

Free - Take One



# Shaqah

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

Issue #111 LP

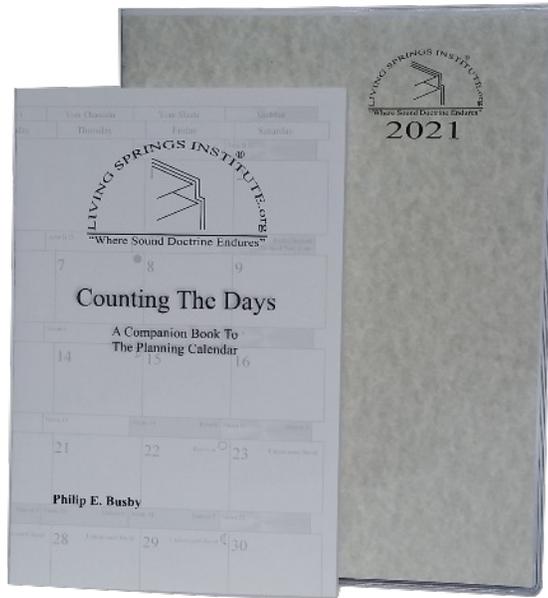
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November & December 2020

## Step Into the Springs!

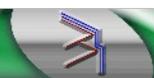
For the thirteenth year, Living Springs Institute has published its daily planning calendar that gives you the Biblical calendar alongside the calendar most of us use every day. Since early 2018 the companion book, titled *Counting The Days*, has also been available. If you're a regular mail subscriber to this publication, and had not already received one, you should have received a calendar with this issue of *Shaqah*. We'd also like to send calendars to all of our e-mail subscribers, but we don't necessarily have your current physical mailing address. Your 2021 calendar is waiting for you, so be sure to contact us, and put in your order today!

As much as we have always felt the planning calendar is a great Biblical education product, even if you do not use the calendar, the calendar's companion book, *Counting The Days*, is still a book you're going to want to read. With a full example calendar in the back, this book is a great way to learn about the Biblical/Jewish calendar all by itself.



*Counting The Days* is an overall teaching about the calendar and feasts God gave in the Law, but more specifically, it teaches the how and why God set up a calendar that contains distinct events, all of which prophesy about God's plan for our existence. It covers what each event prophesies about, why there is a

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Biblical and Jewish calendar, and much more! Of course, many of you have already received a copy of the book, but if you do not have one you will want to receive a copy when you order your 2021 calendar. If you already have a 2021 calendar, it should have come with a pink card inside that you can simply fill in with your name and address, and for only the price of a stamp you can order your copy of *Counting The Days*!

Now, by no means is Living Springs a ministry backed by a lot of money, so it is only by the continuing grace of God we are able to not only offer the 2021 daily planning calendar once again, but it, and a copy of *Counting The Days*, are both FREE! To order your free copy(s) of the 2021 calendar and/or *Counting The Days*, you can simply write, e-mail, or visit us online. For online orders, just go to [www.livingspringsinstitute.org](http://www.livingspringsinstitute.org), click on the "Resource Shop" button, order the 2021 calendar and/or *Counting The Days*, and type your mailing information into the lines provided on that form. To order more copies than the form allows, please use the comment box. If you are using e-mail, send your request to: [resources@shaqah.com](mailto:resources@shaqah.com). If you're using regular mail, write to us at: Living Springs Institute, P.O. Box

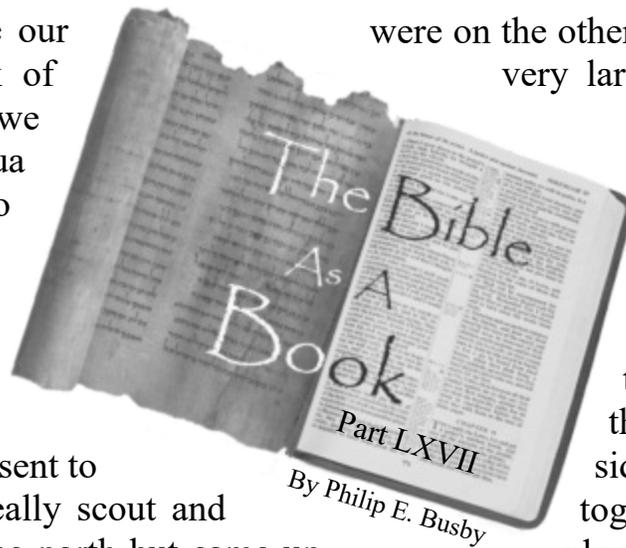
271, Loveland, CO 80539. Just tell us you would like the 2021 calendar and/or *Counting The Days*. And be sure to give us your physical mailing address, and your order will be on its way as soon as we can process it!

For those of you who may never have ordered anything from Living Springs, know that ordering will not put you on any mailing list! Living Springs is happy to send people only what they request. Thus, we want to remind everyone that we also offer other teaching products, and all for free! If you would like a free subscription to this publication (*Shaqah*), don't forget to make that request when you write. We also produce a PDF version of the calendar, along with many other materials in PDF, which you can download from our website at anytime.

In closing, I just want to say thank you, and please remember to share Living Springs Institute with others so they too may learn and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! May God guide us through the year to come with all it may bring, and as always, we pray you will be blessed by this issue of *Shaqah*!

*As* we continue our overview of the Book of Joshua, last time we looked at how Joshua wanted the tribes who had not yet received a portion of land to do the work of defining land for each of their tribes. We see that in doing that job, the men sent to do the work did not really scout and divide all the land to the north but came up with the divisions by only using what had been cleared in the North and also using some of the already occupied South. This meant the land of promise should have been much bigger than it was and these tribe's portions larger than they were, but they did not fully follow The Lord's instructions in the matter. After the issue of divisions was settled we covered the establishment of the cities of refuge as God had told Moses would be needed once the nation was in the land. We also covered the cities the Levites received among the tribes since they were not to be given a specific division of land. In all, we wrapped up the part of the Book of Joshua that concerns the direct taking of the promised land as we ended with Joshua telling the men from the tribes who owned land to the east of the Jordan river that they could go home. That brought our overview to Joshua chapter 22 verse 9, and that's where we will begin this time.

We are told the men from the tribes that had taken land on the east side of Jordan began their journey to their homes, and as they traveled they reached that same spot where Israel had crossed over Jordan. There they crossed back to the east, but once they



were on the other side they chose to build a very large altar before separating and heading to their respective homes. This did not go unnoticed by the rest of the nation, and it concerned them very much to see what these tribes had built. Thus, the entire nation on the west side of Jordan gathered together at Shiloh with the plan to go to war against these tribes. The rest of the nation believed they had chosen to set up this altar as a way to mark where their territory began and the rest of Israel ended, and also so these tribes could turn against the Law of Moses, choosing to go a different direction in their religious ideas. From Shiloh they would send out Phinehas, who was the son of the High Priest Eleazer, and with him ten princes of the houses of Israel. These representatives would come to meet with the tribes on the east in Gilead, and their main question would be to ask why they had committed this trespass against God to turn from Him. They refer back to the incident where the nation of Israel chose to go out and take part in pagan celebrations and revelry with the people of Moab and how that incident caused a plague in the nation. They likely point to this incident specifically because it was one that happened while Israel camped on the east of Jordan and that's where these tribes still lived. However, the main point the representatives bring it up to make is the fact it was not just those in Israel who had chosen to join with the Moabites that were impacted. No, all of Israel was threatened with a plague. They felt that no matter what these tribes would like to do, in building this altar and turning from

God they were going to harm all of Israel. They then tell these tribes if they feel the land in this east side of Jordan was corrupt in some way, it would be better that they simply move to the west of Jordan and live with the rest of Israel where the tabernacle was.

