



Shaqah

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

As we continue our overview of the book of Deuteronomy, last time we covered many stipulations concerning marriage, adultery, children, and capital punishment. We ended by talking about how Israel was to handle some of the nations they had dealings with, such as the Moabites, Amorites, Edomites, and Egyptians. This all came in a line of instructions that would be crucial to the nation establishing itself on the promised land once they entered it. That's why Moses was laying out all the Law to the nation on the east side of Jordan before crossing over. Covering this brought us through Deuteronomy chapter 23 verse 8, and we will begin with verse 9 this time.

Following the line of thought about how to deal with other nations, the next stipulation has to do with going to war. Israel is instructed to make sure they are clean before God when they go out to battle. Even when out on the battle lines, if any man was to become unclean during the night

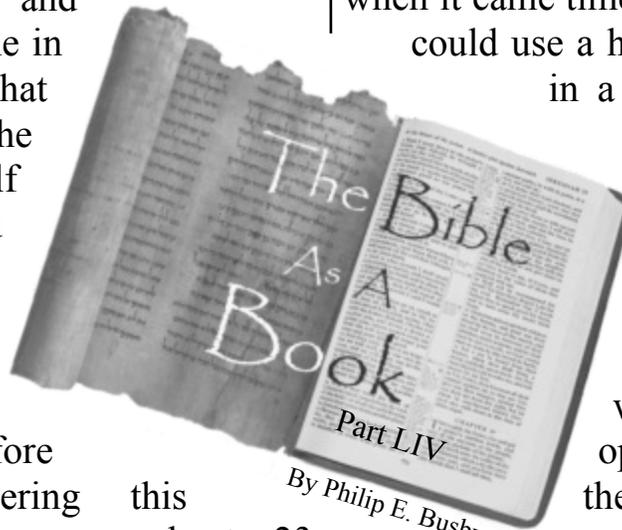
that man was to leave the camp. This meant he would not go to battle with his fellow soldiers that next day. However, that evening the man would wash with water and return to his camp. Along with this God gives instructions about how soldiers were to carry something to dig a hole with so when it came time to use the restroom they could use a hole and bury it afterward

in a place outside the camp.

This was more than just sanitary, it was about God's presence being with them as they fought. Israel is told they were not to return slaves who escaped their oppressor and came to them for help. Instead they were to allow such a person

the opportunity to choose a city to live in, staying among the nation and being allowed their freedom.

Because it has to do with utter sinfulness as well as being oppressive, there was to be no prostitution of any kind, male or female, among the nation. Since tithing was required of all one's gain and other offerings were brought, this would also



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ensure no gain made through prostitution or slavery was brought into the house of God. In order to help the poor or those in need among the nation, they were to charge no interest on money, or anything else that was borrowed by another member of the nation. Of those outside the nation interest could be charged. If a member of the nation said they would give to God by vowing a vow, they were to do it without fail. It would not be a sin to never vow, but once one made such a commitment they were to give to God what they had promised without excuse.

Next we go into those examples again which show how to deal with more than the things specifically mentioned and another item that would help the poor. The fruit of vineyards and corn are used as examples to tell Israel that if a member of the nation was passing by a place where something was being grown that can be eaten without preparation, such as fruits and vegetables, that person could eat of the crop while they were there. The person was not to collect anything to take with them, but they were welcome to pick and eat at the time. Then we turn back to marriage and the stipulation Jesus told us was given due to the hardness of men's hearts. (Matt. 19:3-9) If a man became displeased with the woman he had married, he could send her out as divorced from him. Because women are not given the power men have in society, God allowed such a woman to remarry. The fact this was often necessary is just another reason Jesus told us her first husband causes her to commit adultery by divorcing her. However, because being with another man was not God's intent, if the woman's second husband was to divorce her or even if he died, her first husband was not allowed to

take her back. Since death is the only thing that God intended to end marriage vows, it would be as if her first husband was already dead.

We also have re-emphasized here the fact a man who marries is not to go to war, but be given time to establish his house and relationship with his new wife. He is also not to be obligated to any new business that might interrupt this process, and we are told this was to apply to the entire first year of the marriage. If there's a need to take something valuable as a way to ensure a contract is fulfilled by someone, they were to never take something from the other that was a daily necessity, and a personal millstone setup used to grind a daily allowance of grain in order to make bread is used as an example here. Because it can be a way for rulers to raise an army, very appropriately the issue of slavery is brought around again. This time it concerned forcing another member of the nation into slavery by selling them as a slave. Taking freedom is considered stealing the same way stealing any physical item is, but the punishment for stealing in this way is death! The danger of leprosy is warned about again here and it's emphasized that the nation was to do as the Law stated concerning following what the priests determined. What God did to Moses' sister Miriam when she and Aaron challenged Moses' authority is brought up, because God wanted Israel to know defying His Law on the matter was no way to escape leprosy. (Ex. 12) However, God can heal it instantly if He chooses to.

So many things in the Law speak to how much the people of Israel were to help

one another and not deny the help their neighbors needed. Thus, God also makes it clear that when a person loans an item to another they are not to go and retrieve it themselves. In order to bring more of a public witness to the fact you are attempting to retrieve something that is yours, as well as the fact they gave it back to you, you are to stand outside and ask the person to bring it out to you. It is more important not to be accused of stealing or starting a dispute than to get what you loaned back. However, when it comes to borrowing something that belongs to a person who has little, you were to give the item back to them at the end of the same day you borrowed it. They were to go to bed that night knowing they got back anything they loaned as well as have it to use if they want or need to. If a servant is poor it does not matter if they are of the nation or from outside it, one was to be sure to pay such a servant what was owed to them the same evening of the day they earned it. This way they too can go to bed having whatever they have been able to gain in that day.

These things were to put away sin from the nation of Israel. When there is a line one needs to not cross it is best to stay away from that line, not get as close to it as you can. To be vigilant about putting away sin from the nation is good, but using it as an excuse to execute vengeance is not. Everyone's sin is their own, and others are not to be punished for it just so you can say someone "paid." Thus, God makes it clear the children are not to be punished for the sins their ancestors committed, and older

generations are not to be punished for the sins of younger ones, not even within their family. The nation was to remember they were once oppressed in Egypt and be careful not to take advantage of those most vulnerable when executing judgment. These are not to be judged differently just because there is little they can do to defend themselves. All judgments were to be fair, not based on what someone wanted or who was being judged. In another way to help the poor, Israel is told that if a piece of the harvest was forgotten and left in the field, it is to be left. Even when they harvested fruit and the like, they were to bring in what got picked the first pass through. Gleaning was to be left for the poor and strangers of the land to do and make use of what could be gotten.

