

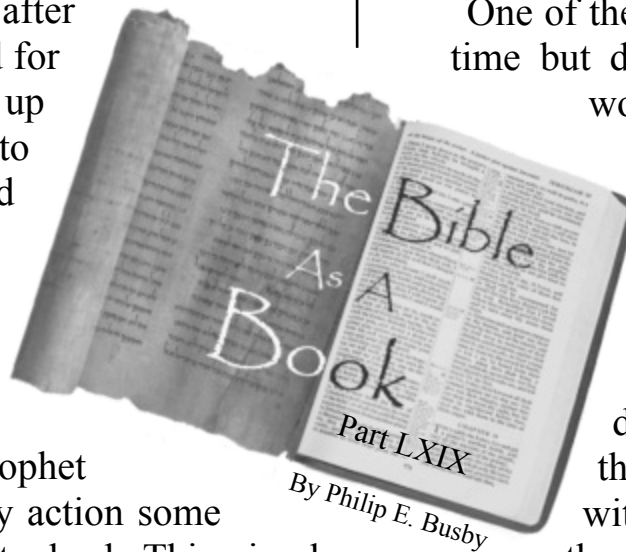


Shaqah

*“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*

In our last segment, we talked mostly about the transition between the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges. This included not just the transition between the books but between having men such as Moses and Joshua in charge of the nations to having no one leader. However, during this time after Joshua there was need for these judges to rise up among the people due to times when they had failed to follow the course God laid out for the nation. We talked about how this was not really unlike the work of a prophet in spite of the military action some of these judges had to lead. This simply mirrors the ways we see Moses and Joshua being prophets. We also discussed the time between these books of which there was not really any. This because the narrative makes them overlap to some degree. As for the total time the Book of Judges covers we found that to be somewhere in the vicinity of about 300 years for the solid history part of this. However, what we should grasp is that this book is the bulk of the history that

exists between Joshua and the time when Israel insists on having a king. All this discussion covered much of what we like to look at when going over each book, but there are details and at least one more question we need to look at this time.



One of the things we touched on last time but did not really discuss as I would like to have is the naming of this book. We talked about how calling those individuals in the book “judges” was really more of a title meant to give us a descriptive way to look at them and speak of them without getting confused with those we call prophets. This we

do in spite of the fact they actually did the work of a prophet, and it is due to this title that we call the book, Judges. However we can say a few more things about this title/name that might enhance our knowledge of why it was used. We know what the word means in English and it is most often used for those officials who sit in judgment over things such as criminal trials, law suits and the like. People who



hold the title of judge do exactly that. They sit on a “bench,” sometimes with other judges as a panel, or often times alone. They listen to cases or issues people have disputes over and their job is to apply the law to such issues in making a judgment of who or what is right. In short, judges judge!

What we see looking back on cultures of the past as well as some cultures that are more tribal in nature and/or tradition today is that there is no such formal system of justice. However, that is not to say there is no need for justice and judgment or that there was/is not an accepted system of some kind in place in all these cultures. This can go from a simple thing such as a leader who gets to pass judgment on their own beliefs, or even just desires, to more of a council of individuals who choose what is justice within their society. In the time of Judges Israel lived in a system of justice which the Law of Moses established. However, this system was just the basic rules or laws that should be applied as well as what we might call the higher court system for larger or more complex decisions to be made by the priests. On more of an everyday level the common people used a simpler and more immediately accessible system. This was a system that existed long before the nation of Israel and it's one we even see Abraham use a couple of times. In those days it was very common for a city to be directly connected to the surrounding agricultural land. It is what later history would call a city-state form of government. Where it differed from the more official form we would call that is in the fact the official form usually had a specific person, such as a king or the like who would rule over the city and the surrounding region. Such kings joining

together and/or conquering one another eventually gave rise to larger nations.

Today we cover such things in our study of history around what we call the middle ages and it's part of the process of learning how Europe became the countries it did and going on into the history of more modern times. What we need to understand is that a system where a city was the place of authority even for surrounding land, existed long before any of these official systems we study. In more ancient times there was not often a king in the city who held most if not all the power. Instead, we see a very organic example of how human government is nothing more than the extension of the family unit God established. I have written many times about this fact and it can be a hard point for some to grasp considering the official governing systems in most of the world today. However, we get a much better view of human history which the Bible shows us is true if we understand this point. God did not setup government outside the establishment of one woman for one man in a lifelong committed relationship having the God given right to bear children whom they will be responsible to raise. This is the establishment of family and along with it the only establishment God gave for men ruling over other men. We even see that fact in the Ten Commandments. Once we get past the first four which all directly deal with the relationship between man and God, the following six are about men relating to other men. The very first of these is that we are to honor our father and mother. We often take this a little too personal and never grasp how it is really more about the larger idea of honoring

what God has established.

To honor our father and mother obviously has very personal ramifications, but the bigger point of the commandment is that we must honor the fact God created Adam, and from him God formed Eve. Together as male and female they had the ability to procreate. This means every other human to live on this planet, save Jesus Christ, came into existence due to the choices of men. Vastly more often than not this was just as God created it to be, one specific man and one specific woman. God made it clear that He intended this to be a lifelong relationship in telling us whether we like it or not, when a man and woman come together in this way they become one flesh. (Mark 10:2-9) The physical manifestation of this truth is when a child is born. All this means there is a bond between all these individuals that not every human has with another. This bond was to form a family and that's why it is specified that when a man takes a wife he, "...leave his father and mother,..." Mark 10:7 When this happens he and the woman he has taken to wife form a new family unit which will more times than not also include children just like the family units that produced each of them. This kind of thinking is clearer when we look at the fact humans were not intended to die but in the beginning we had access to the Tree of Life and would have lived indefinitely. Under such conditions we would see many children being born to parents who were old enough that they had other children and grandchildren who were grown with children of their own.

This would have made the idea of family a far larger thing and generation after generation could easily follow their family tree by actually knowing many generations of their family leading right back up to Adam and Eve themselves! What an amazing thought, and while it may be one some do not really like, if we had never fallen into sin it would have felt much different on many levels than it does as we try to imagine it now. In any case, the point is, this is how God established men to live among men. Thus, when God tells us in the Ten Commandments to honor our father and mother the larger more overall idea God is trying to get us to see is how in spite of sin entering the world this fact has not changed! It has not changed in the aspect that it's physically still the way humans populate nor in the aspect that God intends it to be as it is! What is really being said by God in this commandment is that we should honor the fact God established the family unit in the way He did. In turn this means we can like or dislike our parents but being an obedient child and honoring the God established system for procreation is something we must always do! No matter what extended form of government man may come up with, no matter how our world in our day may look, the God created family unit is still and always will be the foundation of human existence.

This becomes something serious when we look at our modern world with all its official governments and ideas attempting to centralize human power as it once did at the Tower of Babel. Modern

science seems to give us a way to engineer children for the sake of forming a “better” society. For those who relish the idea of building a society where we are all healthy, taken care of, etc., these ideas can be very appealing and we see such people attempting to carry out such plans in all the ways it can be attempted. I say all the ways because there are the very obviously dark ways of attempting to do this which includes the direct and specific genetic engineering of children and the genocide of those who do not “benefit” the system. On the other end of the spectrum it can simply be the hope a specific form of human government can accomplish the utopia we want without so much manipulation of the actual population. In any case it never works, and that's why I say, to those who want to build a great society all these “advancements” are important but for the individual living day by day at any time it could be you're one of the people looked at as standing in the way of a human utopia. If that's the case then man's great society isn't so great to you!

