

Free - Take One



# Shaqah

שפחה

*“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*

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As we continue our overview of the book of Deuteronomy, we ended last time with Moses talking to the people about how to support the Levites and care for the poor. Specifically we ended with the stipulations about how they were to forgive debt to their fellow Israelites every seven years in the Sabbath year. This was not to affect how willing or unwilling they were to loan to the poor, or God would not bless the nation. All this was part of the larger picture about Israel being on the promised land and bringing their tithes and offerings to the temple, as well as giving to those around them. This brought us through Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 11, and we will start with verse 12 this time.

Moses had already laid out stipulations about individuals of the nation who might become poor enough or owe debt to the point they would need to become servants to help pay off the debt, and how that servitude would be like a hired servant not a permanent condition. At that time, he also told Israel how such a person would be forgiven their debt in the year of jubilee, meaning they would be allowed to go free. Here, Moses gives stipulations about a man or woman who is born into the nation being sold to another Israelite as a servant. Buying a fellow Israelite might be a way to get them from a person outside the nation who had come to own them, and for this God gives the person who puts up the money the chance to recover that money. In such cases the person would serve their new master for six years without regard for the Sabbath year, before they would go free. However, in the seventh year of their service the person was free to go. Letting such a one go was also not just about allowing them to go, but the stipulations show how much even this kind of servitude was about getting a chance to work their way out of debt and back onto their feet.

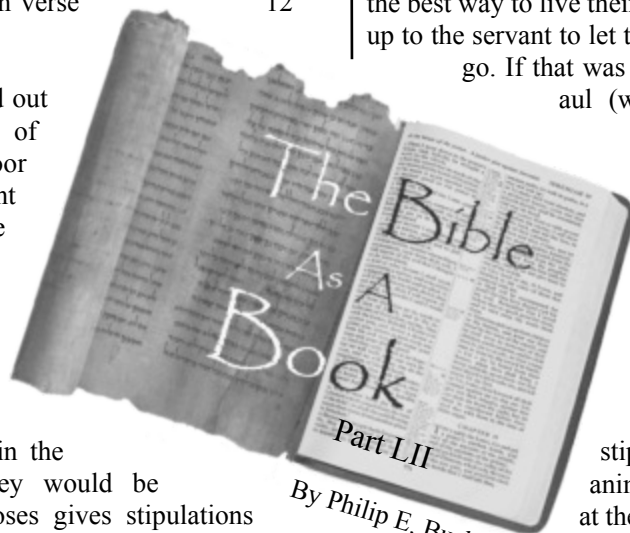
Such a servant was not to go away empty handed, but they would share in the increase their master was blessed with.

This would include getting to take things like herd animals, stored grain, and stored juices from the vineyard. The master was to give these things remembering how Israel was once slaves in Egypt, and all the nation had was founded on the wealth God provided the nation by allowing them to bring with them the spoils of Egypt as God set them free with a mighty hand. This was not to be something a master thought hard to do because God would double the master's increase during those years, and doing this service for a fellow Israelite would be a great blessing. However, it might happen that the person who served a master felt that living and working for them was the best way to live their life. In these cases it would be totally up to the servant to let their master know they did not wish to go. If that was their desire, the master was to use an

awl (which is a metal tool with a small pointed end) to drive a hole through the servant's earlobe, piercing the earlobe much the way one might do today for the purpose of putting an earring in the ear. This would designate the servant was a servant for life, and was to stay with their master's house.

Next, Moses tells, again, about the stipulation that all the first-born of clean animals were to be sacrificed to The Lord at the temple. They were not to use such an animal for work, and sheep were not to be sheared to use the wool. The only reason such an animal was not to be offered at the temple was if it had a blemish, such as blindness or was lame. Such an animal was still not to be used, but be slaughtered and eaten. This did not have to be done at the temple and could be eaten by anyone just the way any animal, such as deer, could be killed and eaten. However, the stipulation is repeated here that the blood was not to be eaten but poured out on the ground.

By this point Israel obviously recognized the first month of the year, on the calendar God gave them, by the name Abib. Remembering to hold the Passover in that month is repeated here with the emphasis that it was to be done in the place God would choose to put His name in the land. Israel is



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told to continue eating unleavened bread for the next seven days following Passover, which is a way of repeating the basic commandment for holding the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is also emphasized that no leaven is to be found in all the land through these days. Also the Passover sacrifice is to have nothing left by the next morning so it was to be gone by the first morning of Unleavened Bread. The Passover is not to be sacrificed anywhere but at the temple, and also eaten there in the place God chose to put His name. After this they could return to their homes for the rest of the seven days of Unleavened Bread, counting six days of eating unleavened bread and having a solemn assembly on the seventh and last day of that feast.