When two people had a dispute they were not to keep it between themselves but bring it to be judged by those slated to do so. In this way, the matter can be settled and those who have done wrong will know so. If the wrong is something that deems punishment that can be done, and if that punishment is to be lashes with a whip, forty is the maximum number of lashes a person could receive. Anything more goes beyond punishment and becomes torture, which was not to be done. To show how much God demanded justice with a heart of mercy and giving in the nation, even the animals were to share in the blessings and be rewarded for their work. For example, an ox that pulled a stone or the like to grind corn was to be allowed to eat what fell near enough to them to reach and not be muzzled so as to prevent it. God was also serious

about each family line continuing. Thus, if a woman's husband died before they had a child, the husband's brother was to take the woman as his wife and attempt to have children through her. The first child to be born to her would then carry on the name of the deceased man and inherit his property. If the brother refused to take her, the woman was to go to the elders at the gate and make it known. When the man comes to defend himself, if it's true he will not take her, she is to perform a ritual of taking a shoe off his foot to illustrate how an important piece of the family would be lost. She is also to disgrace him by spitting in his face, and it was to be known in the nation that the man refused to continue his brother's house. Continuing with how serious it is a man be able to carry on his house, a wife was not to harm a man's private parts as a way to help her husband prevail against him in a fight. If she did such a thing, her hand was to be cut off and no pity was to be shown for having to do so.

We are told they were not to have different weights in their bag, which is talking about scales that used counter balance as a way to measure out things. Without standardized scales everyone may not weigh out the same portions as another, but whatever weight you use to measure by it should stay the same. Anything else is just dishonest and displeasing to God. God despises people taking advantage of others, and tells the nation to remember the specific people of Amalek, who lived in the south of Canaan, that did so. Instead of coming against Israel to fight its army they attacked those at the back of the group as the nation traveled. These were the most unable to defend themselves and that is why

they were slower. Thus, God tells Israel that once on the land they were to wipe out even the remembrance of Amalek. In setting forth the feasts the nation was to observe God told Israel to hold one called Firstfruits. This feast actually sets the start of the year because it dictates when the first month was to take place. However, whether it came on that same day or at any point(s) it was time, there were personal Firstfruits for every household as the nation was instructed that when they settled on the land each house was to gather the first fruits that came of their plants and take them to the tabernacle, or later the temple, to be offered to God. This was to be done by giving the priest the basket of fruit and reciting a very condensed version of the story of the nation's beginnings starting from Jacob; going through the bondage and release from Egypt; and on to the promised land. This was a way to prove one had not forgotten the story of the nation's start nor had they forgotten the God responsible for performing this miracle. They were also giving thanks to God for the land He had given them by telling how they got there and bringing fruit the land had produced. This served to remember the blessings of Israel were not just about the nation as a whole but every individual in the nation who sought to serve God!

In direct connection to the stipulation about keeping a vow one has committed to, we go on to talk about ending the three year tithing sequence Israel was to follow, of giving to the poor and bringing to the temple. Of course, tithing is not something an individual of the nation committed themselves to but something God asked of them. However, in being the people who

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

Last time, we covered the events that immediately followed Isaac's birth, not the least of which was the feast Abraham held in order to celebrate the birth. However, this took us from talking purely about praise to God through to the pain of making mistakes in this life. Abraham and Sarah had made the choice to have a son through Hagar, who was Sarah's handmaiden, and now that Isaac was born this had to be dealt with. We discussed how much this came about due to Ishmael mocking at the feast for Isaac and what that truly meant. We discussed Sarah's request of Abraham concerning Hagar and Ishmael along with how to see that from the correct perspective. We ended with the fact God told Abraham that sending Hagar and Ishmael out of the house was the right thing to do in spite of how painful this had to be for Abraham. All this brought us through Genesis chapter 21 verse 12, and this time we are ready for verse 13.

As we look at verse 13 it is important we remember this is a conversation Abraham is having with God. In this, let's look at one thing besides the words being spoken themselves. Abraham was simply living his life. Isaac had been born and Abraham held a feast. During that feast Ishmael started causing problems, and Sarah tells Abraham Ishmael and his mother need to go. One minute Abraham is celebrating the birth of his son, and the next minute he is faced with one of the hardest things he would ever have to do in his life! While this is a worse choice than most of us ever have

to face, the point is we all have these times where life is going anywhere from great to pretty good. Then suddenly, out of the blue, there comes upon us a situation we did not see coming. At times it may be something we always knew might be a problem or thought would turn into something bad, but we never really know when that moment will be. In any case, when it does happen it can be a surprise and even come in a moment when we think everything is going good.

This often leaves us with a feeling of even deeper despair than if we had known the dreaded thing was coming or if it came at a time when we felt we were already being hit from every side. This has a lot to do with the analogy that the higher you are the further you have to fall. The emotional toll can be sudden, and if we make a quick choice, which is often required of us, we can be left with a lot of doubt in the future as to if we made the right choice or not! People say hindsight is 20/20, but it's not, and these kinds of situations prove it. Abraham was at this moment left with the choice of either sending Hagar and Ishmael away or keeping them in the house against what Sarah had asked. No matter which way he went it was not going to be clear in the future if it had been the right choice. If they stayed, every struggle Isaac faced could potentially be made worse, if not even directly brought about by the fact he had to grow up at odds with Ishmael. Even if the two did not have continuous trouble, it's still true Ishmael's life was to go in a different direction than

Isaac's. What would this mean to Isaac? Maybe something far worse if the two did get along great than if they were at odds!

If Abraham was to send Hagar and Ishmael out, maybe he would have the chance to know what became of them and where they had gone. If this was the case, he would feel responsible for every trial they faced, especially Ishmael. If he did not know what had happened to them, how much would he worry and wonder about it? All these things would be distractions to Abraham and stress on his life for the rest of his life. Even if he knew everything seemed to turn out great, was it the way it was suppose to be, and this truth is really why just the ability to look back does not always help us, or at least it is not as helpful as some believe. No matter how much we are satisfied with the choices we have made, we have no way of knowing what we could have done differently that might have been better. This is true especially if we understand what better means. Sometimes better is even an issue of things turning out a way we didn't think was good, but even further down the line we see it was necessary. Then there is the question, what did we miss on the level of doing something for God if we had gone a different way?

As many science fiction stories have portrayed, the ability to time travel would cause many issues. We can't know all the things that would go wrong if we messed with the way events have unfolded. Thus, people debate how much damage really can be done. However, what brings this debate is that it's a truth events unfold the way they do based on every choice we make, and also on the way those choices interact with the

choices of any number of people around us. Thus, we are all time travelers already. The only difference between our lives and what is portrayed in the stories about time travel is that we are limited to only going forward. This is a good thing, not just because it is almost certain we would more often change things for the worse if we could go back in time, but there's the simple fact we make enough mistakes just going forward. Thus, in many ways it is a great blessing that each moment is something which comes and goes with nothing more that can be done with it than what we did in that moment. We make mistakes and we have to deal with the consequences, whatever those may be. That's the way God created us to live, and Adam and Eve taking of the tree God told them not to take of points this out in dramatic fashion right off the top.

That is why what really matters in life is that we do what we can to avoid mistakes, but, in the end, it's not so much the mistakes we make, because we all make them, but how we deal with the consequences. Because so many of those consequences come at times we might least expect them, there can be little we can do but try our best to muddle through - or is there? There in is the point of looking at more than just the words of Abraham's conversation with God! We should note that verse 11 simply tells us the thought of having to send Hagar and Ishmael away was very grievous to Abraham. However, verse 12 then starts by saying, "And God said unto Abraham,..." Why does this matter? Because as we read the stories of great men of God told to us in the Word of God, we tend to do just that - read it. We take it for granted that God speaks to such individuals, and why not? If

it was not just a given that God spoke to them as they went through each trial of their lives, they wouldn't be in the Bible; at least not as a person of great faith! If they were in the Bible they would be minor or maybe one of those we are told about just because of the mistake(s) they made, right?