All this is why we must understand that government is nothing more than an extension of the authority of men over other men which God gave only to the family unit. That authority was granted so that a man and woman could find a way to live together in peace as well as raise children should they choose to. The fact we have on so many levels and in so many ways rejected this foundational idea is why our world at large is growing worse and worse. This is why we are reminded in Ephesians that the fifth commandment is the first commandment with a promise. If we follow the commandment, life will be well for us

and our days will be long on the earth. This is not a simple individual promise but it has to do with the fact, if we as humans will honor the dynamics of how God setup our existence we will do far better than if we attempt to go our own ways based on our thoughts. The way this really comes to us as individuals is that we can not expect our society or world to go well or get better at this if we do not believe and follow that truth in our lives. We are all God's children, but what makes us a true child of God is that we attempt to honor all the ways He has asked us to live with no regard to how few or how many others do the same!

Truly we see in the governing system of judgment and law which was followed in ancient times a greater understanding of this fact. Instead of having one leader who maybe did or maybe did not pass judgment on the basis of his own selfish desires for power, cities would honor elders as their judges and witnesses. Because people did not tend to move far and wide from where they grew up, the elders of a city would often be direct family members of many who would come before them. In the times and ways this was not true, they were often people who knew their family, and in any case these elders were men who understood they were making judgments, even for a stranger, as if they were one of their family. For this cause, these elders would gather at the gate of the city, and as you read the Bible both before and after the giving of the Law you will find no shortage of references to people going to the gate of a city in order to conduct business of all kinds. There the elders of the city would be witness to transactions of money, property, marriages, and many other things. They would act as a

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we came to the end of the story of God telling Abraham to take his son Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him. Over the last several segments we've covered those words of God to Abraham after He had halted Abraham from taking Isaac's life. We talked about how, it was at this time, God truly made the covenant with Abraham. We don't really see it that way because we think in perspective of time, but all that came before really was about leading to this moment which God knew Abraham would not only get to but handle correctly. It was for this kind of sold-out obedience to God that God chose Abraham to be the father of the chosen nation. In covering the end of this story we covered last time how God also told Abraham his seed would possess the gates of their enemies and how that might not have seemed so true considering all Israel went through. In that we talked about the importance of obedience not just at one moment or the other but with consistency we must let God be Lord of our lives. In coming to the end of this event in Abraham's life we made it through Genesis chapter 22 verse 19, and we are ready to begin with verse 20 this time.

Verse 20 tells us the news made it to Abraham that his only living brother Nahor had done well in having children as he and his wife had eight. This was significant to Abraham because Isaac was now a man and in the culture of the day it was customary for the parents to choose a mate for their child. Early on in the story of Abraham's life we see Abraham as well as Nahor took daughters of

their deceased brother Haran. (Gen. 11:29) Only Terah could have approved this, and the fact Sarah was the daughter of Haran is why Abraham was not technically lying when he said a couple of times that Sarah was his sister. She, by virtue of being his niece was his sister as the culture would look at things in those days. Abraham was simply leaving out the fact she was also his wife, but it was very common to marry inside one's own family. In a way it was looked at as a path to building a true family as a people. One did not marry outside blood leaving the females of the family to possibly never be married. This assured the females married as well as strengthened the family as a group. What may or may not have been known at the time is that it also served to make genes within a family more solid throughout a good number of people.

Today we would call this close family marrying each other wrong. Of course, we clearly see today the fact it can strengthen genes within a family but that goes for the good as well as the bad ones. The bad aspect is why it is illegal in many places today. Today it is known that if you emphasize any bad genes within a family it results in the children having serious problems. It would seem there are so many bad genes within the human race in our day and age that problems abound even when we do try to mix it up. This is just the degrading of the human form along with the universe itself. Sin is a very destructive power and we don't often appreciate it. However, in the time Abraham lived in, the effect of marrying too closely

related a person did not show as it does now. In turn it did strengthen the genetic markers of many people who would come to be known as a people. In time, marrying within a family would not be about marrying so close a relative because the “family” would be a big enough group that just marrying within your own community was considered marrying within the family. We see the propensity to this attitude even today as many parents often feel at the very least they would like their children to marry within their countrymen or ethnicity. This can be looked at as racist by some, but no matter its more deep-rooted source people have a tendency to feel a certain level of comfort about marrying closer rather than farther away.

In some ways this may have a lot to do with culture and the fact if children marry inside the cultural group they are more likely to follow the same traditions. This is helpful not just in that one does not have to learn something new but in that the family can see each other more easily or naturally. If family has a holiday that is important to them, chances are it will be important to someone who comes from the same culture and you will get to keep celebrating with your children and grandchildren as the years go on. There can be all kinds of reasons people feel more comfortable marrying closer but regardless of the real facts as to why, once something becomes a bit of a normal way of thinking it doesn't take long before it becomes an expectation. Even people who do not want to follow a tradition can often feel tremendous pressure to do as they are expected. At times there are laws made that dictate some of these things. So no matter how “enlightened” a society we feel we have grown to be in our time, we should be aware

of how little much of anything ever changes among men.

All that said, we can't say exactly what all the reasons were for this being important to Abraham in light of needing a wife for Isaac but it was traditional and expected on many levels, and one thing is for sure, he did not want Isaac to marry a daughter of the Canaanites! However, Abraham had the freedom that being in a strange land brings. I'm sure somewhere along the line news of Isaac marrying a woman outside the family tree would get back to the core family just as news of Nahor's family had made it to Abraham but there was little pressure on Abraham to do what is expected of him. He had not seen any of that family since he left Mesopotamia with his father and nephew Lot. Abraham had already broke so many family traditions the only reason he was not an outcast is likely due to his father being the one who moved him away. In light of this, it was hard for the rest of the family to be too down on Abraham directly. However, the main reason for pointing out Abraham was not obligated by tradition to get Isaac a wife from the family is to point out the fact him wanting to do it this way was more than just following a tradition. Abraham had been very close to God over all these years, and yes he made some mistakes in thinking he and Sarah should do something to fulfill him having a son, but those mistakes were long behind him at this point. Thus, if Abraham felt it was important to stay within the family group to find a wife for Isaac it must have been important. On top of that we don't see God objecting to this idea so we know we're on the right track in that thinking.

So what we see in verse 23 is that Abraham's nephew Bethuel had a daughter

named Rebekah. The words go on to make it clear he had more sons and daughters than that but Rebekah is named very specifically because she is going to be important and we need to be clear on who she is relationship wise. As we move into chapter 23 we see Abraham's wife Sarah would pass away. This is one of those incidences where we should once again not be thrown by the chapter and verse separation. One can see why this was the place to start a new chapter but be careful to note the event of Abraham hearing news about his family back home would seem to have come very close to the time of Sarah passing away. In either case it was important for us to be clear on the fact Abraham had the family information in hand as the next event of his wife passing away came about. This shows us Abraham and Sarah did not push to deal with a wife for Isaac out of panic over the fact Sarah and he were getting very old. It may seem a very small point but we shouldn't overlook it. God was working things out in His perfect timing and Abraham had well learned by this point to let things happen in that timing without pushing for things based on human thought. Abraham did not jump onto the idea Isaac just had to have a wife now that Sarah was gone either. He did not go desperately looking for information on if the family back home might be able to provide one. Sarah's death might have been the appropriate time to deal with the issue but if it was it was appropriate because it was what God intended.