The representatives also bring up the example of Achan who chose to disobey the directive of God at Jericho and how that too caused harm to more than just himself. However, to all these accusations these tribes answer by putting their lives in the hands of God in saying He knew why they built what they did. They said God should judge why they built this altar and punish them accordingly if it was for the purpose of offering offerings on something other than the altar at the tabernacle or because they wanted to turn from God. They give total credit to the fact that if they had made a mistake then their hearts were in the wrong place and the punishment would, and should, take place making the reason for these men coming a useless point. After making it pretty clear they felt confident what they had done did not violate or represent anything against God, they explain to the representatives why they had built this. These tribes understood that all the stories about God freeing Israel from Egypt and leading them to the promised land would be told with the emphasis the promised land was the part which lay between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Coast. They also understood how much time has a way of causing people to forget. They feared as generations passed it would become a thought that the Jordan river was a border for Israel on the east. In thinking this way later generations would at best discourage the children of these tribes on the east of Jordan from coming to the tabernacle and taking part in the Law. At worse it could be that one day they'd prohibit their children from coming

and taking part in the Law.

In hindsight this was an incredibly valid point! At the time Jesus walked this earth we predominantly see those in Judah proper looking down their noses at those who lived to the north. This point is actually one of the things they had against Jesus Himself. Jesus came from Galilee, specifically Nazareth. In this later case we are not talking about people living west of the Jordan but simply further north than that core area of Judah in the South. Of course, there were plenty of historical reasons why there were many living in the north of Israel who were not in fact Jews but only part Jewish in their blood and heritage. This was caused by mistakes made in the nation throughout the history, but this was not true of everyone who lived in the North. In spite of the facts, being of the North became associated with being not of pure Jewish blood by the time of The Messiah, and that is exactly what the tribes on the east of Jordan were worried about. They knew it could, for many reasons, easily become a thing one day to look down on their children simply because they lived east of Jordan. Now in all this the tribes do not deny that what they built was an altar of a kind. However, they again point out this was not for the purpose of offering any offerings. By building an altar they were in a way pointing to the tabernacle. It was like a road marker to show that if you wanted to get to the tabernacle and the true altar, that was the place to cross Jordan and do so. It would stand as a witness that these people on the east of Jordan had as much heritage in the tabernacle as any of the tribes living on the west side!

Once the representatives hear this explanation they admitted it made perfect sense to do what these tribes had done.

# Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we continued our look at the time God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him. In that part we covered the moments directly after Abraham was told to stop and not harm Isaac. As we read the story we find Abraham turned to see a ram caught in the thicket which he takes and sacrifices instead. However, we spent some time discussing how we might feel if we were in Abraham's place. He had been under such strain up until then and while the relief he had to have felt in hearing God tell him to halt might have been great, it does not necessarily mean he was then in the mood to worship. Yet what we see is Abraham doing just that, and while we clearly see the joy in this moment as outsiders not having to go through what Abraham did, the question is, would we see and feel the same in that moment if it had been us? These are always important aspects of any Biblical story we study. It's easy to see the great people of God succeed and those who do not listen to God fail, all the while believing we would do the right, but whether we think it's obvious or not, it's not necessarily true in so many of these times.

None of us have been asked what God asked of Abraham. Some might disagree in that life has asked us to go through some pretty hard times, but it's one thing to have events unfold badly for us and not see God act as we might want or even expect. It's a total other thing to actually have God direct you to do such a thing for no reason other than God saying He wants it from you. That is another very important aspect of studying

this story. Abraham had lived a life of faith. He totally trusted God in ways and in times many of us would have failed. It is the simplicity of the story's writing that gives us the impression Abraham sailed through the events of his life without questioning God's desire to lead him here and there, but between many of these stories are the years Abraham spent simply living life day by day and doing it with God in his focus. Abraham did all God had asked of him. He left his home for a strange land and this alone is not something many of us would do with ease. Also remember it's not as if Abraham got to choose where he lived his life. Even in the land of Canaan Abraham was uprooted from one place to another and from there to another, and so on. Still he did it without question. He used Hagar to have a son when he did not understand God was truly going to give him a son through Sarah. This was a mistake to be sure, but when the time came God said Hagar and Ishmael had to go in order to allow Isaac the place of the oldest and only son, Abraham did what God asked and sent them away.

Abraham did not just face test after test but passed with incredible humility and obedience to God. The incident of having Ishmael is about his only time really we see him taking something into his own hands! That aside, he made the sacrifices needed to make the situation right for what God had promised. Year after year he worked through trials and at times great pain, following God without fail. In spite of that truth, here he stood on a mount having built an altar to sacrifice his son Isaac, because all he had

been through up to that time was “not enough.” I, of course, added the not enough statement because it's what many of us would feel. It's not always easy to walk the path God tells us to walk and years can get longer and longer for some of us. Just this alone makes many who claim to follow God get very frustrated that God isn't doing enough to “help” us. It can be frustrating to feel we have done so much and clung to God through it all yet there seems to be no reward! Now turn that and think about what God did to Abraham. Aside from this story, nothing illustrates to us a more “unnecessary” test than what God put Abraham through during this.

Again, I go back to the point I made last time when I said we get into our Bible mode or mood, and as we bask in the glory of what great people of God did in these stories we don't really bring them down to think about how they related and compare to what we are being asked of God to do. We don't have to see this test of Abraham's as unnecessary to understand that it was an incredible thing for God to ask. In light of allowing us to see how much this foreshadowed what God would do through The Messiah, we totally see it as having meaning, but the point stands that God was asking a man who had already shown himself to be so solidly a servant of God to do something very above and beyond. I will also say that many of us, even if we knew the point of the foreshadowing for later generations, would question its necessity if it was us who was asked to go through this trial. Again and again I repeat that I understand how many people think what I'm driving at is not really them or has no real point, at least not one that's not obvious from the start. However, this is the reason I drive

at it so hard!

As we move into verse 15 of Genesis chapter 22 it's so important we get the potency of what is said and why it is said. The fact this sacrifice of Isaac was so unnecessary and Abraham was willing to do in spite of that fact is what makes it so amazing! Verse 15 tells us God called to Abraham a second time. The description in the King James Version is that an angel is who called to Abraham, but keep in mind angels are nothing more than direct servants of God. Thus, when an angel speaks in this manner it is God Who is speaking. In light of that it doesn't matter if it was God or an angel, so why does it say an angel spoke? One way to look at it, and I think the best way to see it is, God wants us to be clear this was a literal event that took place. That might sound odd but we often take the idea of God telling someone to do something as being more like an internal affair between God and the person. We could often ask the question when being told in the Bible that God spoke to or told someone something, was it an audible voice, a dream like state, maybe just in the person's head? Just how did God “tell” the person to do the thing He did? When this verse tells us an angel called out of heaven, it is God wanting us to be clear, whether an angel or literally God speaking these words this was as much a real time, in real life, actual part of the event as any physical action taken during the situation.