In a way, all this is in fact true, but don't reverse the point! True, they wouldn't be shown to us if they did not lead such a life, but what we forget is that they did not lead such a life because God just chose these people to grant such faith. All of what we see come about in their lives is due to the relationship they chose to have, which opened the opportunity for God to use them. The things we see as blessings are often just circumstances that without, these individuals could not have accomplished what they did for the Kingdom of God. Sure blessings can be just God helping us through something, but even then it is so often about getting us on in our walk with Him, not just helping us for the sake of relieving our stress or pain. The idea God does just grant blessings to people who are by man's standards "good people" is the incorrect perspective many have of God. Is God a God of love then? Absolutely yes! However, just as we talk about looking back on circumstances and thinking we had it bad when it was necessary to bring a greater good, or seeing "good" that actually stopped us from doing the work of God, just having things go our way is not a way to judge life and see God's love correctly.

We see in our world all around us how little God acts just for the sake of making everything good. If He did, things would be

far more comfortable, and man's suffering would not be getting worse as we see it is. However, this is not the evidence God is not a God of love, it is the evidence that we do not know all we need to know in order to make the judgment call about what love is. We can't know the future; we can not be certain our choices at this moment will be correct; and we don't even know if what we've done in the past is really as good or bad as it might seem in hindsight. Thus, we certainly cannot judge God's actions properly! This means we learn from God what real love is, but that does not always come as easy as it might sound, due to the fact we are not God. This does not mean we should give up, but it means as much as we desire to do right, we don't know what He knows in order to handle each situation. That's what is so important about what we see going on in Abraham's life, as well as the lives of other great individuals of faith we read about in the Word, especially when we see a situation like this come up.

The situation may come up in a way that slaps one across the face and gives us - as the saying goes - a rude awakening, but what should come next? Hearing the voice of God! We don't know if there is too much time between verse 11 and verse 12. We don't know if Abraham sought God for any time before he hears what God tells him. However, we should consider that often we are told the person "sought God." We are told this on many occasions when it comes to great men such as Moses. To our knowledge, Moses stood closer to the direct presence of God than we find anyone else did and live to tell about it. Yet we are told many times he sought God. We are told that

when faced with a question those of the nation he was leading had, his first response was for them to wait while he went to seek the face of God. Then there are other moments when we see God speaking to Moses right off in a way that is unmistakably God responding immediately.

This is true of what we are told of Abraham as well, which means when we see something like the transition that takes place between verses like these, it would tend to indicate God was right there to tell Abraham what to do. While the information God gives might be about God wanting to intervene in order to protect His plan from a mistake a man might make, Abraham is not someone like the later kings of Israel who inherited their position due to whose son they were. Abraham was the man whom God spoke to because he had the faith in the first place to be in such a situation. Abraham and many others we read about in the Word were used of God because of what was in their hearts. This is why I find a study on Jacob's character so interesting. No man in the Bible whom we are told so much about do we see going through such a bumpy ride. I have heard people make comments about the man all the way from excusing his behavior because he was the one God wanted to use, as if that was all that mattered, to those who would judge God for using such a man.

Both ideas are wrong! It should be obvious why the second one is wrong on a lot of levels, but people are not often careful about judging. As to the first one being wrong, that has to do with the fact there is always something to learn. It is good to trust God totally, but that is just the way to approach reading the Word. We need to trust

God in order to do what I was talking about in knowing what being loving really is. We need to look at God and understand there are times we see things that we would not think is loving. However, in stories such as Jacob's life we have the opportunity to see why God would use such an individual. Jacob can be a very comforting character for a lot of us. I don't know if he ever got living for God "right," but we can see how he never seemed to make it to that close to perfect level Abraham made it to. He never seemed to develop that free-flowing faith his grandfather had with God. Thus, Jacob mirrors many of us, and shows us in spite of our weaknesses, if we have a great desire to serve God, our lives can still be used. He shows us God created people to have a wide range of personalities. Thus, it is not a mistake we are not all the calm and collected individuals Abraham seemed to be by nature.

What it comes down to is, again, that point which was made to Samuel; man looks on the outward appearance but God knows our hearts. (I Sam. 16:7) Of course, God knew Abraham's heart, and He knew Abraham was very heavy-hearted over the idea of sending these two members of his family out of the house. However, almost no matter what God told Abraham to do, doing it was not going to be easy. What left Abraham assured that he was doing the correct thing was trusting God! In listening to God, he knew doing as Sarah had requested was the right thing to do. As we look directly at verse 13 we should see God is really just telling Abraham it was right because God had it all in His hands. Telling Abraham Ishmael would become a nation was not just a way to make Abraham feel better in knowing the boy wouldn't simply

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XXVIII

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 talked about the right perspective when looking at how Jesus affected the temple sacrifices and what His death meant from that same view. We also covered issues about allowing the temple to be destroyed and the sacrifices ending, as well as the issue that Israel is now back on their land but the temple still has not been rebuilt. All this conversation was a way to wrap up the time period in our historical look of the nation of Israel that covered the life of Christ. All of which make it very clear as to how God did not replace the chosen nation or reject them. In spite of that clarity, we will continue on with our historical look in order to cover the time between Christ and the nation of Israel's rebirth in our modern era.

If we begin our look right after the ascension of Christ, we can begin to talk about the formation of what we call the church which came about through the ministry of the apostles. However, specifically because of what we are attempting to grasp in this study, we do not want to branch off into that history. Again, I find myself at risk of people thinking I'm attempting to diminish the importance of the church or Christ's work. This especially in light of what I said last time about covering individuals based on the impact their lives and work had. There is no arguing the fact the church which grew out of Jesus' work had a

significant impact, but that does not mean we should always look at the history only from that side. The side we want to look at here is that of those Jews who did not change their way of thinking on the basis Jesus was The Messiah.

We should never forget the fact the church was originally Jewish in that it was primarily composed of individuals who were Jews. This was true even to the point Acts chapter 6 verse 7 tells us a great number of the priests came to believe upon Jesus. Sadly, in spite of how many Jews did come to accept Jesus as The Messiah the Jews as a nation never officially did. Instead, the religion of Judaism went on to become more solidified than ever. This is the hardening men can have in their hearts. The very religion that had kept the Jewish leadership from accepting The Messiah continued to be important in fighting the changes Jesus had made through His work. This is why, as we see it today, what most Jews look to as a definition for what being Jewish is, is the religion of Judaism. In looking at the question this overall series is about we see the argument the Jews we know today are not the chosen nation or, at least, that they are no longer the chosen nation. It also points out that the argument was made by a "Christian" friend. One of the reasons I have spent so much time answering this one question is that it's so sad people who call themselves Christian so often have this argument.