Sarah was one hundred and twenty-seven years old when she passed away, and we are told she died while living in the very familiar town of Hebron. This should come as no surprise as Hebron had, through the years, become the closest thing to home

Abraham and his family had in this strange land he journeyed in. However, the words about Abraham having to come in order to mourn his wife Sarah shows us Abraham was not necessarily right there when it happened. This is not just because he was out in the field but out still journeying around the land taking care of the vast holdings he had been blessed with. Remember it was years before this time that Abraham and Lot were forced to split up because their herds had become so large the spot they were in was not big enough for the two of them. By this point in time Abraham's possessions had to be very large, to say the least, and there is simply no telling how far away Abraham might have been when Sarah passed away. Yet, even at his age Abraham came. It might sound strange that I point that out but let's not lose track of the fact Abraham himself was very old. It was no small thing for him to be out traveling around to take care of his business and no small thing to drop everything to come to mourn Sarah. Sarah was his only true wife and he loved her very much. He would come and he would weep. He would think of all the years they had journeyed this land together and how in spite of all the promises God had made he and she had only Isaac to pass it all onto.

Verse 3 tells us Abraham would make preparations to bury Sarah, and in another small but important point we are told he would bury her here in this land! This was not because it had become home and there was no human thought about how she might want to be taken back to Mesopotamia. She would be buried here because here is where God had brought them. This should stand in contrast to the fact Abraham would eventually send his servant to the family in

Mesopotamia to get Isaac a wife. There was the fact God brought this family of Abraham to this promised land but they were still strangers and always would be in being separated from the Canaanite population. This fact is emphasized in Abraham's words as he makes preparation to bury Sarah. For this Abraham turns to the family of Heth and admits he is no more than a stranger in this land. For all Abraham owned, he did not own any part of this land. He had not taken so much as a small piece so as to have a place to bury Sarah, even here in Hebron. Thus, he would ask the family of Heth to give him a simple place to bury Sarah. In this we should be clear that he does not ask just for Sarah but he says he needs a place to bury his dead. We can take that as being a simple request just for Sarah's sake, but what Abraham was actually requesting is to have what today many might call a family plot. Abraham may not have possessed even a scrap of this land for himself up until now, but in wanting to bury Sarah here he was making a commitment that this was a place his family was going to be. In time we see others in the family were buried here, but for a great deal of time after Sarah's passing this and this alone would be the only piece of ground the family would really own.

The next verses show us how much Abraham had come to be honored by at least some of the people of this land. The family of Heth responds to Abraham's request by saying Abraham was a mighty prince among them. For that cause they tell him he is welcome to use any of their burial places, which in that time was talking about sepulchers. Sepulchers were truly a family burial plot, but instead of a plot it would be a natural cave or one hewn out of solid stone. Usually, stone "shelves" would be carved

into the walls or refined out of the natural outcroppings of the inside of a cave. These were often accompanied by a hollow underneath the shelf for use as a collection place. If such hollows were not carved or not possible, stone boxes called ossuaries would be used. The process would be that a body would be laid on the stone shelf and left there. Over time the body would decay and leave behind nothing but the bones. As all the shelves became full it would be necessary to use that particular shelf again one day. At this time or at some time prior to this the bones would be gathered up and placed in the hollow under the shelf or in the ossuary. Sometimes ossuaries were used for the express purpose of putting only one person's bones in, and at other times they would be used exactly like the hollow under the shelf where multiple people's bones would be collected into them. This brings a full meaning to the times we see the Bible describe someone's death as being buried with their fathers or their bones being collected to their fathers. This literally happened.

Thus, what Abraham wanted was a place very long-term because if you were only interested in burying one body, rare was the occasion that any true sepulcher would be used. To do so would be a tremendous luxury and the rich no doubt did such things at times. Even burying a couple would be considered a luxury, and if anyone could afford it, it'd be Abraham. However, there is no indication Abraham would ever be so wasteful as to only buy a sepulcher with the thought of just him and Sarah being buried there. On top of that Abraham knew full well the promise God had made with him, and while he did not know the details of how the future would unfold he knew he had a son, who would no

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XLIII

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 went into more of the long-term effects of where the Jews found themselves following the Bar Kohkba Revolt. Specifically we began talking about how the system of religious sects started to fade due to there only really being room for one to lead the religious thought from that point forward. This was particularly true in the aspect that the temple had not only been destroyed, the Jews had now lost a war that started with some very promising results for seeing the temple rebuilt. If what happened at the time of the Bar Kohkba Revolt failed to see God move in a way that got the temple rebuilt, the question became, what would? Last time we talked about how time also played a part in all this as we begin to see quite a stretch of time following this war with no positive movement for the Jewish circumstances changing. This truly led to the diminishing of religious sects that were minor as well as those major ones such as the Sadducees which did not offer much guidance for how to be Jewish in a post-temple time period. The Jews had many things in place that came about during the Babylonian captivity which helped guide them, but it became apparent in this time the situation was going to be far more long-term. With all that driving the religious thought, the Pharisees became the big winners in whose theology would lead the way into what Judaism would look like for centuries to

come.

Now, of course, there is no way for us to take this all into a full study of the religion of Judaism and that is not the point of this study. However, when looking at the point of this study we see, once again, a need to wade in a bit to this part of Jewish life more specifically. This because the question we are answering is if the Jews today really are the chosen people. Along with the aspects we've covered on many occasions, which is the point of God not rejecting them after Christ's first coming, there is the aspect of if the Jews of today really are the Jews of the Bible. That question is what took us into this look we are doing at Jewish history running from the Biblical information and up to our present time. There is no way for us to take such a look and know anything about what we're talking about unless we look at the religion that so often defines what the world sees as Jewish. So along with talking about the religious sects, we now need to look at what the Jews chose out of those ideas to really understand why Judaism looks as it does. For that, we will take a look more closely at the Pharisees because they were the group who had the biggest hand in defining the religion. What is maybe more important is to talk about why this group existed. This will give us a clearer understanding of who they were and why their beliefs were more attractive on this side of the temple's destruction.

As we discussed last time, the Pharisees had a much more open view for

debate. This is due to the fact they actually were desiring to find ways to apply the Law and Jewish traditions to everyday life. The more high-minded Sadducees had a very rigid idea of the Law and how it should be followed. The right way to say it might be to say they had a very literal way of looking at the Law and it was so literal it lost all spiritual value. The Pharisees were less rigid about the Law but that has its drawbacks as well. While the Saducees looked at the Law and could see nothing but the specific stipulations, the Pharisees often took interpretation too far. A term many are familiar with in our time which might be of value in understanding what I'm saying in this is to talk about "Artistic License." That term refers to the idea an artist, especially a storyteller, can take a literal historical event or facts of any kind and make them how they want it on many levels. This means they are not just telling the facts or even just filling in the details between facts, but people will often add to the story on the basis of what they find more interesting. This can serve to fill out a story in places details lack but it can be taken so far it's hard to even recognize the real story they are basing their performance or work on. If people begin to see a particular version of such a thing as being the actual facts, it can be hard for people to have a good view on that particular historical event. Of course, artistic license can be used for so many things, but when it's a take on real history it has the potential to be dangerous.