We also see the words, “...the second time.” This emphasizes how much God calling out to tell Abraham to halt and this time was not just outcomes of the situation. If we go back to read the story of what God told Noah after Noah and his family were released from the ark and Noah sacrifices to

God, we see there is a definition between the words spoke directly to Noah and those that fit more in the category of being described as God speaking to Himself. It's a moment where we clearly see what we might call, thinking out loud, but God was not being "out loud" to any man. The way a man gets to know those words or thoughts, as the case maybe, is that God had them written down for us to read in His Word. This has all kinds of interesting implications, but I'll refrain from getting into them here. Getting to the point with Abraham, God wanted us to be clear He physically spoke these words to Abraham! Now, one might ask why this is so important to be clear on. The answer to that is in the point of making a covenant. We talk about God's promises or even His covenant He made with man through His Son Jesus. In truth, we love these kinds of words because they come with impact and emphasis we want. While it's very true God's promises are without fail no matter how they are made to us or how they come to us, in this case, as Abraham stands on this mountain, God makes a literal covenant with Abraham. What makes it literal is that the words God uses to make this covenant are not just told to Abraham, they are spoken, as we say, before God and man! This might not seem so important if we believe nothing about Abraham's actions on this mountain had drawn the attention of anyone else or that anyone besides Abraham and Isaac were literally within ear shot to hear it, but it does in any case. God made a statement and a promise to Abraham, and He did it in a way anyone who wanted to hear it could have if they had been close enough. What more can we do?

The question actually relates to what we are told in verse 16. God starts His words by telling us He is swearing this covenant before Himself. Of course, this is because there is no one higher than God for Him to swear by. However, does that not say it all? As the highest entity to exist God was making a solid promise to Abraham before all the other beings in existence. This in turn means all the other beings in existence have the right, according to God Himself, to hold God in judgment for what He said here. This is a very big deal and explains a lot about why God has done what He has done in the ways He has done them. We need to think about the fact that God created us. It was the literal gift not just of life but of existence. If He had made us nothing but sub-servant to Him with no choice in the matter that might not seem much of a gift. However, we can say and clearly see He gave us a choice. This is not just clear in that God gave Adam and Eve access to both the Tree of Life as well as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. No it's obvious in the fact God does not strike us dead the instant we choose to do things that are unrighteous. God takes this even further by making it clear He does not strike us dead even for doing something He directly told us not to do!

It's hard to say in English, but I think we get it when I say God wants us to serve Him but he did not make us servants. If He had made us servants we would not have a choice, so as much as we may feel we were created to serve God there is a difference between being created with the intent we serve and actually being created as a servant! God gave us a free will and He allows us to exercise that will almost unhindered. In truth,

many of the things people blame God for “doing” is nothing more than God allowing us and/or others to exercise our free will. Only God can really judge where the line is of Him allowing this to its fullest possible extent here in this universe and when He should step in to restrain us. What we see is that God almost never steps in to restrain our free will as individuals. This is something amazing to see in truth, but it's the reality we live in. It's why people like Hitler “got away” with what he did. He needed others to go along with his thinking to pull off the large scale evil Hitler did, but this just proves the point that when he was able to find those people, God allowed each of them to exercise their free will in involving themselves in the evil. The end result was horrendous yet God allowed it to take place.

What we should understand here is that Hitler was/is just the grand example. We have no idea how many people would do much the same or worse if given the chance. From those who have held high government office down to the common man on the street, any number of people could have thoughts that would lead them down such an evil path. The difference simply is they never were in the right time with the right opportunities Hitler had. Those who are on the street might be obvious but even those in high government office are restrained by many factors, not the least of which is how they will look in the history books! The world has no shortage of people who would do incredibly evil things but at the same time there is something in their mind that makes them realize how they will be viewed and if that view is negative they restrain themselves. We may never know if Hitler simply did not have this mechanism in him or if he did not care; it's also possible he

cared but felt it necessary to make the “sacrifice to do what had to be done.” All this line of thought should make it amply clear God allows us to make our choices, and very complex they are! About the only time we see God act is when it is so widespread it is no longer just a few imposing their ideas on the many but the many who agree with such thoughts for themselves.

This is what we see at the time of the flood. The hearts of the people were dark and turned from God. (Gen. 6:5-8) When we look at the Tower of Babel we see a situation where it's very possible there were far more in disagreement with what was going on than Noah represented before the flood, but at the same time it was the entire world that was being pressed by the ideas being set forth. This made the oppression universal, so to speak. We see the contrast in the situation with Hitler. If there had not been a significant number of people outside his influence, making them free to disagree, he would have been able to just do what he wanted. The fact he was defeated in the end shows us there were people he could fight against but not control through direct oppression. This also relates to the mark of the beast talked about in Revelation 13. The reference there is to people who do not take on the ideology that is being pressed will not be able to buy or sell. There is the direct oppression. It's not just that you are forcing people to do such a thing or “I'm coming after you,” it's the issue of having power that allows you to completely choke out the people who disagree with you. This is the power the ideas of men, those ideas which reject God and demand everyone else do the same, had at the tower, and I think it's what we are seeing again even now.

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part XLI

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 wrapped up our look at the Bar Kokhba Revolt by talking about the devastation of the nation it brought in the end. This led us to take a long, hard look at the fact God does allow much suffering in this world and can be blamed for causing much of it by some of the actions He has taken. That said, all this only appears this way due to the fact God is slowing our progress at getting to a place where our existence is so useless He must end it all. This no matter how much "peace" we might appear to have. It is a far better thing we live with some misery and have the ability to learn to walk with God in the end than to be comfortable, especially thinking we are on the right path, only to find ourselves an outcast in the end. This is what God was showing us in His chosen nation. God allowed them to go through the horrible events the Bar Kokhba Revolt ended with to show us all, He is not going to step in and save us just because we are suppose to be "His people." We must choose to be God's people by following God's will, not expect to be privileged in some way due to the fact we carry the title. Thus, if God allowed this to happen to them, how much more do you think non-Jews stand in a place to suffer our own failure to listen to what God tells us?

As I write those words I think about how easy it would be to end this series of

study with them. However, I talked last time about how much this study is not about just the question that spurred it anymore, it's about teaching us history that is helpful to our overall understanding. This history is that of the chosen nation, and the Hebrew Bible shows us that's important. As we talked about last time, it's amazing how little of this history is taught even in a hit the highlights kind of way, not just in churches but even in the Bible colleges meant to prepare ministers to teach others! This, of course, shows us a hand in hand relationship of why the church teaches so much wrong doctrine. If we are not going to teach the ministers who teach the people then what hope is there for the people to see it as important? The answer to that is actually obvious, but that is the real wrong in what calls itself the church. What should tell all of us the importance of learning the historical events the chosen nation has gone through is that it's shown to us in the Hebrew Bible which most Christians call the Old Testament. The Bible shows us how important the nation is and that's why it follows their history for so long after the Law was given. This should cause those who desire to follow God to seek all the information that concerns this nation.

In truth it's simple. God shows us that while He commanded the chosen nation to follow all kinds of laws meant to exemplify righteousness and the path to finding all the answers, God did not ask the same of all the world. This is so we can truly have an outside looking in perspective, a chance not to make

many of the same mistakes we can clearly see the chosen nation made. Many of the mistakes they made were due to their lack of that outside perspective. It's easy to take on that attitude that says "I'm a child of God and under His protection" then expect Him to bring things out right no matter how wrong we've been. However, God clearly shows us He did not do that for His chosen nation, and thus we know He won't do it for us. God wants to lead us into righteousness and He will accept nothing short of willingness to at least learn. We can, by our nature, be a person who acts very righteously far better than a person who, by nature, struggles with all sorts of temptations to do the wrong things, but it won't gain us a thing if we don't care to grow in what God is trying to show us. Our righteousness is as filthy rags and we should never think it good enough to earn our salvation in any way. (Isa. 64:6) That is why someone who has lived their life far less righteously than another will be taken into the glorious place God has prepared for those who love Him while a seemingly very righteous person will be turned away!