While the Feast of Firstfruits is not specifically mentioned by day here, it is referred to in talking about the day the nation would begin harvesting corn. This is because the first sheaves of the harvest were to be brought to the temple on Firstfruits and offered to The Lord before the nation could begin to eat of the new harvest. Thus, Firstfruits is the day to start the count of seven sets of seven days ending with the fourth feast called the Feast of Weeks. We also know this feast as Pentecost. On this feast day the people were to offer to The Lord out of the increase God had blessed each one with. The nation was to use these times to celebrate together in the place where God would set His name, and remember how they were once slaves in Egypt but now they were on a land of their own and blessed of God!

As the seventh month came and the harvest was wrapping up, they were to remember to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days. This feast was also to be greatly recognized in the place God would choose, as everyone in the nation, rich and poor servant and free, were to have provisions to celebrate and rejoice for seven days. This was to truly be a time of thanking The Lord for all He had blessed them with. The three feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles were times all the males were to show themselves at the temple, and none of them were to appear before The Lord without bringing an offering as a way to thank God for what He had blessed them with. These would be times for everyone to see how much God was able to bless not just an individual but increase the nation as a whole!

In all the cities throughout the promised land there was also to be established those who would administer justice. The individuals were not to accept gifts but do their work focused on not being prejudice for or against anyone. Their judgments were to be righteous so that the nation could continue to be a righteous nation which could live before God on the land He had given them. The nation was to be careful not to even plant groves of trees or set up any images near the place where the altar of God was established so that no one would mistake a pagan ritual as being observed as part of the worship of God. It is emphasized again that no animal with a blemish or anything that made it unfavorable should be used as an offering or sacrifice to The Lord. Not worshiping false gods or the powers of the heavens was so serious that any man or woman who was found doing such things was to be stoned to death. The matter was to be looked into and not just assumed

by the mouth of one witness, but once there were at least two solid witnesses who could say with assurance that a person was guilty of doing such a thing, the person was to be stoned with the witnesses being the first to cast stones at them before others would join in. In this way Israel could ensure false religious practices remained outside the nation.

If there was ever a matter too hard to decide among just those who enforced the laws in one place, such a case was to be brought to the temple so the priests and those whom God had ordained could seek His wisdom in order to make a judgment as to what should be done. This would set up a national justice system where the priest and those at the temple could keep track of the way hard matters were handled in past cases, making it easier for those cases to be handled in the future. This would also put the ultimate authority in the hands of those serving God at the temple, and once they instructed a judgment to be done, it was to be carried out. If anyone refused to carry out the judgment made by those at the temple, that person was to be put to death in order to maintain order and justice in Israel. Since this stipulation was given before Israel had a king, this rule would also apply to any king or ruler in Israel so they too were not above the judgments of God. All this was to put the ultimate judgment and responsibility for judgment in the hands of God.

While it is true God did not give the nation a king, He acknowledges that the people of the nation would one day demand to have one like other nations have kings. When this happened, the person chosen as king was not to be left open to debate. The person first and foremost would have to be a person born to the nation. It could not be a stranger or someone who was not blood related to the nation, in spite of the fact such a person might have been born in the land. The nation was also to listen to God's voice as to who the king should be and not just make the choice on their own. In this way the idea it had to be a blood born citizen of the nation was only a first step in physically knowing if a person they thought God might be choosing was a legitimate possibility. The point of a king in Israel would also be to administer the nation and ensure justice. A king was not to work to increase his own power and might by building an army and political alliances with others; certainly not for the sake of conquering others and becoming an empire.