Of course, there are plenty of

“Christians” who make this argument as a way to grow their importance as a “Christian” or member of the church. They believe by diminishing the chosen nation Christians as a whole have a higher place, but to do this one must deny that the church was originally Jewish. For these, there is likely not much that can be said to them on the issue. Even if they felt you make good enough counter arguments to their claim that their arguments no longer seem valid, they will likely just look for another way to grow their importance if not just ignore your argument and move on to others who do not know enough to counter them. This is due to selfish pride, and until The Holy Ghost can get them to pay attention to their unrighteous attitude their mission in the matter really has nothing to do with learning facts. This is actually the case when arguing with many different people about Biblical issues. We should take the time to inform people of the truth, but we will find many times it is not worth arguing over and over with certain ones because they don't really care about facts. On the other hand, there are so many Christians who have never been taught facts, but they have been taught or at least heard these theories about the chosen nation from other “Christians.”

The problem is your church does not have to be like the Catholics (who were the church to write the idea of Israel being rejected, into formal doctrine) in order to find other doctrines, or, at the very least, the general way the Bible gets taught in most churches leaving the impression this is the right idea. Some of this fact comes from the problem that as people broke free from the Catholic church, the church organizations known as protestants, or protestants, still held onto too many bad teachings. Then there is the fact that very few churches do much of

anything to teach against this false doctrine, and therein lies the real problem! You see, if we read some of the closing books of the New Testament, such as first, second, and third John, as well as Jude, we see a lot being said on the issues of false doctrine rising among the believers in Jesus. Certainly, if we read the opening chapters of Revelation we find John being told about wrong things within different churches, and the warning being given by God that if these ways are not corrected God would reject those churches. If nothing else, these words should make it clear that from the beginning one of the largest problems the church faced was false doctrine, and that emphasizes a need to teach against those things that are false doctrines.

One of the troubles plaguing so many organizations is their desire to teach their doctrine without much thought for whether those doctrines line up with God's Word or not. In teaching such things they will find themselves making remarks, some harsh some not so much, only against other doctrines that run counter to theirs, not the Bible as a whole! Sadly, in our day and time even this is becoming more rare due to one of the biggest false doctrines to ever gain a major foothold in the churches! That is the doctrine of inclusion. This doctrine has to do with the simple idea that the church should be inclusive, and while the early church shows us how much this is true on the level of not believing only Jews could be saved or that one had to become Jewish to be saved, it should have nothing to do with the idea of reshaping anything to make it more acceptable to all. It's one thing to try to make your services inviting and important to show what you do comes out of love for others. However, the idea of attempting to make the Gospel itself, as well as the life a true believer

should live, more acceptable to anyone should be totally out of the question!

One of the main reasons false doctrines of any sort take hold within a church is due to the fact ministers specifically believe they can make being a Christian more comfortable and inviting. At the very least they allow things into the church without speaking out against them because they don't want to lose anyone or jeopardize their position in the church. This, no doubt, had some to do with why false doctrine was getting into the early church, and one can see why it's a temptation, especially when one wants greater numbers and/or needs more funds. It seems the perfect thing to avoid teaching something you know they might not like, but this is the downfall. This kind of thinking is what eventually leads to allowing anything and everything into the church until you have a church much like we see many today. This is a church whose teachings are actually led by the idea of making people feel comfortable and included. In many people's minds this is what Christianity is! I can't tell you how often people have found what I have to say as being "un-Christian." They'll use the words, "that's not a good Christian attitude!" Just as with the issue of believing the Jews are not the chosen nation, some do this because they have selfish motives and others do so because that is what they think is right.

Due to this, what passes in some parts of the world as "Christian" could not be more from Satan's heart. Some would argue that would actually be something such as the church of Wicca or the like, but not so. Since before I accepted the calling to be in full-time ministry, I have made the statement that the hardest people to save are the ones who

believe they already are. This comes in twofold. The first aspect is that it is written into most church doctrines that one is saved once you perform a certain ritual, whether great or small, and/or make certain choices. This incorrect thinking I have taught over and over on, so I will not repeat the details of why this is wrong at this moment. However, the second aspect of people believing they are saved already has simply to do with people believing they are on the right path when they are not! This is what makes the church that forms its teaching around making people comfortable so close to Satan's heart. Sure Satan would love for people to serve him directly, but his first mission is to keep as many people as possible from serving God. This is where his real power comes from on this earth. The fewer truly serving God the more freedom Satan has to work without being impeded by God's people.

Thus, when people come into a church, hear the truth, and don't like it, it does not matter if they stay or don't stay. We need to understand they have heard the truth and that's what is important. If they will stay they will hear more truth, and it can begin to shape their lives in the ways of righteousness. If they do not stay, The Holy Ghost has those words of truth they did not like to continue to speak to them about. This is what gives The Holy Ghost more freedom to work. If the individual is a person who will eventually yield to God's voice, they will one day begin to take steps to correct their life and gain a relationship with God. When this comes about, it might be soon or it might take years and years, but whether they ever go back to the church where they heard the truth or not does not matter as long as they find and stay the course with God!

The other factor is that they will always have that experience in their life. At other times they are tempted to go in a more comfortable direction instead of following what they know is right, The Holy Ghost can remind them of how they never would have come to know the truth if they had not one day yielded to that first teaching they found uncomfortable to accept. All these advantages are taken from the person who goes into a church filled with people and/or just a minister whose intent is making them feel comfortable with everything they teach. Some will still not stay but in that one instance when given a change to gain a grain of truth that could have one day moved the mountains in their lives, they were denied that truth. (Matt. 17:19-20) When we do not give them truth and use the excuse of needing to be inclusive, what does it matter if the person stays? If we are never going to teach the truth they are no better off, and in my mind much worse, than if they had not stayed. What will they ever learn to put them on the true path of salvation? If they do find it, why would they stick with it when constantly bombarded with the idea none of the restrictions they are being asked to put upon their fleshly desires are necessary, and/or those are things we never talk about in church because we don't want anyone who doesn't believe it to be offended or uncomfortable?

Sadly, many never think this much about it. They simply follow what they are taught because its comfortable to do so, and they believe they will live for God in eternity for doing so. How many who could have been saved will be lost due to this? Only God knows, but the blood will be on the hands of those who wrongly taught and knew they were doing so to please itching ears. (II Tim.

4:2-4) This brings us back to the point about teaching against false doctrines. Often teaching against any doctrine or accepted activity puts us in a place of teaching against something another church which readily teaches, accepts, or allows that thing. This is then considered un-Christian because teaching against something other churches hold is said to create division among the churches. However, when the apostles talked about division among the churches it was not about teaching against false doctrines, it was about churches that broke away so they could accept false doctrine. Never was it wrong to teach the truth of God's Word because others who called themselves Christian didn't believe it.

The doctrine of inclusion leads us to believe even if another church is not what one is worried about there is then the issue of not teaching something we feel great numbers of people outside the church would never accept is true. In doing this, it is said we are failing to reach a certain group or category of people. Can you imagine, with the emphasis Jesus put on the fact the apostles were to start in the heart of Israel and move their way out what this would have led them to do? When they saw the Jews as a nation were not turning from Judaism to Christianity, they would have began to formulate what they thought would attract the entire population to the church. As Jews came in to hear what they had to say, the apostles would have quieted their preaching down due to the fact they knew they needed to preach something more acceptable to the religious leaders and/or those who clung to their teaching and opinions about Jesus. The apostles and other followers of Jesus spent that Sabbath day after Jesus' crucifixion not sure if they would be next. They stood

confused as Jesus ascended into heaven and left them standing there. What finally gave them the strength to stop being frightened of what everyone else might think or do and begin to teach and preach with boldness, was the baptism in The Holy Ghost!