Understand, I don't say that because I'm pointing out the seemingly more righteous one was just religious minded while the one accepted into the kingdom was in fact doing what was righteous. No, I am pointing this out talking about the standards God sets as to what is righteous and what is not. One who is less righteous by far can get into heaven over a far more righteous person because the one, in truth, accepts God's guidance and the other does not. It's that simple, and this point is a problem in all our churches. It's hard for people to go for any length of time, living the Christian life, without developing a comfort in where they are. We may be a very good person in deed

but we no longer take our walk with God seriously. We can be someone everyone would think was/is a saint, even beyond most anyone else they know or have known, but if we let go of our faith or allow it to become very second place in our lives we won't make it. The chosen nation had been through a lot by the time of this revolt and one might think it should have been obvious God was not going to just make it all right. However, it mattered not what they had gone through, they still believed God had an "obligation" to save them at some point. I put that word "obligation" as I do because it's just one way to see it. We can twist and turn the idea of what they thought and describe it in different ways, but in the end they thought God had to be on their side because of who they were.

The funny thing about them thinking this way is that God had specified in the Law and through Moses over and over there was a blessing to following the Law but a curse in not following. This shows the height to which we can take this false thought of being entitled. The Jews, or at least the religious leaders they followed, truly believed they were so entitled as God's chosen nation they could choose who their Messiah would be. They rejected the True Messiah in Jesus but welcomed with open arms a false messiah in Bar Kokhba. Looking at what happened to them due to this is not an illustration of how God rejected them or replaced them with the "church," it's the proof they were still God's chosen nation being used to show us all what will happen to us, even as "Christians" or part of the "church," if we fail to seek The Lord in all things. This is the beauty in the false teaching the church has replaced the chosen nation. With that thought in mind it's easy for Christians to look at the chosen nation and events like these which happened post Jesus'

first appearing and think it was just more of the same rejection they deserved after rejecting the Messiah. We can even think there is no real chosen nation anymore and this was just a group of people, many of whom may have had the bloodline of the nation, suffering the stupidity of their own actions. When we do that we can dismiss most all of this history as irrelevant to us as Christians. We also are blinded from seeing the facts about our not being entitled in any way making it easier for us to slip away from the true things of God and/or believe we can make up the rules as we go along. Then we do this, expecting God to make it all right in the end or “keep up” His end of the “agreement.”

None of this is true, and thus we see our future in the chosen nation. What we see following the Bar Kokhba Revolt is a nation in ruins. A devastated people which the Romans were truly tired of dealing with. However, this is the time we should really see what it means to be God's people and the statement God will never leave us nor forsake us! (Heb. 13:5) Nations of people have vanished from this earth for far less than what the nation of Israel suffered at this point. Sometimes nations disappear simply because the number of people diminishes and the culture dies with the people. Sometimes it's that a more dominate culture comes in and the older culture is lost. In truth, only God knows how many times and to how many people this has happened over the centuries. Records can easily be lost and they are often intentionally destroyed. There is also the fact many cultures keep the record of their people alive simply by telling their stories to their children and nothing was ever written down. All this can seem sad to think about, and in

our modern day there is a great emphasis put on preserving cultures, even to the point of hatred by some cultures that theirs was almost wiped out by the coming of another. However, as believers in God we must understand all these things are nothing more than what will one day turn to dust like any physical artifact.

God has a plan and a purpose. That plan and purpose is something He used a group of people for which He intentionally made into a people, starting with that great man of faith named Abraham. The Jewish cultures, specifically those parts that are derived from the Law, are the only culture God has and will continue to preserve. Why? Because they are the nation of people He entrusted His oracles to and due to that they are the only “nation” or “culture” of people He will sustain through it all. (Rom. 3:1-4) Cultures of this world will come and go, but what God cares about is the individuals in them and bringing them to faith. This is true even among the chosen nation. Inside the chosen nation there has been and always will be those who want the ways of God; those who follow the Torah just because it's tradition; those who reject it; and even those who hate it, but it matters not. Just like the rest of the world, among the Jewish people, God cares about the individuals and their potential faith. That said, He will continually sustain the chosen nation in order to continue the tool He has created by entrusting them with the Law. This is the part of Jewish history we now move into in a very clear way!

We see at the end of the Kitos War that Rome attempted to outlaw the Torah and limit the places in the land Jews could live. When this was done it served to anger the

Jews and in some ways can be blamed for why they continued to rise up. This is just another factor in it all we need to understand. God had made the Law a “culture” for the Jews on purpose! This because people will often fight for their culture. Thus, it didn't matter if you were a Jew who really was angered about being blocked from studying God's Word because it was God's Word or if you were just angry because it seemed your culture was under attack. This speaks again to that idea I've been alluding to on and off about God causing things or His actions being to blame. While we have talked extensively about how much the Jews felt God was in some form obligated to protect them, we must also stop to appreciate the fact they felt they had no choice but to fight in order to preserve their culture itself! So again, we see how if God had not made the Law their full culture, maybe some of this wouldn't have happened. That said, it should be fairly obvious God could not really accomplish what He wanted to accomplish with and through the chosen nation if He had not made the Law their culture. If God had tried to simply take an already existing people who had a culture and entrust them with performing the ordinances of the Law there no doubt would have been greater corruption in doing it than the Jews ever had.

At the very least we would have ended up with a chosen nation that didn't look any different than most other people we see today who live in a certain culture but attempt to live for God. One of the main reasons God did not put the Law on all of us is because God never desired to dictate to us our culture or way of life other than to live it righteously. That is why God developed a chosen nation and gave them a culture defined by the Law. They were a blank slate to write upon, and

they agreed to be that slate. Thus, God wrote upon them a culture of example. A culture that could be looked to and see how to live righteously on a day by day basis but not as a cookie-cutter mold of how every culture has to look. All this was done for the benefit of the world, but God making the Law the culture of the chosen nation is what made it easy to say there was a blessing or a curse to following it or not following it respectively. Even if many in the nation fought for only the preservation of their culture, at times it could be and even in these cases was a help to those who desired to preserve the things of God in this world. However, when it becomes the primary reason the nation rebelled or fought it was not a good thing. The nation attempted to fight for their culture and even used religious ideas of God's obligation to save them as a way to directly not follow what God wanted from them, and that's why it came to what we see at the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt.

All that said, now was when preserving the culture worked in the favor of the world. That not just in the idea the Jews preserved the purity of the Torah and all of what Christians call the Old Testament, but because it preserved the nation as well. While it's true God was not just going to let the chosen nation vanish from the earth as other cultures, nations, or people did, God couldn't violate man's free will to do it. The fact so many among the chosen nation desired to preserve their culture gave God this opportunity with ease and that in spite of how little any of them took seriously a true walk with God! This truth is just another reason what is called the church could never replace the chosen nation. If there is no one on the planet who desired God and His plan of salvation there would be no church. This is

why God can say Jesus is coming back for a church without spot or wrinkle. (Eph. 5:27) How few or how great the number is of those who are alive and remain at the time of Jesus' return is not a factor. (I Thes. 4:14-18) How far spread out across the world true believers are won't be either. The church is not about a group that is Jew or non-Jew. It's not about being part of a particular culture or any of those types of group factors. The church always has been and always will be about whosoever will come to The Lord from wherever they come and no matter where they stay.