When it comes to the Law God gave the chosen nation, knowing facts is of vital importance. I'll say right up front that it is a very good thing God preserved the Law for us in writing because it is important that no matter what any man believes or teaches, we can go back and study the Law for ourselves

word for word. Far more than most Christians have any grasp of, the Torah actually contains all the vital facts. This is not to say it contains all the facts needed to be part of the chosen nation, but that all the vital facts needed to live for God are right there. No doubt we are blessed to have the New Testament's words and in particular the Gospels. However, we should not lose sight of the fact the Gospels are nothing more than the actual account of something happening that only matters to us because long before, God said it was going to happen! The books that follow the Gospels are teachings to help us see this and the fact that what God has done is meant to be applied to our everyday walk in the here and now. This is to say, we are not just biding our time in this world waiting for our lives to end or for The Lord to come back. We are to be living for God right now with the same determination we should have in any circumstance. Heaven will be about living for and with God, and while we can't live as directly with God in the here and now as we will be able to then, we shouldn't forget that to walk with The Lord is our goal now as much as in heaven. This is why in the model prayer He gave us Jesus said, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10 This is our goal and it matters not how much of it we think it can be accomplished here, it's what we desire as true believers.

I say all that because as we look at the Pharisees we see a group that believed heavily on what is called the "Oral Torah" or "Oral Law" as some prefer. If we want to have any idea why the Jews look as they do and have over many centuries leading to the present, we have to understand the idea of the Oral Torah at the very least. In shorthand, the Oral Torah is a collection of "rules" which

were passed down by mouth from teacher to teacher, never having been written down as the Torah we know. The argument among Jews is that some believe these rules or “Laws” date all the way back to the same point in time the Jews received the written Law. Others believe they came about gradually over the centuries or were given at a later point in order to clarify the Law. There are even some who believe the Oral Torah is what actually existed all through Jewish history and the written Law is what was developed later. Views on this issue can be wide but for a Jew to escape the Oral Torah would be very hard. Most all Jews who are religious on any level are going to see the Oral Torah as carrying a lot of weight when it comes to debating what is right and wrong. Even more weight when one asks how to be Jewish and even more when it comes to the question of how to be Jewish without the temple!

This is what made the Pharisees more able to offer something after the temple's destruction. For the Sadducees the temple was about all that mattered. You did what the Law told you to do at the temple and that was that. In other words, you accomplished the ceremonies and your work was done. This was a very ritualistic approach, and one many Christians can be closer to than they think when it comes to how to be a “good Christian.” The idea is, I go to church on Sunday (or any other day); say the prayers I am to say; sing the songs I am to sing; and in all things whether rigid or loose, accomplish the ceremony, observance, etc., I'm obligated to accomplish. Once I've done that I've fulfilled my obligations and what I do, especially outside of my interpretation of what it is to be a good person, is not really an

issue. This in many cases has clearly led to very rigid observances, some even arduous religious ceremony inside the church but extreme liberalness in life outside the church. In our modern time it has led many to extreme liberalness both inside as well as outside the church. Neither of these is good!

The problem is no matter how few or how many rules we may have, no matter how strict or liberal we believe it's necessary to be, we are not truly living for God. Instead, we are living for what God can give us! This is not what God has asked of us in any way. Thus, neither the Sadducees nor the Pharisees offered the true right solution, but since the Sadducees were so much about accomplishing the required at the temple things and the Pharisees were not, the Pharisees had more to offer. On many levels this is because they held onto the Oral Torah, and in it are more of the guidelines which different teachers set down for ways to be Jewish outside the temple. So where did the Oral Torah actually come from? The truth is only God knows the real details on that, but if you believe God recorded for us the actual Law He gave to Moses and that It is what we know as the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), you can make some pretty good guesses. All we have to do is look at how man responds to things, and the Bible shows us much of this throughout It's words. In truth, the chosen nation was developed specifically to show us these very things. In a very contained environment God gave one people the responsibility to hold onto and perform the rituals He literally gave in writing. This goes along with that attitude I've heard from more than one non-believer when they say, “If we can ever find Noah's ark, I'll believe the Bible is true.”

There is a deep rooted desire in the flesh to be able to see things and experience things in the flesh. By that I mean using the flesh. We want to be able to see it with our eyes, touch it with our hands, etc. Thus, we become this ritualistic people so many are. Seeing might be believing but we want that to be a more than onetime event. Religion gives people a chance to believe they can feel and touch what they believe! God saw that this is what man wanted and gave a specific group or nation the opportunity to have something tangible which God Himself gave them. He did not give it to the entire world to perform all the ceremonies because the Law actually teaches us how much ceremonies are nothing because we need a true relationship with God. Many people totally miss this point, but for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear the truth, the nation gives us something physical to look at, even interact with. In many ways what became the Oral Torah is an example of how much the Law shows us ceremony is nothing. You see, to simply follow the ceremony of the Law is to find a life that is not good enough. This is true in spite of all the Torah contains. In a sense this is what the Sadducees actually wanted. Their attitude was that the Law's ceremonies were enough and it was all that mattered. This in many ways was a rejection of all the complexities of the Oral Torah. More importantly, it gave them a lot of freedom to ignore a lot of everyday issues.

Getting more directly at the question of where the Oral Torah came from, I think it goes without saying that after the Law was given to the nation there were a lot of questions that began to rise about how to properly follow the Law. This was only natural because it's not possible for a written law of any kind to speak to the reality of

every specific circumstance various people will come across, especially over time. If anyone could have done it, it would be God, but we see He did not even attempt to give the Jews that. Instead He gave them instructions from which to extrapolate how to live righteously through day by day events. This was meant to be a very personal thing as it should be in every one of our lives. We look into the Law for guidance and find the right path not so often in the specifics but in the example of what it shows us. The problem with people is that whether good-intentioned or not we get lazy about having a personal walk with The Lord. It can be very helpful to go to a minister and ask about any particular issue you don't believe you really know the answer to. There is nothing wrong with that, and in point of truth God gave us ministers for that purpose. In Israel they were to go to the priest with things they could not figure out. We are specifically told what we call the fivefold ministry today was a gift from God after Jesus ascended. (Eph. 4:8-12) The problem does not come from asking, talking, debating, etc. The problem is that we end up looking for less and less of an organic daily walk with The Lord; instead replacing it with a more rigid set of beliefs.

This is how the Oral Torah came into existence and all the way to a point of becoming written down during the time period we are beginning to cover now. Early on there was the asking and debating about how to follow the Law, but over time debate became irrelevant as the "answers" seemed to be more set or agreed on for one issue after another. As this happened there came to be a consensus on the "right answer" for more and more things. No longer did individuals have to ask much of a question on many things they might have. As new generations were

raised they were simply taught what these standard answers were. When this happens people don't ask questions and get answers so much as they are taught answers and they live those answers more religiously as each generation passes. To some this is what can be described as doctrine and that may be an apt description, but we need to stop and think about what we are describing. The process of coming to conclusions by having a direct relationship with God and building a doctrine in our lives that guides us through the circumstances we face is a good thing. The process of building doctrine as a larger group is not.