Such a king was not to take the nation back under the authority of Egypt in any way. This would be a direct insult to the fact God had freed the nation from Egypt in order to establish it. This was always to be known as a serious wrong done by any king there might be in Israel. A king was also not to take many wives, because this can be a point of physical lust and power, not to mention political ties with other nations, all of which can turn the king's heart from doing what is right according to what God said. He was not to make it his thought to increase in worldly riches because this too is a very corrupting thing. When a king came to his throne, his main source of how to rule was to have a copy of the Laws God had given the nation through Moses. He was not to rely on the fact a copy was held by the priests, but his copy was to be made off the one the priests had. This way he would be constantly

# Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we finished talking about Abraham's encounter with the Philistines and the incident of the king taking Sarah, but God warning the king to return her. God also told the king he would have to have Abraham pray for him in order for his house to be healed because God had taken away his entire house's ability to conceive children. We ended with the fact that after all the years of waiting, the time had finally come for God to give Sarah the ability to have a child, and Abraham would finally have a son through Sarah. This took us generally into the first couple verses of Genesis chapter 21, and we will start with those verses this time.

In these first three verses of chapter 21 it is made very clear that the son Abraham had was a child Sarah had given birth to. The first verse tells us God did for Sarah what He promised He would do, and that was return her ability to have children. As we talked about last time, the return part is important because Sarah had past the age women are able to have children. God wants us to be clear that the timing of this birth was not random, for it could not have happened just at the will of men at any moment. It was only going to happen at the time God had appointed to return this ability to Sarah. One might also note Abraham and Sarah did not go on to have several more children together. This one son was all they ever had, and this was in spite of the fact Abraham had a son through Hagar prior to this and would go on to have children with the wife he married after Sarah death.

This might seem to some to mean Sarah was of less importance, but this is one of those clear times where less is more! Sarah would give birth to only one child, but that child would be central to the entire plan God had for her and her husband's lives. On the other hand, while Ishmael, being a son of Abraham, would go on to be a great people, he would not be in the line of the chosen nation. Not too many verses down we see how Ishmael was, by God's will, sent away from Isaac where he and his people would develop and grow pretty much out of the picture of Isaac's life. The sons Abraham would have after Sarah's death would also go on to be nations, but Abraham would give them gifts before his death and send them out away from what was happening with Isaac. Isaac alone would go on to be the chosen nation the formation of which was the primary promise of Abraham's life in service to God.

Verse 2 emphasizes the fact Sarah bore Abraham this son, and reminds us what a miracle it was for Abraham to also go ahead and have a son at his age. This point is something Abraham had brought up when God told him he would still have a son with Sarah, but the fact he was able to go on to have children at an even later age proves how much God had restored or maintained his body to give him this son. This verse also point-blank gives us the fact Isaac being conceived was truly done not by the timing and will of man but by the will of God. No matter how much the general ability to have children

was restored or always remained with Abraham, the timing of him being able to have a child with Sarah was the one God was working everything out to happen and exactly when it happened.

Now, verse 3 is where we are told Abraham names the child Isaac. This might seem trivial, but two points on this. First, with Ishmael being born and living to an age where it was becoming clearer as to what kind of man he would be, God still told Abraham Ishmael would not be the son to develop the chosen nation because the son Abraham would have with Sarah would do that job. At that same time God goes on to tell Abraham he was to name the son he had with Sarah, "Isaac." (Gen. 17:19) Thus, God changed Abraham's name from Abram and Sarah's name from Sarai, and then told Abraham what to name the son God would miraculously give them together. This brings us to our second point. Verse 3 tells us that is exactly what Abraham named his son, which makes the point Isaac did not have to be renamed by God in order for it to be right.

This may seem another trivial point in the story, but it just shows us how much Abraham did not take this happening as something totally physical and forget what God had told him. When we read a story like this, we do not often stop to think about the time and happenings between the moment Abraham was first told this name and the grand moment of seeing the event. We just read along and take it as a given that Abraham gave this son this name. However, there are so many times when God tells us things or shows us things ahead of time for the very reason of helping us understand the event when it happens, but when it finally does, we can find ourselves so caught up in the day by day affairs of our lives we aren't really conscious of the fact the event we are currently living through is what God told us about.

For example, Abraham's great grandson Joseph had dreams about his brothers bowing down to him one day. He does not hide this from them, nor does he approach the subject with a high-minded attitude. Joseph simply shares this information with his brothers so they would know what God had shown him. These brothers could have passed this off as the musings of a younger brother who would one day grow up to know better, but in spite of whether they did or did not take what he said as something that would seriously happen one day, this information upset them. It made them so angry it became the very reason they sold Joseph into the slavery, which led to him eventually rising to be second in command in Egypt where they would one day come, bowing before him and begging to buy some of the precious food supply God had given Joseph the wisdom to store.