When it comes to the chosen nation, they can exist no matter how few really care about God due to the culture. While spread out across the world or they can do it in very individual ways, but there is no doubt it helps to have some core. This is why we see Jews seeking out other Jews to do business with and far more than other cultures often care to bother doing. We see them cluster together into true communities within communities in ways far greater than most anyone else does. Kosher eating laws alone can cause this for so many reasons as they seek to have kosher foods while possibly living among people who's entire diet and/or ways of going about preparing their food is almost devoid of things which are kosher. The point is, Jews are compelled to live together on many levels and not just because they personally get along. There is a need for each other that is true in ways no other culture faces. This can ultimately bring about what God said would happen in the end as God talked about gathering the chosen nation from all over the world. (Isa. 11:10-12) Once again we have to consider that willingness factor. God will not force Jews just because they are Jews to come back to the promised land. However, by the

very circumstances they face in other parts of the world many have been and will continue to be compelled to go back in our modern time!

At the time just after the Bar Kokhba Revolt there was, for many Jews, just the opposite situation. While attempts to ban the Torah and Torah Law in general had been made before this time it was not like the others. When the Greeks did it at the time which led to the events that are celebrated as Hanukkah, it was completely different circumstances. The Jews had been living their lives under the Medes and Persian Empire. It was not always a good thing, and just as later times there were many Jews who wished to be freed from imperial power. Then everything changed as Alexander the Great marched into the East and dismantled the Medes and Persian Empire. Alexander would begin the Greek Empire and the Jews by virtue of being where they were would be part of it. It would then be the simple philosophy of the Greeks that dictated their desire to Hellenize the world or at least their empire. It was a belief that their culture was the superior one and should be everyone's. This the Jews did not agree with or many Jews I should say, so the Greeks attempted to outlaw the Torah and all things Jewish in order to force their hand. This left the Jews in a position of accepting the fact their culture was banned or fighting for it. Fighting for it is what many chose to do, and the temple, which had been desecrated, was eventually freed and cleansed.

The wars or "revolts" that happened during the Roman Empire's rule were really about something more in the line of just refusal to live under the rule of an imperial power. I hate to put it that way, but the truth

is there were far more times when nothing Jewish was really illegal than there were times anything of the Law was prohibited. This is not to say the Jews didn't have something to fight for or stand up for, to be sure! However, they failed to seek God on the matter and the times and ways they chose to rise up, along with who they chose to follow, was ill timed, to say the least. The bottom line is that none of these battles with Rome were directed by God or as clear cut in defense of the things of God as what the Jews did during the Greek rule. All that aside, one only has to look at the result to see it in no way turned out good for the Jews. Following the Bar Kokhba Revolt, the Jews would once again face a time when their things would be outlawed and there would be strict, even violent enforcement of these regulations. The Greeks wished to wipe clean the Jewish culture in order to make Jews something that fit with the Greek culture. At this point the Romans wished to wipe from the earth the fact there ever was a Jewish people!

Thus, there was at this time a systematic attempt to wipe out not just the Torah or Torah Law, but without pursuing an all-out genocide against the Jews, Hadrian desired to get rid of the Jewish people themselves. This means the Jews did not face simple laws against actions they would normally take, but by the end of this third Jewish-Roman war what Rome did was more like the extension of a war already fought and lost by the Jews! It was in this time that what we know as Judaism truly took more of the shape we know today. As much as other exiles, or limited access to Jerusalem and the temple, had created a form of Judaism which was more able to survive outside the

promised land; as much as the total loss of the temple many years prior and with it the ability to perform the sacrifices, the Jews now faced the distinct possibility they would never have access to Jerusalem, much less the temple, ever again! At the very least, it is safe to say the Jews understood that not only was the restoration of the temple not something just around the corner, or that God was going to bring about in the near future, but something they no longer had any power to fight for.

This means more than many people understand, and there is another contrast we need to look at here. The core elements of what we see as Judaism began to form at the time of the Babylonian captivity. It was a simple truth that for 70 years the temple and Jerusalem lay in ruins while the Jews were dispersed into other parts of the Babylonian Empire. As we discussed very early on in this study, some of this process goes back as far as the time of the northern kingdom of Israel being dismantled by the Assyrian Empire. That event spread a significant amount of ten of the twelve tribes of Israel into the far North and other places. The kings of the northern kingdom had tried to keep their people from coming to Jerusalem even before their destruction, and that combined with their now inability to come to Jerusalem had started to develop a form of Judaism. Of course, the events we clearly see in the Hebrew Bible is that of the southern kingdom of Judah falling to the Babylonians. For that not only do we see the whole story which leads up to the king of Babylon coming to take the king of Judah and destroy Jerusalem, but we also have the events of Esther and Daniel which are stories of things the Jews

went through during the captivity. Then Ezra and Nehemiah give us the story of how Israel was returned to the land and ordered by the king of the Medes and Persians to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. All that said, those 70 years were enough for Jews to make a great attempt to figure out how to be Jewish without the temple.

We have touched on this issue several times in this study, but at this point it's particularly important we are reminded of how much the synagogue system and other ways of living as Jews had developed; ways that had to do with being Jewish without the temple, and thus the full Torah Law in place. What is really bad is that at this point even these traditions were something the ruling authorities could go after. One good example is that of the Jewish calendar. There is great argument as to exactly when the Jewish calendar came into play, but the most likely truth is that a certain form of the calendar was developed during the Babylonian captivity. If one does not understand why this is important you need only to look at the Law. In the Torah Jews were given a lot of instructions as to how to do things and this included when to do things. There are seven specific feasts given in the Torah and those are just the high points, but when we look at them we see enough of a need for a calendar to exist. The real point to grasp is the fact that when the temple or earlier tabernacle was in place this schedule was not a calendar as we think of calendars! God gave the Jews laws that were not just dependent on having the tabernacle/temple so there would be a defined place to do certain rituals of the Law, it was generally necessary for the chosen nation to be in the land God promised them in order to accomplish many things on the basis of events that would take place in the

land!

Each month in the Jewish year was set by watching for the new moon. If you know anything about astronomy one should understand the exact night one person would say is the new moon could be different than what another person would say based solely on where the two people live. This means the Jewish nation needed a place to set the standard of when a new moon started the month. As the nation traveled as a group through the wilderness this was easy to do because they were all in close proximity and, of course, they had the tabernacle at the center of their camp. As the nation spread out across the promised land it only made sense the proclamation of the new moon still be done at the tabernacle. Once the temple was built this set a more permanent place, but one can see how even those in the northern kingdom would be somewhat lost once they were removed from the land. Once the Babylonian captivity took place this ability was lost for all the Jews until their return to the promised land some 70 years later. To be more shorthand about it, the lack of ability to set the months according to a standard moon observation affected the ability to figure out exactly when the feasts and other events commanded in the Torah were to take place.

One more point is that the feast cycle itself had to be started during the correct moon cycle or month as we say, on the basis it is anchored to the beginning of harvesting the grain crops. Again, seasonal cycles are different in different parts of the world, so while Jews can simply go by where they live in order to figure some of this out there is a loss of unity among the nation. This is not so much a problem for the individual who is trying to keep the Law even without the

temple but as a nation remaining a nation it is. Celebrating events across a country or even the world are important connections people make. Certainly cultures can live or die on the basis of how well or able this is to be done. It was, and maybe for some “Christians” still is, a pretty big rift that Easter is celebrated on a different day by the Eastern Orthodox church than it is for those who follow the Western church headed by the Vatican in Rome. So too the twelve days of Christmas are a thing people are at least somewhat familiar with but many do not understand this comes because of a split on which day to celebrate Christmas. Now when we talk about when and how these “Christian” holidays are observed we are talking about things not ordered by God. When it comes to the Jewish feasts we are talking about exactly that – a commandment of God!