Now, I know I've said something once again that many are not going to like and I have no intentions of trying to back out of what I just put in black and white. However, let me clarify that what I just said is not to say there aren't beliefs or standards within a group of believers. In a go to church system, it is only right that a church set standards for what is expected in general when it comes to individual behavior. Such things as the kind of modesty that is expected from people who come to the church. This may vary a great deal from how people feel they want to, or shall I say can live their everyday lives but stricter standards for inside the church is not asking too much. One would hope the minister(s) of the church would have some wisdom on such matters that goes beyond what any one individual might think is appropriate. This wisdom often comes from knowing more about what different individuals struggle with, both among those who come as well as those who might come into the church. When we come together we need standards to go by. Those who feel a church's standards are too rigid or liberal will need to find another place to attend.

However, this decision should not be made on the basis of just what you grew up being taught or what you feel personally should be accepted. It should be made based on personal belief in right and wrong. In other words, your personal doctrine. It should also go without saying that the overall standard of a church for some actions is often going to be or seem more rigid than many people's personal beliefs. This can be true if for no other reason than to have a good appearance to those outside the church that we care about what we are doing here. If at no other time, when in church we should be an example of the believer! (I Tim. 4:12)

When we look at this we can see how the Jews likely had good reason to want to have more, shall we say, group doctrine, than other people might. The many ceremonies of the Law they had to perform were very much about the group and little details about certain things were not covered in the Law Itself. In that case agreed standards can be a good thing. That said, we should always question our doctrine. Not for the sake of shaking something God has made clear for us but to be sure we have not gotten lazy and began to slip. Many religious people would disagree with the statement we should question doctrine because they feel it is the glue that holds us together, but that's the point. If we are being held together for wrong reasons in any way that needs to be corrected. Besides doctrine gets questioned and changed all the time in the wrong direction. The reason to question is to be sure we are not going down that path or that we have not simply accepted bad direction from the past which we blindly follow for sake of tradition and/or ease. I am well aware that questioning doctrine often leads to going in the wrong direction, but there again, if people are not seeking God and

only looking for what makes them most happy, at ease, etc., strictly following some doctrine of the past often only gives people a false sense they are still in the right!

Obviously doctrine is another one of those subjects I'd love to have time and energy to write a book on, but one way or the other we don't have the room to take it all on here. My point is, there is fair reason for the Jews to have what might be referred to as the Oral Torah but very wrong for it to be looked at in the same light as the Torah. The name "Oral Torah" may in fact be a great descriptive name for what it's referring to, but the name is a problem in and of itself. The use of the word "Torah" is to say these writings/teachings are at the same level as the actual Torah and that's wrong! Knowing the nature of man I have observed, it would be my educated guess that the belief this Oral Torah dates all the way back to the giving of the Law of Moses comes from the desire to say exactly that. I'm not attempting to judge anyone here, I'm simply asking us to look at the facts. We know from the Torah Itself how God gave the Law or Torah to Moses. Those parts that are the core of the core were given to Moses as he stood before God on Mount Sinai. We see the rest of what God had to say being given mostly in the form of stories where we hear things such as, "And God spoke to Moses..." or Moses saying to Israel something like, "Now hear ye the words of the Lord..." All this was written in a book, and at the end of Moses' life we even see the description of how the Torah was put next to the Ark of the Covenant. This is the written and only authoritative Torah!

We can say the Oral Torah came about at the same time as the written Torah but then

why is there no record of it in the actual Torah? Unless you want to take those few statements where we are told "...and the Lord said many other things..." as being the evidence, there is none. Even some of those instances are followed by being told Moses wrote the words down in a book or the like. There is just no credible explanation for the Oral Torah being given, especially by God Himself, at the time of the written Torah we know. However, what is very believable is that men went forward following the Law and in noting certain details are not specified they filled in such details with standards. As time went on these standards became codified or placed into doctrine, so to speak. They were traditions we might say, and thus they were handed down to each generation. I'm all for keeping track of history, even the history doctrine has passed through but let's face it, any such thing does not hold the same authority as the Word of God Itself! This understanding is why many Jews feel the Oral Torah developed later and/or over time. Now how much that affects their belief in its authority we can't say. Some believe this and still believe it holds the same authority as the written Torah. I can't explain why, other than to say men are often just as fond of their doctrine as they are the actual words of God. Others no doubt see the Oral Torah as guidance, and still others believe both what we know as the written Torah and the Oral Torah were all made up by man. There's nothing to be said about that last group. If you don't believe any of the words were really given by God Himself your problem/argument lays outside this discussion. What we are talking about here is the way the Judaism we know today shaped/shapes the Jews we know today and the Oral Torah has a lot to do with what

shaped Judaism.

As we touched on last time, without the temple everything about the Law seemed to be in a bit of turmoil. Yes those who lived through the Babylonian Captivity had to deal with this, but remember they lived mostly with the hope the temple would be rebuilt and it was, even within one generation's lifetime. Following this third Jewish-Roman war that did not happen and as we see the temple has not stood again even to this day. This made the matter of figuring out how to follow the Law without the temple a big thing. It also opened the argument to a lot of things it shouldn't have. You see, when man feels he can no longer follow the rigid ceremony he once could or was told to as was the case with the Jews, men begin to feel they can question everything. For example, if you feel God told you to bring a sacrifice to the temple for a specific event and without the temple you cannot do that, you look for what you "need" to do instead. This does not just open the argument of if we need to or don't need to but how do we handle this change all the way around. In turn we debate, and in the end reshape far more than just that one stipulation!

The problem the Jews faced was the feeling they did what they did in order to redeem themselves or at least make themselves worthy to be redeemed. Christians go through this same debate all the time, especially on a personal level. As a teacher of God's Word I can't tell you how much this fact has been proven true through questions I've been asked by many people. They are not questions we ask as a church, but they are asked by individuals who are looking for a handhold of salvation. It just isn't a comfortable thing not to be able to assure our salvation on a physical level be

that through ceremony of some sort or just the question of what must I do, and not do, in order to make it to heaven? For the Jews this kind of thinking found them in the worst way. Without the temple the solid feeling of, I've gone to the temple and done my prescribed ceremonial deeds, was just not possible. Instead of opening their eyes and seeing it was never really necessary to perform the representation as long as you were attempting to live in the truth, they panicked about how to replace the representation. As I said before, the Jews have a better excuse for this than a non-Jewish believer in that they actually were commanded to do certain things. However, there in is the point once again. If God gave you a ceremony to do at the temple, He'd also have to give you a temple to do it at. It was God Who said the temple had to be built in a certain way. It was God Who came to say, Jerusalem is the spot the temple is to be built and nowhere else. If God laid down the stipulations that now make accomplishing His Laws to the letter impossible, He will not be judging you for not doing them.