In reading the story, we should keep in mind that as the brothers went to Egypt they were not like their father who thought Joseph was dead. They knew the truth of what they had

done, and while it had been years past, selling one's brother, especially for the reason they did, has a tendency to stick with a person. However, it had never, in their wildest dreams, occurred to them they might encounter their long-lost brother there, much less the idea he could be the one they would have to talk to in order to get food. They would bow before him just as Joseph had dreamed, and would not, until after the fact, remember what Joseph had dreamed. This story is an example of how God knows we have the tendency to forget and/or never understand what we were told, especially until after the deed is done. That being said, God knows we do this so badly that He warns us of other times we cannot afford to make that mistake!

The church today claims as its primary mission the teaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. However, we like to throw out the bits we don't care for. Thus, as time goes on, more and more it seems we forget the crucified part, especially when it comes to holding on to God through what Jesus told us would come for those who followed Him. That being the fact, we must also take up our cross. (Matt. 16:24-27) Of course, the part we like the most about the Gospel is the part about Jesus' Second Coming and the fact we believe we will be part of the resurrection which happens at that moment. In fact, people like that part so much, most churches teach a doctrine that separates the resurrection from the second coming of Christ, setting it on a pedestal and calling it the rapture! People have often wondered why I think such teachings are so dangerous, and the answer is exactly what we are talking about here.

Jesus warned us there would be many who would be caught off guard by His return and fail to be ready to meet Him. The very examples He gives about two being at a well, or in a field, etc. when one is taken and the other left are marquee pieces of how people justify the rapture teaching. They say, how could it be a surprise if it happens when Jesus returns to set His feet on this earth once again? I've always found it fascinating that people ask this question with such conviction that we can know when the true second coming of Christ will be. However, this is because their question primarily rests on another false teaching of a seven-year tribulation, one that can be known as to when it starts; therefore, telling us exactly when Jesus will come. The truth is that people have it backward. The idea there is a seven year period which can be calculated was a story made up very much for the sake of justifying the teaching of the separate resurrection event. You see, when you teach something wrong in the beginning when people know what's right, the question is why would we believe the rapture takes place as a separate event from the second coming? To answer such questions the idea was presented that we can know when Jesus will return to rule this world due to this seven year "calculation" of a "tribulation." This, in turn, brings a need to explain why Jesus tells us many would be caught unaware, even those directly working and living among those who are waiting with all their hearts. Their explanation then can be that the rapture is a separate event which will be a surprise.

If you think that sounds complicated and believe that is the reason to dismiss what I just said, think about the fact we all know lies and deception are often very convoluted things. This is why we call them tangled webs that deceivers weave. It

has always surprised me that people are convinced the person who tries to untie the knot for them must be the one who has it wrong simply because it's complicated, when we know very good and well the truth should not have a knot because it is not complicated. The teaching of a seven-year tribulation is what is complicated, and many would be hard pressed to find someone who could lay it out with ease. This is why 99.99% of people who go around defending the doctrine have not shown themselves approved to give an answer when asked to explain it to those who ask them.

It was easy to come up with the seven year thing for teachers who have often falsely taught prophecy as if it was some crystal ball we could tell the future with, because that's what so many are hoping we can do. If we believe this can be done, then we think we don't have to study it for ourselves and we still won't be caught unaware. However, if you go back and simply read the words of Jesus without all the scrutiny, it's clear He never mentions the idea of having a rapture and a second coming. If you read what follows in the New Testament on that foundation, you'll see there is no basis for taking it any other way. There is simply the return of Christ at which time the dead in Christ shall be raised incorruptible. (I Cor. 15:51-55) This is the first resurrection, and those who are watching and ready will be blessed to be part of it! (Rev. 20:1-6)

So why is this place of talking about Abraham naming his son what God told him to, the right place to consider such a thing as the second coming? Because just as with the birth of Isaac, the event Jesus warned us would catch many people off guard, will do so because it will happen just like Abraham and Sarah having Isaac. It's not that these events need to be a surprise, it's simply that these are events that must happen in God's timing alone, and that puts the events outside of when most people would believe it is logical for them to happen. With the birth of Isaac, that timing had to be long after both Abraham and Sarah had passed an age normal people would expect to still be able to bear children. In the case of Jesus' return, there will also be factors that put it outside of the maximum time limit human thinking causes one to think it should.