In the Torah every male is also to show themselves before God three times a year. This is easy to do when there is a temple in Jerusalem. After the temple was destroyed this was still possible on some level, be it hindered to a great degree. However, if Jerusalem is forbidden for you to go to this becomes a difficult question to answer when one asks, how do I follow this stipulation? This is the kind of things the Jews would now face along with other factors. Following the war Hadrian solidly changed the name of Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina. He also barred Jews from coming to, much less living in, the city. This made so many stipulations of the Law difficult to figure out what to do about, it's hard to list them all, but one of the ways the Jews had handled the timing of events even without a temple, the way they coordinated with other Jews across the globe,

was to set a calendar that was not so dependent on the every month observation. In times of uncertainly while Jerusalem was still available, an observation at the temple or Jerusalem in general could be made to adjust the calendar and keep it more correct, and this made events take place more correctly. This had been done as a way to preserve the Torah's events in the event of losing the temple and/or having limited to no access to Jerusalem. Now, Emperor Hadrian would go after the Jewish calendar itself!

Hadrian outlawed the Jewish calendar and this didn't just mean it made it more difficult for Jews to carry around a written version for fear of being caught. Hadrian literally made it illegal to observe any form of the calendar, meaning he outlawed the feasts themselves along with other Torah commanded events. If you don't think this is serious, Hadrian also ordered the execution of Jewish scholars who would keep this on track. This also meant it was illegal for people who knew the Law well to proclaim the times and seasons for holding, much less observing, the feasts and the like. Jews were very quickly being thrown into a turmoil which their earlier experiences had only slightly prepared them for. Jews remaining Jews was becoming more difficult by the day, but with God's help they survived, and with God's help we will continue to take a look at how this all unfolded as we continue this study.

Until next time, may we each continually choose to be the people God wants us to be!

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

FBS continued from pg. 8

This means the mark is not about a physical item or a singular action. It's about a choice to give up God or be starved, deprived, etc., to such a degree it's not possible to live this physical life. Don't think for a minute that simply refusing to do one thing or the other is going to dodge the mark. The mark is about a choice we are faced with and that is a life and death kind of choice. What makes it hard is that it's not about just being executed for disobeying, it's about a long-term suffering. Be assured these are the signs of the Lord's return. As it was in the days of Noah, most people's hearts have turned dark and their thoughts are only evil continually. As it was at the Tower of Babel there is little any individual can do, certainly not in stopping it but also in keeping it from touching their life, even dictating it! As true believers are faced with these facts more and more we are seeing how we must hold on because our redemption draweth nigh! (Luke 21:28)

Now, many of you believe that at this point I've gone far and wide from our subject at hand, but we have not. All of what I just covered relates directly to this moment Abraham stood in and why I have gone over and over what I have about it. Abraham was asked to do something literally against what righteous people know to be righteous. He faced being recorded in the history books as the man who killed his only son and that because God told him to. This would say something about both Abraham and God! As I mentioned before it seems an easy out that God stopped Abraham thus showing the righteousness of God, but when God makes this covenant with Abraham it's not being done with any of that thought. None of it is about the idea Abraham knew God would

stop him or that God intended to all along. Abraham was fully prepared in his heart to do it and would have no matter what the cost. However, there is only so far God could let Abraham go to prove this point, and this is why God swears by Himself to make this covenant with Abraham. The words tell us very clearly God says what He does because Abraham was totally willing to give his only son to God, just because God asked it of him. This is why I use the word "unnecessary" to describe what God asked. That was the point. Abraham had passed all the tests life had thrown at him, all the things God asked him to do in order to carry out the plan God ultimately had in creating the chosen nation. However, it was for this act of obedience in the face of being something that would set the plan backward or make it impossible at this point in Abraham's life that God says He made this covenant.

When we look at what God says here one might be tempted to say it's no big deal because God had already told Abraham more than once about the plan to make him a great nation. However, to think about it that way is to miss the point. Again, I struggle to say this correctly considering the weakness of language in our day, but while we say on one hand it was for this one act God truly makes this covenant that is a very linear way of seeing it. This incident came closer to the end of Abraham's life than it did the beginning by far. These words of God come far after we have seen God say similar things and make the same overall promise to Abraham more than once before. Thus, what we need to see is that God was not saying it was really for this one act He made this covenant with Abraham. In truth, it was not due to all his combined actions over the years! No, what God is saying is the true

heart that was in Abraham all along had been shown in the greatest possible way through this one act! In this moment, before all men, Abraham had shown how much he had no other gods before the One True God! Thus, in this same moment God would swear by Himself because that was the greatest possible oath He would make, and He would speak these words audibly before the world because there is no other witnesses to judge. Simply put, there is no other tie, bond, covenant, or anything of the like made between God and any man that is as unbreakable as this one between Abraham and God!

This is why there is so much anti-semitism in this world. We can argue there was no one on that mount to hear God make this promise besides Abraham and Isaac. We can argue these are just dusty words in an old book and/or that they are the record of just certain opinions in favor of one ethnic group. We can make all the arguments we want, but the fact we feel we have to make the argument(s) at all shows the truth. There is a knowledge of what God told Abraham which resides in the hearts of all men. God has physically shown it throughout the centuries, even millennia at this point. God did not just create from Abraham a chosen nation, He has sustained it and is in our time fulfilling the promise that in the latter days they would be gathered again to the promise land. (Isa. 11:10-16, Micah 4:1-2) The chosen nation lives and thrives today in spite of oppression too many to name. Through multiple attempts to wipe the nation from the face of the earth, whether through diminishment or total genocide, the nation lives on and is recognized as a nation. We can try to sidestep it, explain it away, but again the only reason

to try is because the evidence stares us in the face. This promise God made to Abraham on this hill on this day we are covering is evident to us and all around us to and in our day. We can accept it or reject it, but the truth stands in either case!

Now, putting aside those who hate the chosen nation, people love the words God gave Abraham to start this journey which we see in Genesis 12:3 “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee:...” Some people even take this as if it's some obligation God has made and which can be taken advantage of. This is true not just in taking advantage on the side of those who give some charity gift or do some other thing for Israel or Jews thinking God is then obligated in some way to bless them. It's also in that charities that endeavor to raise money for work among the chosen nation love to use it as a marketing ploy to raise more funds. In either case, people are attempting to use something God said to their advantage. In a big way this speaks to what we've been covering here. This is the heart and mind of many people. We look at God for what we can get out of Him. We look at our faith in the light of what it will gain us. This is why I pound on the fact Abraham was willing to do this thing that gained him nothing and seemed as though it would cost him everything! Most people would not begin to entertain such an idea, much less just do it without question the way Abraham did. It was for this attitude, faith, and truth seen in Abraham's choices that God makes the covenant with him He does.

Now, let's contrast those words we love with what God said here in chapter 22, keeping in mind those words in chapter 12

were spoken as the journey that is Abraham's life begins. By chapter 22 we are a long way down the road! This is not to say the words in chapter 12 don't still apply, but the importance of remembering they were spoken early on has to do with that, God obligating Himself to things, issue. Just what did God obligate Himself to in chapter 12? The answer is that God was going to take Abraham on this journey to use him for a special plan. That plan was, of course, the development of a chosen nation. What God told Abraham is that he would face both acceptance and opposition, help and hindrance, but as he did, God would bless them that blessed Abraham and curse those who were on the other side. In other words, God would see Abraham through this task in spite of the free will of men, many of whom would love to have stopped God's plans. God was also telling Abraham he was not going to do this by his own power. If God was going to bless those who were helpful and on Abraham's side as God led him, God was certainly going to bless Abraham himself! This would not be just, or even, in blessings as we think of them, but in just making sure the right things got done in the right timing. For that there is probably no greater example than the birth and life of Isaac.