I know many would say that's an over simplification, but it really does boil down to that. That said, we can't rest easy in that and miss an opportunity God opens to rebuild the temple and begin again, but that brings us to another problem with forming a religion. While it's true the Jews coming back from Babylon when they did allowed even the generation that had seen the first temple see the second, the religious things that came about in the absence of the temple were never given up once the temple stood again. As it turned out some of this may have been a good thing (I debate that a lot in my mind) considering it gave some footing to this later time of not having the temple, but the point

stands. Why did so many traditions that were put in place at the time the first temple lay in ruins survive after the temple was rebuilt? It's a hard thing to deal with men. In one way the traditions meant to take the place of the temple helped keep the temple's importance in the minds of the Jews. In another way, these traditions were so comfortable we see them holding up the building of the second temple when the opportunity came about because the people did not see the importance of having the temple once again. Men are a tangled mess of emotions and beliefs, and whether beliefs are right or wrong is not the only issue. There is the issue of why do you believe what you believe? How serious do you take what you believe? How real is it to you and what's at its core? I could go on and on.

Traditions, doctrines and the like can be a good thing or they can be a bad thing. What many don't see is that they can be a good thing for a time or time period and then be a bad thing if we hold to them after their time has passed. One can use what I just said as an excuse to believe the right in many traditions, doctrines, teachings, and even what the Bible says in black and white is now outdated and/or that we now understand God was trying to say something different than what was believed to be said over the centuries before us. The idea that time brings about new circumstances and thus requires new perspectives on how to interpret the Bible is a popular one. All these things, all these sides of where we can be pulled are dangers to an individual's belief. This is why a man very in tune with God once said, "The best way to get on your feet is to get on your knees, and the best way to stay on your feet is to stay on your knees." He was saying in a

very simple way the point I've been hoping I can make and that is, we each must feel assured that what we believe is not just what we've been taught but that it's something our personal relationship with God has shown us is true. This does not mean there won't be, whether long term or short term, many things in our lives we do because it's what we've been taught or because it's what our current church teaches. It is to say, we each need to not only believe something but know why we believe it. It is most often in the attempt to find the answer of why we believe or were taught a certain thing that we find stability in that belief or the truth we have been missing which might shift our belief.

This is the process we each need to go through, and for the Jews it is the blessing and curse of the Oral Torah. Its blessing to the Jew is that it does give guidance and sincerely following its guidance on how to be Jewish can be a great starting point. The curse is that it can lead one down the wrong path if we do not recognize it for what it is because it is doctrine not a collection of commandments from God. What no one both Jew or non-Jew should do is lose sight of how much our personal walk with God supersedes all! Doctrine must flow first from the Word of God Itself. The Word is only appropriately applied in daily life through guidance from The Holy Ghost, and we only receive that through our faith, our daily relationship that is so very personal with God!

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

doubt have a wife and children, all of whom he likely imagined would live their lives here in this land. So when the children of Heth tell him he can use any of their sepulchers they knew Abraham would want a more long-term burying place for his family. Upon hearing their offer Abraham shows them great respect as well by bowing to them as a man asking for something would when he was not a king or the like whom people felt could demand things of them. He then tells them clearly which place he wants. This was the cave of Machpelah which was at the end of a field. This would seem to be an ideal place and one not just anyone would give up. However, it was not due to that fact but because Abraham was a man of high honor that he offers to pay for it.

To be perfectly clear, Abraham does not offer to open a negotiation on the property but he flat out offers to pay whatever it was worth. Abraham was not out to get anything in a way that would give anyone an excuse to say they really helped Abraham get this or that. God had made Abraham a stand alone man who could easily afford whatever he needed. Thus, he certainly had no need to beg anything of anyone! What we are told is that the person Abraham knew owned this cave was not in fact a son of Heth. He was a Hittite but he lived among the family of Heth. One could argue he was not bound by the family's promise to Abraham that he could have his choosing or that this man agreed to sell out of pressure from them. This conversation was taking place at the gate of the city not some room where only a few were. This was a traditional thing to do as it left a public record of any transaction. The elders of the city would often sit at the gate of the city for

the express purpose of bearing witness to such events. This would take the place of keeping written records which were easy to falsify or even lose. It would be in this binding forum Ephron would respond to Abraham's offer and this gives us a chance to say with certainty he was not pressured or giving out of pressure. Ephron would reject Abraham's offer on the grounds he did not want Abraham to pay him anything for the cave. Instead, Ephron wants to give the field along with the cave to Abraham.

Abraham again shows respect for such a gracious offer by bowing once more. However, Abraham counters this offer by insisting Ephron's willingness to give up the place at all is enough. Abraham wanted to pay him what it was worth. Ephron points out what the place is worth and it is in fact quite a bit of money for those days. However, Ephron points out that between him and Abraham he felt that was such a small thing it simply did not matter between them. He felt Abraham should just take it and use it. Abraham would not argue the point further. Ephron had named the price he felt the land was worth and without questioning that price in any manner Abraham counts out the exact amount Ephron had named. The verse also emphasizes that Abraham made this transaction right there in front of all the witnesses as it was meant to be done, and he pays with silver that was current to the marketplace so there is no question the entire transaction from start to finish is beyond reproach should the matter be asked about at any later time.

Verse 17 makes it just that much more clear that what we might call the "title" to the entire piece of land was transferred to Abraham there in front of all the witnesses.

One interesting fact that is pointed out is that the trees on the land were part of the deal. This was important as it confirms to us this was not a partial or temporary agreement. It was common for people who owned great herds of grazing animals to pay the owner for the right to allow their animals to graze the land. This, of course, would give free access to such land so herdsman and the owners of the flock(s) could do the business of caring for the animals. What it would specifically leave out was the right to change the land, and in the day there was no greater way to indicate a major change to the land than to do something such as cut down the trees. Trees were valuable assets, they also very often get in the way of construction projects be it houses, roads or other such things. To specify Abraham bought this land, trees and all, was to make clear from now on Abraham had the right to change this land in any way he chose. How much changing of the land Abraham may or may not have done does not matter as his reason for wanting it was to have the cave to bury Sarah in. This he would do in this very familiar place of Hebron.

As we move into chapter 24 we get into the story that is the reason we were told the information we started with this time. That being the information Abraham received regarding his brother's family back in Mesopotamia. Due to this connection it would appear there is little time that passed between Sarah's death and what we are told in chapter 22. Right off we are reminded that Abraham was growing very old by this point. He had truly lived a long and full life. However, there was still the matter of seeing Isaac find a wife and Abraham would waste no time dealing with this matter. Abraham would call his eldest servant for this task.

This was a man Abraham put total trust in. He had already entrusted this man with all his possessions but now he would also entrust him with Isaac. This would be a huge responsibility! For that reason the first thing Abraham makes this servant do is place his hand "under" Abraham's thigh. Now there are different opinions as to what this means and some are not so pleasant to talk about. Why people interpret it in such ways I can not say for sure, but the idea of being under one's thigh does not have to refer to the back of the thigh as if the person was sitting and you placed your hand under their thigh. A body is more often than not referred to as top to bottom meaning from head to toe. Looking at it this way would mean to place one's hand under another person's thigh would be to put your hand(s) somewhere just above the knees.