That is why the Feast of Weeks comes just seven weeks after the Feast of Firstfruits! The simple point is, people need to hear the truth. There could be a thousand voices teaching a lie, but the more one is outnumbered, the more important it is the one be that voice of truth! This is why we attempt in this study to cover why the chosen nation has not been rejected by God. Maybe some have been taught this because it is part of their church's doctrine. Maybe they have learned it from others who call themselves Christians. Maybe it's just the impression the teaching they have heard leaves in their minds. It matters little, this falsehood needs to be taught against. Don't be fooled, while there is a growing number of churches which support the modern nation of Israel and/or Jews in general, I am alarmed how many actually are motivated, not by the truth they are God's chosen nation, but by the very same point I mentioned at first about people teaching against the Jews. People are often motivated by the general idea there will be something in it for them, and this is no exception.

Of course, God said those who bless the nation will be blessed, but many people have specifics in mind as to what they think the blessing will or should be! (Gen. 12:3) There is no shortage of those who will support the nation because they believe it's some magical formula for gaining greater finances or what they believe to generally be "success" in their lives and/or ministries. Also, flipping from teaching, or seeming to

teach the church replaces the chosen nation to supporting the nation of Israel, can often be no flip at all. This because there is no shortage of people who believe encouraging Israel will somehow bring about the coming of The Lord. For many it's as if Israel is now the sacrifice for the world's gain, instead of understanding Israel is going through a process they need to go through in order to prepare them once again to be who God wants them to be when The Messiah comes. This thought can be anywhere from bad to really bad! If we believe in God and have accepted a relationship with Him we understand Jesus will one day return, but as we covered in our last segment, Jesus' return is not really about anything good happening among men. It is more like the flood of Noah's day, meaning things are going very wrong! This is why the blood will flow to the horse's bridle, a point we talked about last time being the very reason many in the church will believe Jesus must be a false christ not the returned Messiah! (Rev. 14:19-20)

We are given the warning in Romans 12:21 that we are not to be overcome with evil but to overcome evil with good. This warning is a general one to all believers, and we must follow it always. However, there is the truth that this becomes more of a warning as we come to those days that are as Noah's. (Matt. 24:37) It is not the goodness, kindness, or generosity of men that necessitates the return of Christ, but man's corruption. This means as the time grows ever closer to the necessity of Christ's return, those who follow God will need to survive in spite of the rising evil going on around them! We do this by continuing to focus on the good we can do. True good according to God's Word, not "good" according to man. This is very important, and it means if supporting Israel is

good, we do not bring on the coming of Christ. If anything, we hinder it by not becoming part of the necessity for His return. Does this mean we should not be supportive of God's chosen nation? Absolutely not, but we do so because it is the good, the blessing of which is overcoming evil, not bringing it to a head or doing it because we think we will gain anything our flesh wants!

Where the problem comes in for many people who support Israel thinking it will bring on the return of Christ is that they think they are working to get the nation to some specific point God wants them to be so Christ will return. While all true believers who are alive and remain when Jesus comes will benefit greatly from His return, and all those who think they are saved would hope to gain the same benefit, Jesus will not return because the chosen nation makes it to some point on the level of accomplishment, in the Law or as a nation. As we have been emphasizing in this part of the study over and over, the chosen nation has been gathered in these last days for the purpose of being where they need to be in order to receive The Messiah. Now, we wait for the moment the rain starts to fall. Never forget, Noah was not told to build the ark a few months before the flood and God did not wait to assemble the chosen nation until just before the moment of Christ's return!

Just as God told Abraham the people of Canaan's sin had not yet come to a full a very long time before the chosen nation God would bring through Abraham came into existence, so too the sins of this world have not yet come to a full. (Gen. 15:14-16) Thus, God is bringing the nation of Israel together. As true believers are faced with a greater

amount of evil, we will not be able to offset it with good. If that were possible there would be no need for the return of Christ as long as we did. The overcoming of evil with good must eventually become very personal in that we understand there is little to nothing we can do to affect this world, but we can still affect our lives. Just as Noah was eventually told to take his family, the animals, and himself inside the ark, the walls this world's evil is building around the good are closing in. Eventually the door will even need to be shut, but when the time comes for the rain to begin to fall, the nation of Israel is in place for Christ's return. It didn't happen because man wanted it to happen or supported it. The nation came into existence and stays in existence because God said it would be so, and it is!

We can choose to be a part of what supports the nation or we can not, but spending our time doing good in spite of the fact evil seems to counter it faster than we can do it shows how much we still believe in what God is coming back to restore. In spite of how rare it is becoming in this world, we still believe what's right is right! It shows we have not given up on the work no matter how many others have. It shows that we have read the end of the book and found it ends with the good winning and the evil ultimately losing. We don't just expect or want to be on the winning side because it gains some specific blessing. We live what the winning side represents because we understand it is how God created us to live, and that is what we know will be the absolute best for our lives as well as all others. We don't pray The Lord's return will be very soon just because we so desperately want to be by His side, but because we see the world and the lives around

us crumbling under the weight of living unrighteously. We understand it is not because God is specifically punishing them in any way other than allowing it to continue, and we want to see it end for our sake and especially for the sake of the next generation being born into this world. More and more I have to wonder what possible chance they will have to know the truth, but God knows for sure and that is why it is all in His hands.

Thus, we carry on, not attempting to bring on the return of Christ, but working to live in righteousness. If we understand the Word of God, this is to live our lives in God's ways, and when it comes to serving God, we are being asked to do the same thing Israel is being asked to do. God's entire work is one body and we are only its members. In my case, the work is to continue doing what I can to provide teaching that might help those who want to know the truth. In the case of this specific study, it is to teach against a false doctrine about the chosen nation being rejected by God. To do this we have studied what God said in His Word, and what we are doing in our historical look at the nation is showing how much what God said was going to happen is happening. This is the evidence that God's Word is true and in that we see how much God is still working through the chosen nation. That in and of itself answers the question this series is based on. However, it's important we continue to emphasize the point by going on through the history of the nation after Jesus left this earth. This is the time period that really speaks to if those we know as Jews really are the chosen nation that came through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

We need to know what happened to the nation post Christ in order to see those who now call themselves Jews are directly

connected back to those who were then. The Jews survived the Babylonian captivity. They survived the events that took place between the Testaments. The Messiah had come, gave His life, and returned to The Father, what would the nation do now? The answer many might be tempted to give is that they went into a state of decline until they ceased to be a people, but that is not what happened, and God's Law has a lot to do with why that is. This is the time period where God would use what the nation was willing to accept of the Law to keep them distinct. The Jews were not following God's Laws in a way that would make them able to maintain the temple and its sacrifices, but that was really true even by the time Christ came. In other words, Jesus' life did not make it so. The nation was holding on by a thread, but the tie that would really bind them was still the Laws of God! Thus, we see that after Christ there were many of the nation who accepted Jesus as The Messiah and understanding The Messiah was God in spite of what the religion of Judaism told them. Too few people have a view on this issue to realize Christianity does not just have its roots in Judaism. If the Laws God gave the nation had been meant to become a religion, Christianity is what it would have looked like after Jesus!