This is why many will not be ready for it as individuals. We get so caught up in everyday life that by the time the timing of human events comes to the right point and Jesus returns, many will have given up, thinking it's not imminent enough to daily think about. Isaac is a foreshadowing lesson in so many ways concerning The Messiah, and his birth is no exception. God did not want Abraham and Sarah to be unaware of this important event taking place, so God kept reminding them and preparing them. When Jesus told us we could be caught unaware at His return, He did so not because God wishes to see people caught unaware. It will happen because in spite of all the times and ways God has warned us, many are just not listening and won't be ready when the moment comes. Sadly, it is my belief the idea and hype of a rapture has made this fact more true than it would have been!

The point is not to come up with an answer to how

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part XXVI

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 discussed the religious thought patterns that truly brought the leaders to their desire to crucify Jesus. This was led into by the fact I wanted to clarify the point about the appointment of Jewish men to the position of Ethnarch still being important, in spite of the fact the position had once been held by a totally non-Jewish ruler of the Herodian Dynasty. The base understanding of that point is that Rome still needed a person or persons to act as Ethnarch because Rome wanted a buffer between them and the Jewish people. By the time of Christ the position was basically being filled by the religious establishment, which is why it had to be amazing to Pilate that these very rulers brought Jesus to him.

All that being covered, we need to get to the more strictly Jewish side of the historical look of things as we approach the time of Christ, as well as during His lifetime. To do this, I believe there is little reason to talk more about how the common Jew was living their lives, as we have covered the synagogue system, as well as some of the ways and why Jews had different circumstances in the North than those who lived in the now direct Roman province of Judea in the South. However, one loose end we have not talked about of late is that of the priesthood itself. This is important for understanding another aspect of how much the Jews needed Jesus first and foremost to set things straight among them before The Messiah could turn to things concerning the greater world.

In coming up the line from our understanding that is totally based in the Law, through to what the priesthood had become by the time of Christ, we see many transitions. Some people argue these transitions are evidence the Law was, in fact, put together only by men, and due to this was rightly shaped into what men wanted it to be. This is another incorrect thinking we can end up with if we want to dismiss God's mercy for when humans get off track, or the idea God never had anything to do with any of it to begin with. However, the priesthood, according to the Law, was to be administered by those who were of the tribe of Levi. This part of the Law was not greatly violated until who was of what tribe became far harder to know in later times after the Jews had gone through captivity and return. That being said, even then it was known to some degree, and the fact such things were kept purer and better track of by those in the South than many of those in the North of Israel is part of why we see hostility from those in the South toward those who lived in the North. That aside, the priesthood was held by Levites to a great degree. However, what is far more in violation of the original established law was that the priests serving as those who administered the sacrifices, and specifically the High Priest's position, was to be held by only one family line. For the High

Priest this was even to be in succession from father to son in every way it was possible to do so.

This means the only glitch in the system would be if a High Priest failed to have a son who could take his place. God could ensure such a thing never happened, and in truth, the idea the Jews as a whole would have no trouble bearing children was one of the specific blessings God would have granted the nation if they would have followed His Words. (Deut. 7:12-17) Under those circumstances, the case of having no son would likely never have happened. However, the idea of a High Priest failing to have a qualifying son was the least of the worries, considering the nation did not serve God with their whole heart. This touches again on the point I made in our last segment about how if God was going to reject the chosen nation for not accepting The Messiah, He had every reason to reject them long before it came to that. Violations of the strict protocol of father to son in one family alone was in some ways a result of circumstances caused by sin, not all of which was directly connected to the priesthood. Keeping the High Priest's position strictly in the correct family line was far harder to know than who was of the general family of Aaron, and this basic fact is what made that position more difficult to fill with the right person during later times of Jewish history.

There can be great debate as to how well this was done versus how it was not, but in the end, we know the position went through transition. As we have talked about in this study, the position was fought over, suffered forced take overs, and even bribery was used to obtain it at times. The Kingdom of God truly suffereth violence in this world! (Matt. 11:12) However, the fact all this happened is interesting and something I could spend many pages on, but I'll try to be brief on the issue. In spite of the fact Israel demanded a king, when God had given them no king to begin with, and eventually got that king, the High Priest's position remained in the spotlight. The fact that after Saul failed, David was appointed by God and God chose his line to perpetually be king over the chosen nation did not cause the High Priest's position to disappear. In spite of the fact the position was overshadowed on many occasions by the power of kings and/or the rulers of empires, even ignored by the nation at times, it lived on and gained in importance.

