number of young bulls would decrease by one, and the sacrifices would be twelve young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year, each with their plant-based offering and drink offering. There would also be offered one young goat for a sin offering

with its plant-based offering and a drink offering.

On day three, there were to be offered eleven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There would also be offered one young goat for a sin offering with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. On day four, there were offered ten young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year, with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There would also be offered one young goat for a sin offering with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. On day five, there were to be offered nine young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first year, all with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There would also be offered one young goat for a sin offering with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. On day six, there were to be offered eight young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first year, all with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There would also be offered one young goat for a sin offering with its plant-based offering and a drink offering.

On the seventh day, the number of bulls would be reduced to reach the same number of the feast day itself, which is God's number of completion for this creation. Thus, there would be offered seven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year, all with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There would also be offered one young goat for a sin offering with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. This day marked the technical end of the Feast of Tabernacles, but added to it was an eighth day, and this eighth day was to again be observed like a Sabbath, in that no work was to be done; but there was also to be a solemn assembly of the people. This day represents the continuance into eternity God's people will experience, and on this day the number of sacrifices would go back to the more familiar number seen on many feast days. Thus, only one young bull, one ram, seven lambs in their first year, all with their corresponding plant-based offerings and drink offerings. There would also be offered one young goat for a sin offering with its plant-based offering and a drink offering. As with all these days, none of this was to displace any daily offerings that would be required if this was not a feast day. To be clear, God also points out all these daily, Sabbath, monthly, and feast day offerings were to be offered no matter how many offerings individuals might bring in a day, for all the reasons there were to bring them. All this, Moses commands the people to remember!

Next, Moses would sit down with the leaders of the tribes and go over a rule they all needed to be enforcing as leaders of the people. He wishes to make clear the Law concerning vows or promises people make. Moses tells them that when a man makes a vow, everything he said he will do he must do. If a woman who has not been married lives with her father and makes a vow, her father must be witness to it, and she is held to everything she said just as a man would be if her father does not object to any of it. However, if her father objects, her entire vow, no matter what it included, God will forgive her for not following through with because she does not

have the power to make the choice. This same thing would be true for a married woman whose vow was to be witnessed by her husband and the husband objects or allows. Now, if a woman has lost her husband to death or he has divorced her, then any vow she makes under those circumstances is binding upon her just as a man's vow would be. The critical thing for a husband to know is that when he marries a woman, she may have made vows that for these reasons she is bound to. However, when it comes to his knowledge that she has made a vow, he then has the power to disallow it, or he may allow it simply by not disallowing it at that point. Any vow he chooses not to disallow becomes binding under his authority; and if a husband then chooses to disallow or hinder the woman in what she has vowed at any point, God will forgive the woman, and the man will be the one to bear her sin instead!

Before he is taken from this life, God would also give Moses the task of demonstrating God meant what He said about vexing the Midianites for what they had tried to do in tempting Israel. To do this, Moses would call for one thousand men out of each tribe to arm themselves for the task. This would send an army of twelve thousand men against Midian. Phinehas, the son of the High Priest, would go with this army, acting not as a soldier but a priest to blow the trumpet and call upon The Lord for Israel. The battle against the Midianites was such a success Israel killed every male among them including their kings. Interestingly, the prophet Balaam, whom the king of Moab had called to curse Israel, was also killed in this battle. The army also proceeded to gather up all the things of value from Midian and burned their cities and strongholds. As they brought all this back to the camp of Israel, the problem was that the army had followed tradition in taking all the women and children captive as part of the spoils of this war.

Moses and Eleazar the High Priest, along with the princes in Israel, went out to meet them as they returned, and Moses was angry when he found out they had done this. Moses asks them to consider why they had kept the very women whom joining with had been a big part of the problem after Balaam had not cursed Israel when the king of Moab asked him to; and Midian chose to tempt Israel by getting them to join in the worship of their gods, which caused a plague in Israel. The bloodline of Midian was not to be among Israel's. There was to be no dispute about Midian living on as part of Israel. Thus, Moses commands that all the male children be killed. He also tells them to kill all the women who had already been with a man. This was to leave only women upon whom no male, living or dead, had a claim; and due to Midian's promiscuous ways, this would seem to only leave girls and very young women. We also see Moses giving the instructions that all those involved in the killing during and after the battle, along with those females left of the captives, and every article the Law instructed needed purifying after being exposed to a dead body, should go through the seven day purification process, which necessitated them to stay out of the camp for that time. Eleazar would further detail these instructions mostly concerning the process of items made of materials that could withstand fire, and those things that could not, needing to be

purified; and everything, including people, would go through the water of purification made with the ashes of the red heifer just as the Law commanded. Before accomplishing this, neither they nor anything they had, could enter the camp.

God then instructs Moses and Eleazar to count all the people and beasts that were taken during this battle and divide them into two equal groups. One half would belong to the men who had actually taken part in this battle, and the other half would be given to the congregation at large. God would also instruct how to honor Him in giving to God His portion of the increase, as this was no ordinary increase. To do this, Moses was to take from the half that belonged to the army one person for every five hundred captives, and one animal out of every five hundred of the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep. These were to be given to Eleazar to heave offer, and thus, belong to the priests. Out of the half that went to the congregation, Moses was to take one for every fifty of both the people and of all the kinds of animals they had captured. These would be given to the others in the tribe of Levi who did the service of the tabernacle. Moses and Eleazar take this count and determine the army had captured 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys; and of the people kept alive, 32,000 women remained. The half that went to the army consisted of 337,500 sheep, 36,000 cattle, 30,500 donkeys, and 16,000 people. Out of these, Moses took 675 sheep, 72 cattle, 61 donkeys, and 32 people and gave them to Eleazar to heave offer before God. The portion that belonged to the congregation consisted of 337,500 sheep, 36,000 cattle, 30,500 donkeys, and 16,000 people. Out of these and all the other kinds of animals, Moses took one for every fifty and gave them to the tribe of Levi as God had commanded Him to do.

After this, the officers who led the overall army, along with the officers from each tribe that were over a thousand, along with those officers under them who were each in charge of a hundred men a piece came to Moses and informed him that they had counted the men that went to war, and not a one had been lost! Due to this amazing fact, they wanted to give God an offering of thanksgiving and show they understood war was not something to be celebrated but cleansed from. Due to this, each man wanted to thank God for preserving their soul by giving items out of the things each man had gotten. These were items not included in the count and division of the spoils, such as precious stones, gold, and valuable metalwork of all types. The total weight of the gold alone which they brought was 16,750 shekels. Moses and Eleazar accepted all these gifts from the officers on behalf of the men who had went into battle, and brought them to the tabernacle to be part of the treasures held there as witness to God's great blessings upon His people!

Let's stay in God's Word!