This is where our terms become almost too weak to use. When I say Christianity it is hard not to think of the church we spent most of this segment discussing; a modern church that by and large has turned its back on the True Word of God. However, what I'm really referring to is what the church members of the apostle's day looked like and believed. Their teaching and ways of living and conducting their lives is what caused people to start calling them Christian. (Acts 11:22-26) This was a way of distinguishing the

followers of Jesus from the Jewish establishment that had rejected Jesus. This was important because we're not talking about a separation that could have been defined by Jews versus non-Jews at the early stages of the church. We are talking about a nation that had a great debate, and to show how much that debate was not about abandoning the temple, we should see that the apostles went straight into the temple to teach. Acts even tells us one story where the apostles were released by God from the prison the religious leaders had put them in to await standing before the council, and the next day when the council came together, those sent to retrieve them could not find the apostles. When they finally did find them, where were they? At the temple, teaching the Gospel. (Acts 5:17-26)

The Jews are not the base of what we think of as Christianity today because they refused to leave parts of God's Law behind but because Jesus told His disciples to go first into Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria – then the utter most parts of the earth. (Acts 1:8) This would eventually create a church where non-Jews would outnumber the Jews. Even if all the Jews of the nation had accepted Jesus and been part of this process, they would have eventually been outnumbered. Still one would think the difference would have been that the heart of the church would have remained in Jerusalem. However, the reason the physical heart of the church has not been seen as beating in Jerusalem is the same reason the heart of the Jewish nation was not able to for many centuries. So what's the real difference? The religion of Christianity has taught us the church's heart can be elsewhere, but it has always been clear to most Jews Jerusalem can never be replaced!

We have talked some about what might have happened if the nation as a whole would have accepted Jesus instead of wanting Him to be crucified, but even after, maybe I should say especially after Jesus' death, it was still God's desire the nation make a transition. In short, this still may not have maintained the temple and its sacrifices, but I don't think God would have allowed the nation to be scattered like it was. Possibly the process would have just taken longer depending on how well the Jews followed God. The rules really never change! The big point is that both believers in Jesus and Jews who did not accept Jesus lost the temple due to the fact men slated with its administration failed to follow God in all things. It was no more the job of the apostles to administer the sacrifices and take on the administration of the temple than it was any other Jew that was not of the priesthood. However, if the nation overall had accepted Jesus by listening to the words of the apostles, which they readily taught at the temple, that might have changed. At the very least the temple could have become a place where teaching the Gospel was a main activity. Remember, sacrifices were never the real point. Jesus reminded us all that His Father's house is a house of Prayer! (Matt. 21:12-13, Isa. 56:1-8)

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

become a vagabond or slave of some sort in the world. It was about assuring Abraham God had a plan for the boy's life in spite of the fact he was not going to be a direct part of the plan God told Abraham was reserved for Isaac.

This is very important, and now is when we want to look directly at the words. God calls Ishmael, "...the son of the bondwoman..." but says He will make of him a nation. This verse ends with the reason, "...because he is thy seed." Let us not forget that Abraham had asked of God Ishmael be used as the promised son. He did not do this because he did not want Isaac to be born, but because he wanted Ishmael to be used of God. (Gen. 17:18-19) Abraham felt very sorrowful that Ishmael would be displaced, and it shows us how much he really did love Ishmael. Abraham never looked at Ishmael as a second-rate child due to the fact Hagar was his mother. Abraham had gone through with the plan to try and have a son through Hagar for the true reasons of wanting to gain the heir whom God could use. To Abraham, Ishmael was not the son of a servant in his house. Ishmael was simply his son, and first-born on top of that. Abraham wanted God to use Ishmael, but God said no! Ishmael's birth had been by the will of man and God had already made it clear He would give Abraham and Sarah a son, something they had tried for and never could do on their own. Thus, Isaac would be born by the will of God, and he was whom God had always intended to use.

With that in mind, God was not being derogatory in any way toward Ishmael by referring to him as the son of a bondwoman.

God was simply pointing out, Ishmael may have been Abraham's first-born son but not by his first wife! No offense to Hagar, but there is also the point Hagar would never have been his wife if he and Sarah had not been looking for a way to have a son. However, Ishmael was still Abraham's son and that meant God would make of him a nation. Oh, the time we could spend on just that fact alone, but one simple point about the words themselves is, you will note the absence of the word "great" here. This is not just a passing oversight in this particular incident. How often do we see God telling Abraham He would make of him a great nation? In human terms we might think of this as size and/or success. In reference to Ishmael that is what it would be. However, translation issues keep us from understanding that often this is not really what is meant by the word great when talking to Abraham in general. Abraham would be the father of many nations, but what great refers to is the fact there would be one chosen nation. That nation would come through Isaac, not Ishmael. Thus, here God just says He would make a nation of Ishmael and that would make him a big part of the promise that Abraham would be the father of. Not just a chosen nation but of many nations.

Ishmael becoming a nation speaks again to how much we cannot know what the future holds. As we look at how the Arab population has generally treated the chosen nation in modern times, it speaks directly to that point about not knowing if bad things are really leading to something better or are necessary. Simply put, God is allowing the events we see in modern times to happen, and it's hard not to believe there is a reason

for this allowance. One thing I will insert here is that we can not judge Ishmael on the basis of what his descendants have done, because we have no idea if this really reflects on Ishmael's character or not. What we do know is that God made the call he would become a nation on the basis he was Abraham's son. Thus, if we want to talk about blame going back to the beginnings, we could throw some of the blame for the bad actions of Ishmael's descendants on Abraham. However, to be blunt, making Ishmael a nation was God's call to make, and this is where what I was saying about God and love becomes really important.

If we look at all the trouble the Arab people have caused the Jews it can be hard to believe God intentionally allowed them to grow and continue to exist as a people. However, this is something only God knows the end result of. The individuals who go against God's chosen nation will get no free pass from God on the basis of who they come from or the nation they are part of, but it's interesting that they are the ones so heavily involved. This can be looked at as true just because the Arabs and Jews developed in ancient times in the same region. We know resources and land are always a hot issue. However, this could have happened with any people Israel might have come back to find greatly inhabiting the area of the promised land. What we need to see is that one way or the other there was going to be people against the Jews. The fact it was people of Europe who carried out the Holocaust proves that. So what we have with the Arabs is the proof God fulfilled His promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael. Just as the Jews have survived in order to

continue being the chosen nation, so too Ishmael's nation lives. Because God is faithful to His promises, the region is so populated with those who trace their origin to Ishmael, the struggle is directly between sons of Abraham.