What this means is that the promise to Abraham in chapter 12 is not God obligating Himself to do anything for others really; it was about helping Abraham accomplish the impossible to do on his own things God was asking of him. Because we all have a free will God knew there would be a lot of attitudes to consider and thoughts people would have as they saw Abraham's life unfold. It seems so obvious to us and simple to say if we bless the chosen nation God will bless us, but what God was really doing with

those words in 12 was dealing with all the attitudes and circumstances Abraham would face. A side we do not often, if ever, think about is that Abraham would no doubt witness some who would help him or be on his side, suffer for their support. We see this today and through history when people have stood for the chosen nation or with them. God wanted Abraham to have no fear in doing what God had asked him to do, and this is how the promise still applies today. If we attempt to live for God and others support us, or we see people supporting the children of God, we can see them suffer for that support. This can make us feel many things. For the person being supportive we might feel sympathy that they suffered for us, but God promised Abraham He would bless such people. Thus, Abraham, while having compassion on them, should not flinch from the task due to such issues or feelings. We can rest assured as well. It can be sympathy or go all the way over to anger that God allows those who support His ways seem to suffer so, but there is not reason to feel that way. God will bless those who bless the chosen nation, and those who are against it have their curse; of that we can be assured no matter what it looks like in the moment.

I could go on and on about that but let's contrast the words in verse 12 to those here in Genesis 22. In verse 17 God is more general and in a sense there is a reversal of the thought. Abraham is getting close to the end of his life, and as we know he would not see his house grow into a nation much less a good indication he would be the father of many nations as God had said. (Gen. 17:3-8) Abraham had just shown he'd give anything in his life to God without question, and that essentially tells us he was likely a man who learned the lesson well. He did not and would

not flinch at anything God asked of him for any reason. The worry over those who stood with him being treated badly for it was not going to move Abraham, for he knew God had it all under control in a very in-depth way most of us can't even scratch the surface in comparison to. If Abraham was not going to be moved by the worry of those who support him, he certainly wasn't going to move for those who opposed him. These concerns had passed, so here in verse 17 God assures Abraham that in blessing the world at large he would always bless Abraham, and thus his house. These words are the same and different. While we take the earlier words to be very applicable today, and I'm not saying they aren't, it's just about applying them correctly, Abraham had reason to believe they were more short term.

This would be true especially considering at the beginning of all this Abraham no doubt believed the promise to make of him a great nation was something he would see evidence of more and more as time went on. This is why he and Sarah used Hagar to have Ishmael. At that point it must have seemed they were doing something wrong for the evidence not to be growing. Time was running out and there just had to be something they were missing about God's promise and their part in it. By the time God asked Abraham to take Isaac and sacrifice him we see something totally different in Abraham. Abraham at this point had a firm understanding that no matter how much it did not make sense to him, no matter how impossible it seemed the promises of God could be true, God had a plan He was working in a timing and way only God could (at the time at least) know. Abraham would trust the lessons he had learned even if it

meant taking the only son who could carry the promise of God forward and ending his life on this hill. Now that's faith!

To Abraham it now seemed solidified not everything was/is as it appears to human eyes when God is in it. The promise God would bless those who stood with him and curse those who opposed him must have seemed self-evident by this point. The fact he did not necessarily see the blessing and the cursing others received was minor in comparison to not seeing any more than he had of God fulfilling the purpose He made the covenant with Abraham to accomplish. Thus, at this point God assures Abraham he has now become, for lack of a better way to say it, a fixture in the creation of this world and God's overall plan. As the world goes so goes the plan specific to Abraham. This is why what the church in more recent centuries has tried to teach, about the chosen nation being rejected in some way, is foolish, to put it mildly. What we see in these words to Abraham is that God cannot bless the world without blessing Abraham specifically, and God will not allow this world to multiply without multiplying the promise He gave to Abraham. This world will not go forward at a pace that is greater than the one God set in motion using Abraham. Maybe a shorthand way I could put it to make it more understandable is to say, there is no way this world could eradicate God's chosen nation, and with them the plan God is using them to move forward, for in doing so the world would have to eradicate itself. The only other choice is for God to be a liar, and we know that will never happen!

Until next time, Shalom!

**The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 4**

Phinehas even describes it as a sign God was truly among the entire nation. What these tribes had done was out of concern they would be left out of the service of God, and the fact they were compelled to think about this was encouraging. The representatives would return to Shiloh and they would share with the rest of Israel what they had learned about this “altar.” The rest of Israel was also very glad to hear all this, and it caused them to realize there was no reason to go to war against these tribes. They would return to their homes from Shiloh and the tribes on the east who had built the altar would give it a name to denote the fact it was built as a witness. What this really tells us is how much this was not an altar at all. This was a monument, and with the fact Joshua had instructed a monument be built on the west side of Jordan using 12 stones collected by each tribe from the river bed of Jordan, we see there was now a monument on both sides. This would truly create a link between those of Israel on the east and those on the west. One also has to think that if Israel had continued in the pure ways of God and stayed stable on the land as God intended, this location where Israel crossed Jordan would be a very special place for all the people of Israel throughout their generations. This would also have fit very nicely with the kind of traditions the Law established which emphasized the telling of the stories of Israel's beginnings as parents would be compelled to tell how these two monuments along the banks of the Jordan came to be.

The narrative then tells us there was a time gap following this where Israel enjoyed some real rest from all their wandering and the battles of taking the land. This time was no doubt filled with activity as the nation established themselves in their new homes.

However, we are told the day came that Joshua was very into the last days of his life, and that being true Joshua calls for the heads of the tribes, the judges, and the officers. This brought together all the main leadership of Israel which today we might refer to as the governors, those of the judicial system, and the military leadership. Joshua starts off what he has to say by reminding these leaders how it was God Who fought their battles and gave them this land, and in doing so he was emphasizing how much it was not them or even he who had done the work but God alone! He also points out that he had divided the land on this west side of Jordan extending all the way to the Mediterranean Coast so that each tribe enjoyed a portion of the land as their own. This is done with the point it was the original nations of Canaan that had been divided, meaning while it was true each tribe knew what land belonged to them, it would be up to them to be sure any remaining inhabitant of each portion be driven out!

Joshua also tells them it would be God Who would do this remaining work. However, this is where they needed to be courageous, not in going out to battle but in following the Law God had given the nation. This was important because in following the Law the nation would be careful not to simply mingle with these remaining people of Canaan because the Law demanded they be separate in order to perform the representation God had given. Israel would also not be taking on the gods and religious practices of the Canaanites because in following God's Law there would be no room for other gods besides The One True God. Israel would also need freedom to perform the Laws of God, and this should cause them to see they were never to end up servants of these people or yield to them in any way but drive them out completely. All this was a test

of the nation to put their efforts over the years where their mouth had declared them to be. These tribes, in this generation, had promised once again to serve The Lord and committed their children and generations to follow to those ways. Joshua was pointing out that now was the time to simply continue in the right path and in doing so they would be led to do the right things as the time came.