While one may want to argue the fact men got "away" with corrupting the position by transitioning it from what it was by God's original commandment in the Law, into what it became later on, this is the deeper truth. The fact the position lived on in importance is another proof, along with the continual existence of the nation as a whole, that more than the will of man was involved in it's creation. Think about it, right from the giving of the Law God said the nation would one day reject the way He had established the nation to live by wanting to be as other nations and have a king. It eventually happened just that way.



Still the High Priesthood became the more revered position as time went on. This is odd, because while priests have held powerful positions at times in various cultures, the position has never stuck as an important one. This because priests come and go with the popularity of the religion they serve, and the whim of kings and the like. Today the priest of the sun might be the most powerful, and tomorrow the priest of the moon might rise to importance. This is what happens when men establish a religion for and at their own pleasure.

When God lays down law, men will show this same pattern of shifting thinking and desire, but the truth does not pass away. By the time of Jesus, was there a king in Israel? Not so much, unless you want to say it was Herod or Pilate. On the other hand, was the position of High Priest still being fought over and desired? Absolutely, and one of the reasons why is because of the very circumstances that made it Jewish. God put it into the Law and that's what made it valuable to the chosen nation, which in turn caused secular authorities of the day to permit Israel to have one. Even when rulers did not want to allow it, they did not take it away, but instead attempted to be the ones to control it. The result of taking such a thing completely away from the Jews was shown when the Greeks tried it. A king was easy to remove, but the priest's position was not because God maintained its existence, and that is exactly why people who desired power fought to obtain it and/or control it!

This coveting attitude among men is why we see so much transition in who had the position and how it might have been handled through the years, but the important thing is that as easy as it might have been to lose it, that never happened! Why is this so important? Because while many among the chosen nation, as well as the world, looked for a king, which Jesus did not seem to them to be, a rightful High Priest, who could set the office in order, was needed more than anything. This is something we need in our minds if we are truly going to understand the work of The Messiah! As I said, there really was no king in Israel by the time Jesus came. What did this mean? In the nation's mind The Messiah needed to be that king, and Jesus had all the qualifications. Unlike the Hasmonean line, whose roots were mostly in the priestly tribe of Levi, Jesus' earthly father made him of the line of the tribe of Judah. More importantly, Jesus was of the line and lineage of the house of David! The Jews had every reason to accept Jesus as their king, irregardless of if they accepted Him as anything else.

This fact is why the religious leaders did not want Jesus to be proclaimed as king, which really came to a head the day He triumphantly entered Jerusalem not many days before the Passover. Was their resistance entirely based on the idea He was not the king they wanted in that He was not a conquering hero? No, what really got them was the fact that Jesus acted more like a High Priest would have. That day Jesus entered the city in full view of the entire nation and the world, He did not go to some house where He might rule from. Jesus went to the temple and began to teach. Matthew and Luke records He started by turning over the tables of those who were buying and selling in the temple, telling them they had made the house of God into a den of thieves. (Matt. 21:1-16, Luke 19:45-46) Judgment was truly starting at the house of God, and Jesus was here to do that work.

(I Pet. 4:17) Thus, Jesus not only did not seem to be the man who was going to go after the Romans in the way they wanted Him to, in the way they had taught the people for many long years The Messiah would do, Jesus was more poised to cast them out of their comfortable positions, at least for starters!

This fact is what scared those religious leaders who held the power at the time of The Messiah, and this fear was shared by more than one man. Why? To understand that, we need to look at the history of what the priesthood had become, a history which left the door open for Jesus to take the position of High Priest? In many ways this is the information that we have been tracking through this study all along. You see, at the time of the Maccabees a precedence was set, not just on the basis it had come to that on many occasions, but in the fact the Jews literally chose to have certain people serve as leaders and High Priests until a faithful prophet should arise. Other than the fact these men focused far more on being king than on being priest, this is just going back to the truth Israel was not to have a king in the first place. As I mentioned, Mattathias being a priest meant the Maccabees came from the priestly line. This was somewhat correct for the High Priesthood but not the king of Israel. What this showed was the nation had truly come to have no trouble accepting the way things had to be without pushing even further for what they thought needed to be. They would wait until God sent the right person.