As we go into verse 14, we must be clear on the fact Abraham is doing what God told him to do, nothing more, nothing less. This is important because many people look at this story and feel Abraham truly did kick Hagar and Ishmael out. This because we are simply told Abraham gave Hagar a jug of water and sent them away. After that, Hagar and Ishmael go out into the desert. Why did Abraham not give them more? Why did he not take them somewhere to help them get a fresh start? There are many questions we may be wanting to ask about this, and some find comfort in believing Abraham did do more that we just aren't told about. However, I don't think that is the case. Again, Abraham was doing just what God told him to do because God told him to do it. Hagar was a bondswoman and she was being released from her service, which likely would have lasted most all her life if he had not released her. Thus, even more so than any other servant he might have done this with, Abraham was going to make a clean break and - as we say - not prolong the agony.

As we have talked about, this was agonizing for Abraham. It had to be so for Hagar. If not at all in the same way, then for other reasons. I'm sure Hagar was at a loss as to why all this was happening. Not that she didn't know the dynamics of why, but the unbelief of how sudden this was for her.

As we have been discussing, this was sudden for Abraham, but as much as that was true and painful, it was much more sudden for Hagar. We don't know if she had any advanced warning about this, but one has to think that is the one thing which did take place and we were not told about. Abraham had surely given Hagar a chance to pack her belongings ahead of time. At the same time, I'm sure there was little she herself owned, and Ishmael was still young enough that without Abraham granting him an early inheritance of some sort, it is likely he had nothing to speak of. Unlike today, most people did not even have that many clothes so there was little to take with them, and that brings us to the question about why Abraham did not give them more.

We must understand, God was truly making a break from Abraham and Ishmael here. Ishmael had the chance to be raised by his father, as an only son I might add, all the way into his teens. He was circumcised at the age of 13, and this was no earlier than two years after that. Ishmael was somewhere around 15, maybe as old as 18. Thus, he was no child as some think of him when they read this story. He was old enough to make his way in the world, and it was certainly true for many his age that they were on their own long before this age. We just can't judge this by our modern standard. What does this all mean to why Abraham did not give them more? It means everything! God had made it clear that Abraham's household belonged to Isaac and Isaac alone. Now this did not mean Abraham was powerless to give Ishmael whatever he wanted at this point, but that is not the point. There are many factors here, and one of them we covered earlier in this

storyline. That is the point there was to be no dispute about the fact Ishmael and Isaac would not share. There was to be no argument over Abraham's house and who inherited it!

As much as this could, and no doubt would, have been a big problem had Isaac grown up with Ishmael still in the house, if Abraham had given Ishmael anything significant, much less anything that was enough to make a fresh start, there might still be a problem of some kind in the future. Anything and everything could have been used to argue there was another son of Abraham and he deserved to have at least some, if not all of Abraham's house. I just don't think in our day, with the cultures most of us live in, we can understand what a problem this could have been. If we go back to a subject we hit on time and again about Abraham, we remember how hard Abraham's father Terah worked to separate Abraham from the others of the family. One can argue that Abraham left his father's house with great wealth, but the difference was Abraham had space and time! Terah had taken Abraham to a far away place. There Abraham was able to build a life of his own with his own hands. Sure his father was there and we don't know how much he helped, but Abraham left his father's house before his father died.

This left Terah with a house and inheritance even in that place which could be easily claimed after his death by any heirs back in Mesopotamia, but Abraham was long gone. That brings us to other factors. One, the person who was going out (Abraham), did so of his own will. Two, he was going out to be separated and would

have no reason to turn back or argue over his father's house. Three, he was not the oldest son in any case. Four, as just a son that had gone out of his father's house, there was no reason for any of that house to attempt to go after what he had, not to mention they had plenty of their own. None of this was true of Ishmael. He had been the heir apparent since the day he was born! If Abraham had given him enough to set up a household, it might have seemed to be an extension of his father's house. As the oldest son, with the culture they lived, it would have been a given in most people's mind that Ishmael deserved to inherit it all. If, after Abraham's death, Ishmael had made the argument he was deserving, everyone, or at least enough people, would have been on his side that he would have had the support to at least cause many problems.

Instead of worrying about how disturbing it is that Abraham didn't send them out with much, we should consider the other side of what Abraham could have done. With real concern over this son interfering with future events one can see how he might have been asked to send them far, far away! He could have ended up in a land where he had no knowledge about how to survive there. One where he probably would not know the language and certainly not the culture. However, this was not done. It was God's intent for Ishmael's family to grow in the same region of the world. Another thing we have talked about is that God was surrounding the area of the promised land with people related to the same root families of Abraham and Lot. When Israel later came out of Egypt that was the case without dispute, and what was

not directly surrounded consisted of people who by then were at least affected by the nations derived from these early family members.

Ishmael would be just next door, but he was not to look as though he was just a satellite extension of the great house of Abraham. He and his mother would go out with not much more than the clothes on their backs, and what Ishmael ended up with in this world would consist of what he had built with his own hands. To jump ahead a bit, it is of interest to note that while those we know as Arabs today have long been looked at as merchants and traders, especially between the Orient and Europe, this had roots in what we are talking about right here! Not much later on when we see reference to passing caravans of merchants going, at times, all the way from Mesopotamia to Egypt and who knows just how far, we are probably talking about Ishmael's family. Ishmael's life would not just be separate from Isaac's but follow a totally different lifestyle. If Abraham had given them animals to have or start flocks, this might not have been the case. Could he still have given more than just water? Yes, but as this point illustrates, anything he gave could have changed Ishmael's future. Bottom line, God did not tell Abraham what to give, and only God could know what would be right. Thus, Abraham puts a bottle of water on Hagar's shoulder and sends them away!

Until next time, Shalom!

committed themselves to be God's chosen nation it is all much the same. Thus, just as with a vow there are words to be spoken. For tithing this would be made at the end of the three year cycle after one has brought all that is required of them. This narrative is not a story but a direct proclamation that one has not taken of the tithe for their own use, offered it to a false god(s), or held back anything of it for any reason. One was to proclaim they have done all that was asked of them by God. This, of course, would be a lie if one had not done all they were suppose to, and the knowledge one had to make this proclamation before God brought weight to making sure one actually had, to the best of their knowledge, completed it. It would also remind any person who had failed, to instead bring their sacrifice and/or offering to the temple in order to repent of their misdeed in this area.

After this, Moses tells the people God has asked of the people these things, "...this day.." By saying this day, Moses is not simply referring to the idea of time passing because some of these Laws were given to the nation earlier. What it means is that no matter what day in the future may come, it will always be as if The Lord has commanded these things that day. This is important to human nature because people have a tendency to think once a great deal of time has passed there becomes more flexibility to what we are told. We believe circumstances have changed with the times and, especially those things we don't like, are unnecessary in our day. God was emphasizing that was not the case and never would be. Due to this, the next thing that is commanded is that once the nation

crossed over Jordan they would set up monuments much like the ones found in Egypt. In truth, if this had been done in the way it was instructed, it is very likely that the land of Israel would have similar ancient artifacts as one finds in Egypt. The difference would be that none of these would be tombs to honor a man, or woman, they would not be written upon with the ideas of men. Such monuments would be carved and engraved with these very Laws of God that Moses was rehearsing in their ears here in Deuteronomy. It is not clear whether Israel ever really set up the kind of monument Moses describes, on the mountain Moses names here, but what we do know is that sadly, setting up such monuments throughout Israel did not become a common practice or we would find them in archaeological digs of the nation.