The idea that is pretty much universally agreed upon when it comes to this gesture is that it is an act of submission on the part of the person doing the swearing. You in essence are yielding your will to the other person's will in the matter you are swearing to. This goes hand in hand with the fact the couple of times we see this happen in the Bible it is a person who would be in a lower position swearing to accomplish something for a person who has authority over them. We see that here as Abraham is telling a servant to take an oath, as well as when Joseph swears to his father Jacob that he would bring his body out of Egypt and back to the promised land to be buried. (Gen. 47:29-30) While both of these incidences may have happened with the person in authority sitting or lying down, this is not about that detail. This gesture of putting one's hand under another person's thigh was used because it meant something within the

culture. That means in most cases it would not be a person sitting or lying that would ask a servant, child, etc., to swear something, the one in authority would most likely be standing if they could at all. This makes the interpretation of being on the leg somewhere lower than the thigh region make perfect sense. It was very common for people of those days to bow as a sign of respect. We see that in the story we just covered as Abraham bows a couple of times to the family of Heth in order to show respect for them and/or their responses to his request. When it comes to a true servant or a child to parent (especially in those days) it would be common for the person to be kneeling at the feet of the one who had authority over them. Asking them to put their hand under your thigh would be saying, I want you to reach out your hand and take a hold of me.

For two friends, especially males who felt almost like brothers or family, it was common to grasp each other's wrists. Instead of shaking hands as we often do today they would take hold of each other's wrists. This would create, as well as symbolize, a tight bond between the two. In contrast, if a servant came begging for forgiveness to a master or authority of some kind it was common to kiss or take hold of the feet of the person you were kneeling to. If you wanted to grab on you would take hold of the ankles. A master pulling away from such a connection or ordering the one kneeling to be pulled away was a very bad sign and likely meant the servant would be cast out. If we look at all these truths it is easier once again to see the correct interpretation of placing one's hand under the other person's thigh is to reach out and make a connection just above the knees. That part of the body would be right in front of a person kneeling. For those

who are familiar with physical wrestling you know that to grab someone's knees directly puts them in a vulnerable position so you wouldn't do that. To grab too much higher than just above the knees is to be in risk of violating a person and certainly for a servant it would be touching their master in a more private area of the body. To grab below the knees would be more a sign of total submission while requesting something of the master. Thus, under the thigh is the master saying to the servant, I want you to touch me but in a manner that indicates you are taking with you some of my authority to do this task. You will be my legs to go forth on this mission, and in doing so you will swear to me to do it as I instruct and only in the way I instruct you to do it!

This is exactly what Abraham was asking his servant to do. I actually doubt he was, but even if true, the fact Abraham may have been sitting at the moment does not matter. The gesture and the meaning of taking a hold of his master's leg held the same meaning in any case. Abraham was clearly in no condition to go to Mesopotamia and do this task himself. There is also the bigger matter which is the fact God had brought Abraham out from his home there to bring him to this land of Canaan. To go back there would be somewhat a violation of this fact, and at Abraham's advanced age the chances he would die and end up buried there instead of here with Sarah was very great. Traveling in those days across such a great distance was something we see even military commanders at times had trouble doing. It simply did not make any sense for Abraham to go himself. At the same time this was a task of immense importance. Whoever went back was making a decision that would effect the outcome of this family's future in a tremendous way.

Abraham had lived this very long and full life but in all that time he had only one son with Sarah. As much of a miracle as it was for Isaac to be born when he was, considering how old Abraham and Sarah were at the time, it would be more than a miracle to accomplish it now as we have been told Sarah had passed away!

Isaac was it. He would carry on the promise God had made about bringing a chosen nation from Abraham or no one would. Sure we see Abraham go on to marry another woman and have children with her but just as we have already seen with Ishmael God had made it clear the chosen one would be a son Abraham had with Sarah! This is why in that later story we see without hesitation Abraham sends the sons he had with this second wife away. He does this specifically for the same purpose as sending out Hagar and Ishmael, to separate them and whatever people they might become from Isaac and what God had promised to do with his life. All these facts show us what an important job Abraham was giving to this servant in sending him to retrieve a wife from the family Abraham left behind in Mesopotamia. It is for this reason we see in verse 3 Abraham does not make the servant swear to him or by him. No Abraham demands this servant swear by God Himself that he will not take a wife for Isaac out of the daughters of the people of Canaan. This was important because if the servant felt he had an obligation to come back with a wife for Isaac and he was unable to get one from the family Abraham was sending him to, he might think it a fair compromise to find a girl that would be willing to come who was out of the land they now lived.

Such a thing would appear to be cheating, but when tasked with such a great task that just had to be accomplished it might seem a small thing to make this choice. The fact was neither Abraham, Isaac nor anyone else seriously connected to this situation knew what the women of Mesopotamia looked like. No one could identify or it mean anything for them to fail to identify any woman this servant brought back as being of the right blood, much less the right family he was asked to get a wife from. If this all seems to be a light matter on the issue of believing Abraham trusted this servant so much he would not have worried about him pulling such a deception, just stop and think about what Abraham and Sarah did. Stepping back once again to that story of Abraham getting very old and yet still being without an heir, we see Sarah of all people believed the problem could be solved by taking up a custom familiar to the day. She had Abraham use her handmaiden as a concubine or surrogate to bare a son in her place. God made it very clear in the end this would not be good enough. Abraham even begs God to accept Ishmael for the task, but to this God flatly refuses. A child had to be born of the right people, he and Sarah, and nothing could take the place of that. So too here Isaac needed a wife of the right heritage. Abraham's intent was that the servant get that wife from his family back home. Would this be possible or would a wife simply from the home region have to be accepted was not dealt with at the moment. The first and greatest stipulation the servant had to follow was that he not choose any woman who was of the Canaanites!

Until next time, Shalom!

living record of who had given what to whom or agreed to what and how. They would be used to judge many matters of disputes and often this was easier for them because they knew well all the events of the area and the people themselves. Unlike a king or other disconnected political leader these elders were prepared to make good judgments for the people in their community. They saw the literal comings and goings of the city. They knew what life was like in the area not just because of the people in it but due to all the factors such as weather, the fertility of the soil, availability of water, and all those things one knows when you've really lived in a place. They were in tune with how the community conducted itself, why people did what they did, and what people needed to do.

Like a good father who knows his family personally should know how to do good for his family, like a mother who raises her children and works side by side with her husband knows what her family needs, so too these elders knew how to make good judgments for their community. This was a governing system that was truly an extension of the families that lived under it, and it's the best kind of system man can hope for in spite of all we think of as advancements. Most "advancements" come because people are both lazy and greedy. Many do not want to put forth the effort to take care of their family or even their own personal lives. Others are very greedy of power, fame, money and the like. The lazy tend to easily give themselves to those willing to take the authority and the greedy are more than eager to take every inch they can get. Why we think of such systems as

advancements is a bit of a mystery but the problem often lies in the dream. We dream of a day when we will escape the curses laid on us by God at the time of the fall which were meant to remind us of our mortality and a need to reach to God for the answers. Man dreams of what government could do if it were used as a vehicle for good. However, believing government can be a vehicle for good and actually getting it to be one are two totally different things!