This is what makes Jesus' coming and the truth He was of the house of David so timely. The nation had lost much of any simulant of a king in the nation. By being what Jesus was and acting as He acted, accepting Him as their king would not have caused a war with the Romans. If there is any point made perfectly clear during Jesus' trial, it was this! The leaders came to Pilate accusing Jesus of being the king of the Jews. This accusation was so clear to Pilate, it is what he literally had written on the plaque above Jesus' head as He died on the cross. A plaque that was there for everyone the Romans crucified, to tell the world the person's crime. In spite of being clear on this, Pilate said over and over to the religious leaders, "I find no fault in this man." He even points out after sending Jesus to Herod, who should have been even more threatened by this claim, that Herod found no reason to be worried. Again, there was every reason to embrace Jesus as their King.

Because circumstances were what they were, this also meant there was no reason not to accept Jesus as the rightful High Priest. Not only was the nation waiting for God to send a faithful prophet, but they had been accepting men of the wrong family line for the job of High Priest and king for many long decades. Why question a man from the house of David? Better yet, even if you do not see Jesus' deeper connection to the line of Aaron, there is the simple fact Mary was of the daughters of Aaron. Jesus was the right house on his father's side to be the king of Israel and the right house on his mother's side to be the High Priest, but it gets better. When we are told Mary goes to her cousin's house after finding she was pregnant, who was that cousin? It was Elisabeth the wife of Zacharias. We are specifically told Elisabeth was of the daughters of Aaron. (Luke 1:5) Zacharias had also been shown to be serving as the one to go in and offer the incense in the Holy Place before the veil. Had the right man always done this job? Most likely no, but the year

Elisabeth was to become a mother an angel was sent to Zacharias while doing this job. The fact he had seen a vision of some sort was apparent to those who prayed and waited outside the temple. What more confirmation does one need to say you might have found the right man to do the job of High Priest continually?

Who was the child the angel came to him to talk about? The child this older priestly couple was to have would be a miracle in much the same way Abraham and Sarah were able to have Isaac. The argument just keeps getting better. Truly the faithful prophet was just around the corner, and all the signs history pointed the nation of Israel to look for were there. Who was the child in Elisabeth's womb? John the Baptist, whose mother received the promise of Pentecost the moment she heard the voice of Mary coming to her, for John leaped for joy inside her womb. How can a person who claims to be a Christian accept abortion after reading that? Being born of older parents, the faithful prophet would have been at great risk of being aborted if the thinking had been like today, and Jesus, maybe even more so, but I digress. John would go on to show himself to be the faithful prophet, but as we talked about before, he did not come and take his place among the priests in the way his father had. This the establishment did not like, but they never asked him what he thought they should do, and they certainly ignored the warnings he gave. Thus, when the time came and John explained to his disciples that he was not going to be the large figure they wanted him to be any more, but decrease for the very sake of The One he had been pointing them to increase, the religious leaders were not around to hear those words. The man who had every right to be the High Priest in Jerusalem was specifically telling others that he would step aside for The One who could do it all, and he was talking about Jesus!

The door was completely open for Jesus to serve as both the king and the High Priest not just because He was of the right lineage, but because, by Israel's own words, the one they had been waiting for was telling them The Messiah was among the nation at that very moment and He was Who the nation should have been truly looking for. My point is this, the nation had no king, but in truth, since they were waiting on God to show them what to do to set it straight, they had no legitimate High Priest either. The closest thing they had to God telling them a certain man was the right man was John, and he was the man who would not be High Priest. Why? Because the priest after the order of Melchizedek had come. (Ps. 110) John's only real job was to point this out and clear the way, but the way was already clear on so many levels the religious leaders refused to recognize. The job of High Priest was not being administered by even one family at that point. This is why John's father is only said to be doing the job he was doing at the temple when the angel came to him as being, "...while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord." Luke 1:8-9

This is where we really stop to understand what the priesthood had become in those days. What we know is that the High Priest's position was rightfully reestablished during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and Nehemiah gives us names for the High Priest going forward for a time, but it ends about the

time Alexander the Great came marching in to take the fight to the Persians. This leaves quite a gap, but as I have said before, where the Bible leaves off is really about the same time man started keeping better records on his own. This shows us two things. At risk of making the rest of the Hebrew Bible sound unimportant, the first thing it shows us is how much the first five books of the Bible are the true core. What follows is to show us how the Law was implemented and how it affected the world. This is not unimportant information, but it is different in nature. The Torah shows us where man came from and why we came from a state where God walked with us in a garden, to God needing to put commandments in writing for us to learn from.