In any case, the nation was told that when they crossed over and set up this initial monument it was to be dedicated to God by also building an altar of natural stone. Natural does not mean something other than concrete or the like, but stones gathered out of the field and put together as an altar without modifying them at all. Then they were to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings on that altar. This would be followed by a celebration before God for bringing the nation into the land promised to their fathers. Then the priests and Levites continued with the thought told to them about "this day" in telling the people this day they became the chosen nation of God. Because of this they needed to be careful to follow God's commandments and perform the ceremonies God had given them to represent God's plan. Moses then named the

specific men that were to stand on each of the two mountains in order to perform the ceremony of blessing and curse which they had been told about, and which could only be performed once they were at those mountains on the other side of Jordan.

Moses goes over the words the priests are to speak, which begin with laying out actions and attitudes that will make one cursed because they are displeasing to God. The first is the setting up of idols. Next is holding the lives of one's parents as well as their reputations in low regard. Then the prohibition of removing a landmark others of the nation have set up to commemorate or designate something. A curse is upon those who hurt the physically disabled. A curse is upon those who judge unfairly, especially when judging those who are most vulnerable. A curse is upon a man who has a physical relationship with his father's wife. A curse is upon the man who has a physical relationship with his sister or half sister. A curse is upon the man who has a physical relationship with his mother-in-law. A curse is upon the one who is privately abusive to another, and a curse is upon any of the nation that does not believe in following the Laws of God. After each of these are proclaimed the entire congregation was to agree by saying Amen.

From there Moses goes into an admonishment about how these things they had been commanded to do were not just a ceremony or ritual. It certainly is not a formula which upon the completion of will grant them special blessings. The blessings of The Lord will only come if the nation was

to follow the Laws God gave them on a daily basis. This, as a nation, as families, as well as individuals. It was The Lord's desire to bless Israel above all other nations of the world through giving them a Law that demonstrated how much God's ways were right, not just in representation but in the people living righteously on a regular basis they would reap the rewards of such a lifestyle. The nation would be blessed in their crops. They would be blessed in being able to have children; in the increase of their herds of animals; in what they were able to save for future use. Literally their coming and their going would both be blessed. They would be blessed in battle against all that came against them as enemies would be directly turned back the way they came in attacking the nation. Also, their business dealing, both inside and outside the nation, would see increase and prosper.

All this would be true not just because God made it so, but because God created us to live in the ways He was asking Israel to live. The result in the world would be a nation whom all the other people of the world would know was special, and come to understand it was because they followed the God of creation. Thus, on top of the way the dynamics of righteousness bring blessings, God would give them the kind of things we think of as blessings from God in making sure their increase in all things was pronounced. They would have the children they desired to have; the rain would come to water their crops on a regular basis; Israel would be a nation that had plenty to loan and no need to borrow. The nation

would be in a position of top leadership in the world, not a struggling nation at the bottom of the global food chain. There would be a supernatural ability to the nation which others could see and know God was with them. The nation just had to use the Law as a guide for how to serve The Lord and seek to please Him in their ways. They needed to study the Law and not choose to turn away from even the smallest of its commandments, and the reward would always be much greater than the effort.

As they had been warned before there was also the opposite side to all this in that if they chose to ignore the Laws God had given them, being the chosen nation would be a curse. This too would not have so much to do with God specifically plaguing them but the truth of why God tells us to be hot or cold because to be lukewarm is worse than either of these. (Rev. 3:14-16) We can choose to be people of the world or we can choose to be people of God. However, the worse thing one can do is believe and/or claim to be the people of God and refuse or simply not put forth the effort to live in the ways God told us the righteous should live. If the nation turned from following God they would find nothing worked for them. Their cities would not function; their agriculture would fail; the storeroom would be depleted to nothing; and their flocks would be as well. Just as with the blessings, on top of the dynamics of not following the ways of God, God Himself would make sure they knew they were on a losing path. Because they were God's chosen nation it had to be clear there was punishment for doing wrong, and God would vex them from every side making their lives miserable. They would experience

pestilence until that alone would make the land unlivable. Their health would fail and violence would destroy their society. Corruption such as mildew would plague them and dry winds would destroy the land. The ground would not grow the things they needed and the rain would not fall. When they went out to fight, they would be scattered in many directions. They would be taken captive and removed to other lands. They would not see their home again but die in those lands, maybe never even being buried.

The example of something they would know all too well would be used here as the kinds of sicknesses the Egyptians struggled with would be brought upon Israel. They would have no peace of mind and stress of this life would drive them crazy. They would see no clear direction, and even when they thought they were doing something right it would come out wrong. Their wives would be taken by others, crops would be stolen, and animals too. Their children would be sold into slavery, they would watch as their animals were killed by others and they would not share in anything of the food the slaughter might yield. The very stress of the emotional strain of watching everything in their lives go wrong would frustrate their minds constantly. The nation would be carried into other cultures where they did not fit in, but there they would live being looked at as a strange and unusual people, and for that they would be persecuted all their lives. In the end they would become just the opposite of what was intended. Instead of being known as the nation blessed of God they would be known as cursed, and people would be amazed at this

truth.

Even in the other lands they would give much and end up with little. Seed would not produce, vines and trees would fail to yield fruit. Any children they would have would be sadness to see the hardship of their lives. What little their crops did produce would be eaten by insects. People outside the nation would prosper above the nation making the people of Israel the lowest people not the highest. They would become followers and not leaders in the world. As they failed to follow God's instructions all these things would grow and become the reality of Israel's existence. These things would come due to the fact the rewards of serving God would not even make following His Laws a joy for them. The enemies that should have served Israel, Israel would become servants to, and the work would be hard. As if the enemies the nation had were not bad enough, they are warned people from a very far distance across the earth, people whom Israel did not even know about, would come swiftly upon them. They would come to take what little Israel was left with. They would destroy the land until there was nothing left at all.

The nation was not to think their walled cities and defenses would be enough to stop them, because the cities would be put under siege until everything in them was eaten up and the children would starve to death. The adults will become so desperate that even the kindest man would turn on his wife and friends refusing to share what he is able to find. The kindest women would turn on their husband and even children. Times

will get desperate and disease would come upon the nation. It would not just be the horror and suffering of the immediate future but the long-term effects that would pass on through generations. Diseases they feared in Egypt, those warned about in the Law, and even ones the nation had no idea existed or would exist would come upon them. These things would continue until the nation that was now large would be left as very few. Not only would they be scattered into cultures they knew of but into cultures they had no knowledge of. Even in these far off places they would find no rest as the persecution would follow them everywhere they went and they would constantly be a people on the move. They would live in fear for their lives and dread every day wishing it was over and that the night would pass when it finally did come.

The nation would serve in bondage to others once again, and this would come about because they refused to follow the ways of God! All this would be true in spite of the fact God desired to do them good. Following the Law should be a joy, if for no other reason than the fact it would bring them blessings. However, if they refused, God could not bless them the way He wanted to for He will not prosper the ways of the unrighteous. Being the chosen nation of God they were also to understand God's judgment would be nearer to them than all others. The choice was up to them, they just needed to make the right choice on a constant basis throughout their generations!

Let's stay in God's Word!