Joshua assures these leaders that when they go to drive out those Canaanites that remained, God would continue to easily give Israel the victory. The emphasis here was not to repeat a point about how able God was, but to assure the nation God wanted it done because if Israel simply lived among these people it would no doubt result in the children of Israel intermarrying with these Canaanites. In doing this the blood of the nation would lose a lot of the distinctiveness God had built into it, and along with that would come the lose of knowing Israel as a people in later times. This is a fact we see as very important today as some try to claim Jews are nothing more than the descendants of earlier nomadic tribes of Canaan who congealed into a nation. Here Joshua also points out that if they were to begin mingling with the Canaanites God would not drive them out. This would not be a punishment but a simple fact that in intermarrying there would be no separation to the point there would be no one specific to drive out. The end result would be that Israel would be plagued with the cultures of these people, and it would be a factor to lead Israel away from serving God through the Law. This, in turn, would result in Israel being removed from the land by powers that would one day overcome them. All these were facts we can clearly see in hindsight but might have been difficult for Israel to really grasp at the

time. However, the lesson they show us is how much our focus can not be the details of the future, but doing the right things as much as we can in the present. Simply put, following the right path leads to the right destination and following the wrong path leads us to something other than what should be our goal!

Joshua emphasizes that his life is coming to an end very soon. What was obvious is that God had not called a new leader to replace him as God had replaced Moses with him. Israel would be on their own, and their incentive to follow the ways God had set before them would be the reward of continuing to see the blessings they now enjoyed. Obviously there would be a curse from God if they did not follow Him, but that did not have to be so much God punishing them as we tend to see it as much as the truth of the way things would simply go against Israel. God's grace on the chosen nation has been very much the maintaining of the nation in spite of all the things Israel has done which by nature would cause any other people to perish as a people. Thus, Joshua would wrap up the words he had for these specific "governmental" leaders. However, this would not be the last words of Joshua to the nation. Joshua would call all the nation's people, including all these same leaders, to a place very familiar to the patriarchs of Israel. That place would be Shechem. In doing this Joshua was calling the people to the place which was laid out in the Law as that place they were to come after entering the land, and by standing on opposing hills which overlooked Shechem itself recite the blessing and the curse of following versus not following the Laws of God. (Deut. 27:11-26) In its simplest form this was Joshua asking

the nation to renew their vow to God that they would keep the covenant between them and God.

At this meeting, Joshua would go back to even before Abraham to touch on the stories we know from the early verses of Genesis. He would refer to those first people talked about in the Bible as Israel's fathers. This was not to say they are not the fathers of all people, but a way of emphasizing how much Israel was in fact another nation on the planet which came from the same circumstances all other nations had come from. Joshua makes the point clear by talking about those people who literally lived before the flood of Noah's day. He refers to that as living on the other side of the flood, and it paints a very good picture of how important it is to understand why God finally came to form a specific nation to be His chosen nation and holder of His oracles on this earth. (Rom. 3:1-2) Joshua goes on to name Terah and his sons Abraham and Nachor (Nahor) specifically. These he says were brought by God to the other side of the flood to wander in Canaan. This is very true in that if God had not brought Noah and his sons through the flood Abraham and the chosen nation would not exist. However, this reference to the flood also has very much to do with the fact God having a chosen nation, Him choosing to take that path at all, was due to the choices of mankind. We need to respect where we are now is not what God created us to be. Salvation is about getting back to that more perfect plan of God's creation, and again, God's actions and interactions with man has all been about opening a way and leading us into that way of getting back there.

Joshua goes on to hit only the very high points of the story, talking about how Abraham had Isaac and that led to Isaac

giving birth to Jacob and Esau. This then culminates in God giving Esau's descendants the far south country which is directly below the Dead Sea. However, Jacob and his descendants followed a specific path meant to bring about the plan of God by going out of Canaan and into Egypt. He then skips again to the fact God one day sends Moses and Aaron to bring Israel out of Egypt, which was done by plaguing a Pharaoh with a rebellious heart toward God. Joshua then specifies the story of how Israel came out of Egypt to end up with their backs against the Red Sea and Pharaoh pursuing them one last time. As Israel cried in fear to God, He would use this incident to lead Israel across the Red Sea on dry ground, but then also use it to drown Pharaoh and his armies. This freed Israel from an Egypt now decimated with a finality that truly changed the people from servants of Egypt to a people free to serve God. It was if Israel came through to the other side of a flood all their own!

Joshua continues the story by mentioning the fact Israel stayed in the wilderness for a long time, meaning a lot longer than they should have, a fact this generation knew all too well. God then brought Israel around the Dead Sea to the east of Jordan where they would face some very powerful kings who wanted nothing more than to destroy Israel. As the Amorites Israel originally feared so badly came against them God destroyed those people from off their land. As King Balak and the Moabites greatly feared Israel, Balak attempted to use a prophet of God to curse the nation, but Israel clearly saw in that incident how no enchantment, or supplication to God Himself could cause Israel to be cursed or destroyed. Only Israel could cause a curse upon themselves by refusing to follow the things of God. Israel would go on to cross Jordan and face the

people of Jericho, but without lifting a hand the city would fall before them because God was with them. Joshua then names all the major people of Canaan whom Israel had seen flee before them by God's power and not their own might. God did all this to give the land to Israel, and here they now enjoyed living in houses and cities they had not built. Israel ate from vineyards, orchards, and other things they had not planted nor had to wait to grow. All these facts were things the people who now standing before Joshua, hearing these words, had lived through and thus knew firsthand of the blessings of God.

It is at this point Joshua gives some of the greatest instructions any of us can ever be given. They are great not for length or complexity but for their simplicity and applicability in all situations we find ourselves in. Joshua tells the nations to put aside the gods their fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt. This is to say, all false gods and beliefs both of the far past and present for no god is true but The One Who created us all, and that was The God Israel had specifically been formed to serve! He goes on to give words most familiar to Bible students as he tells Israel to consider if it is better to serve the kinds of gods the people they had watched God destroy or The God Who had destroyed those people along with their false gods. Joshua then makes clear he had made his choice already. He and his house chose to serve The Lord! The people of Israel then speak up to say they too would choose to serve The God Who had brought them up out of Egypt and drove out all these people from before them to give them the promised land. Joshua challenges the people by telling them they can not serve God because He is a God Who will not ignore their

sin, nor will He put up with the fact they will turn to serve false gods. Instead God will destroy Israel as He had these nations before them. To this the people answer “Nay” but that they would serve The Lord. Joshua then points out they had become a witness against themselves. It would not be God enforcing His judgment on the nation if they did turn from God, but it would be punishment for lying on this day in saying they would not serve other gods!

Joshua then instructs them to put away the strange gods among them, looking to God alone, and the people promise to obey the voice of God. There Joshua confirms once again the true heart of the covenant God had made with Israel, and he writes these words down for future reference in a book. He then puts a stone upon them and places this next to the tabernacle telling the people the stone would serve as a witness to the promise they had made that day. With this Joshua would send the people home and he as well would return home to finish the last days of his life. Joshua would die in peace having seen Israel serve The Lord the entire time of his leadership. Knowing full well the works he had done the nation would bury him in that portion of land he had received in Ephraim as an inheritance. The Book of Joshua ends by telling us how the bones of Joseph, which had been brought out of Egypt, were buried in Shechem among his family in a place bought so long before by Jacob himself. Eleazar, the son of Aaron and second High Priest of God's Law, also died and was buried in Ephraim in a hill that belonged with his families priestly city of inheritance.

Let's stay in God's Word!