As we look at the facts we've covered so far it might seem we've left off talking about the Book of Judges, but that's because while we can get some out of just the basic facts about a book, we get a greater understanding of what God was wanting to do and why if we look not at what man has become but what we once were. In a day and age where literally the older men of a community sat at the gate of the city conducting and being witness to the events of everyday life we can see more clearly how Israel's cry they be allowed to have a king was truly about the desire to be as other nations. It was a desire for the dream of what central power could do not what it far more often than not does. In that, we see it was not such a stretch as we would see it today for God to never intend the chosen nation to have a king or official government outside the priesthood and their responsibilities at the tabernacle/temple. As we leave behind the wars the nation fought to take this land with Joshua at their head and see the people settle into living on this land, we see how easy it could have been for them to follow the Law without a king. All they needed to do was adopt the Laws of God into their fundamental ways of going about life in

each community in the same way they would for much of the time even after a central government was in place. For us it might be hard to conceive but for them it was only natural.

However, even in the name of the Book of Judges resides a view at the cracks that show us the chosen nation was already starting down the road to being like other nations. More and more communities were turning from the natural system of just having elders at the gate to having men they considered leaders of the community. These men had their organizational value at times it might be needed, but as you should suspect they were looked at more and more as the authority in the community. These community leaders in Hebrew were called “Shophetim.” As you can see I did not use Hebrew letters to write that word, thus it is a transliteration. Some will transliterate the singular as “shophet” others prefer “shofet.” It's a technical detail to our discussion here but what is not is the meaning of the word. Shophet does mean “judge” but it's used as a title due to the older language root it derives from which means, “to pass judgment.” It is not extremely clear when this title came into use, but we do know that as Israel journeyed to the promised land God had them organize the camp and the people using men who were often referred to as “Heads of the Tribes.” It is possible this term was used for these men but whether it was or was not cannot be known from the wording of the Bible. Even if within the written words we see this word used in the earliest Hebrew texts known we can't say for sure if the word appears

because it was used at the time or if it was just a good way to write it down. Following words through history from writing into common speech of a certain time is very hard.

In any case the word did eventually get used to describe the leaders of a community, and it is why we see it applied to the individuals whose stories we see in the Book of Judges. Due to that, the book was named “Sefer Shophetim.” This is easily translated into English as “The Book of Judges.” This is why early on in this part I said we know what a judge is in our modern time but we need to understand what the term meant to the time period of the book. The individuals we call judges in this seventh book of the Bible is one step away at best from elders. At the head of a more official looking army they become more than that, but at their root this title denotes why anyone followed them or their acts were recorded. In general, these judges did work for the larger community of Israel to help them through a time of despair or crises. What we see is that just as all men do, Israel looked at these leaders with the hope one day such a leader could lead and thus help the entire nation as a king. That request was even proposed to Gideon, but like Joshua before him Gideon told the people he would not because God was their king. (Judg. 8:22-23) However, this didn't stop the nation from having the desire for an earthly king. The judges should have shown Israel their true need to turn fully to what God had instructed in the Law but in a show of how hard it is for men to see past their desires to their needs many wanted a

king that much more.

As time passed, we see God followed the nature He showed us in giving the second of the Ten Commandments when He said He would visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. It was not that Israel hated God in the way we often take those words as meaning but in not loving God's commandment they not have a king, and seeking to get that right they essentially hated God's original plan. For those who knew right at first God's desire they not have any king but God, such a desire was truly an iniquity and a desire God would not grant. As God "visited" or watched the events of each generation unfold, He witnessed that desire grow from an understanding of not being what God wanted, to a hope later generations held in their hearts. In time, I have no doubt this was something people in Israel even prayed for with little to no real awareness of what they were asking for. In the end, God would not hold them blameless but He would give them a king. We see those facts in the statement God makes to Samuel who acted as the last community leader who would physically anoint both Israel's first and second kings. God tells Samuel, it was not him the people had rejected but it was God! (I Sam. 8:6-7)

Now that we've looked at those facts we can see Judges is not only the history of the only time period in the nation's history when they lived more like God intended them to in not having a king, but we also see Judges as a transition book. I hesitate to call it that because I fear people looking at it in the wrong way just as Israel looked at the

judges. Today we find it very hard to imagine any nation existing without a more centralized government, and due to that we tend to skip over this time in the nation's history. Sure we know it's there but we don't really look at it as the vital history it is outside it being a transition to the time Israel had a king. God knew we would do this and it's why as time passed both those who lived through it as well as those of us who can only read about it got/get a chance to see how badly the nation failed even with a king or due to a king as the case may be. Then God sent Jesus to be The King of The Jews. God allowed the nation to have a king because one day He would, as a man, be their King! Thus, if we are so short-sighted as to look past this history or see it only as a transition time to where and how Israel ended up with a king, it's not a good thing but you will get by. That is the tremendous grace of God. He has worked things out so that even many of our failures have been turned into things which can lead us back to the right ways!

Of course, we would be remiss if we did not also cover the one question I don't believe that to this point we have even touched. It is the last one we have not covered that we usually do and it is the question of, who wrote the Book of Judges? To answer this question we have to be aware that the book covers not just a time of around three hundred years but it's also a time when Israel had no Moses, no Joshua, no king or the like. The early parts of the Book of Samuel, which we know as having a first and second book, is clearly the recording of events during one man's leadership in the nation in spite of him being the last judge. From there it goes into

the time of there being a king. This means the events could be easily chronicled for future reference. However, the time of Judges is the time when no one individual was a leader for any long length of time. Some of the judges did not so much deal with Israel as a nation. Thus, the stories we see in this book are more individual stories, and while they were put together into one book it's clear we are looking at a collection. The book is even cut into three parts by many teachers. They like to emphasize the opening chapter and a bit of chapter 2 is an introduction. Then the bulk of the chapters are the actual stories, and finally chapters 17-21 are said to be an Appendix.

One reason to go with this is to see something I said last time which is the fact the Book of Judges is clearly a stand-alone work. This is one of the clear reasons the Torah is the core and the other books are dependent on it. Without the Torah we don't see the real meaning or reason to study these other books. The Jews separating the books as they do makes this fact clearer. For them Judges is part of the Nevi'im in the subcategory called "The Former Prophets." There is no panic over the idea this book was not so clearly written or inspired by God as those of the Torah. I don't say that to diminish this book or any other from being the Word of God. I say it to emphasize how much the Torah tells us what God wanted and throughout it we see God being very solid about things going in that way. This is what leads some to say the God of The Old Testament is a different God than that of the New. This is foolish and can be seen as that more clearly when we see the Torah books

are God showing what He wanted. The rest are God dealing with what man did with it. If any book can be described as being a book in the Bible showing us what man did with what God wanted, it's the Book of Judges!

In the end of the day, we can't say with any certainty who actually penned the words of this book, but one thing can be said for sure, it was more than one person. The length of time it covers shows us that because no one person could have lived that long. Of course, we can go with the theory that one person collected all these verbal tales into one collective written work but I don't believe God would have preserved such a work for us. Verbal history is not reliable and that's the reason God wanted us to have a written Word given by Him. The best way to see the Book of Judges is to see it as records of the events as they happened or not long after the fact. Someone was led of God to chronicle each of these events. In time God led them to be collected into a singular record of history for the nation. It is likely the beginning and ending of the book were written by whoever compiled them. While we can only guess who that was, we know this book is Scripture because its solid preservation had to be directed by God. Without it we would have no record of the time period it covers and that is unimaginable considering how important a time it was for our understanding and learning of what God is trying to show us in His Word!

Let's stay in God's Word!