What follows shows us the struggle even a specific people given direct laws by God had being righteous in a group form. This is how we come to understand how much our lives as individuals can be saved if we choose God for ourselves and in spite of the world around us, but the world as a whole cannot be saved for they will not listen. It also shows us how much we have to have a relationship with God in order to even begin to walk in the ways of righteousness, because no set of rules and regulations can be followed, even as just a guide, and accomplish much righteousness, much less enough to save our souls. Thus, we come to the most important point, which is that no matter how much growth we may find in our walk with God, we will all still need God to save us in the end! We've never been able to do this on our own and we never will.

Really, by the time of Daniel it's becoming pretty clear we have been given pretty much all the information we need to understand what I just laid out, until it became needful for Scripture to record the fact The Messiah did eventually come. The history in-between what we call the Old and New Testaments is not a silent period, it is just a waiting period. One in which nothing so important happened that human historians would not give us a good enough record to understand. This is exactly why Daniel is given a vision of the things to come. As the events unfolded they would become self-evident in spite of the fact no one in Daniel's day could have hoped to understand a deeper explanation than he was given. When Daniel pushes to know more, he is told to close up the book and wait until The Messiah, because the world would just keep doing its thing, shifting what we see as life while ignoring the true meaning of it. (Dan. 12:1-4)

This takes us back to the historian Josephus, who gives us information to put together the names of at least those who served in the position, whether rightful or not, and with this information we can come up to the time of Hyrcanus II, which we have covered. All these technical names are not as important as understanding the nature of what happened though. For a simple breakdown of that, we start with the end of the Hebrew Bible, which ends chronologically with the information told to us in Ezra and Nehemiah and the words of the prophet Malachi. At this time we already see the cracks forming that would lead to the Sadducees, Scribes, Pharisees and the like. Nehemiah was resisted at about every turn by the priestly line for much the same reason Jesus was rejected. Nehemiah was sent by God to be a reformer, not to take their positions, and even with that truth those who were in the positions wanted to do things their way instead. In spite of this, the temple and priesthood were firmly

established, once again, in a way that it would survive to the time of The Messiah.

What we have then is a High Priesthood that was held fairly well within the line of Aaron, all the way from there to the time of the Greek oppression that brought about Hanukkah. On the other side of what history calls the Maccabean Revolt, we see a line change in lineage of who held the position. This point is something we've covered very well, and it takes us through what we call the Hasmonean Dynasty all the way to Hyrcanus II, who was the last. These men were as pure a Levites as there were in general, but with the rise of Herod the Great, even this line came to an end. To extend this all the way out, since Jesus was not accepted, the High Priest position would go on to be held as mostly a political office that was shifted by the whim of the Herodian Dynasty and Rome until the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

As we have also talked about, the Sadducees were more of the family that should serve as the priests, but just who was the High Priest was not always agreed upon. Thus, the setup of what we see around the time of Jesus is affected by something that basically had been put in place by King David even before Solomon built the temple. What we see if we read the chapters starting in I Chronicles 23 is David putting the tribe of Levi in order so they could serve in Jerusalem and specifically the temple. This was not completely unlike what Moses was told to do near the start of it all. However, by this time the house of Aaron alone was large enough to be divided into several groups - 24 to be exact. This was based on the fact the two sons of Aaron who survived were Eleazar and Ithamar. Eleazar's house had ended up with 16 chief men, and Ithamar 8. This is the "24 courses," as they are referred to. David divided the family in order to assign specific jobs to each group. If this was still being observed in any meaningful way by the time of the Babylonian captivity, the captivity certainly disrupted it.

When the king of the Medes and Persians allowed the Jews to return, many took up the offer. However, when they got to the promised land many were greatly frightened to do anything about the temple or Jerusalem. The altar was set up, and not much else for quite awhile. The greater problem was that the Jews were afraid to live in Jerusalem itself. Many were afraid that if the nation was attacked it most certainly would focus on Jerusalem, if not be because of it, so they desired to live elsewhere. This was not going to work for the temple needing priests as there was no way for them to constantly be there as they should and live any distance away. The solution was to rotate in and out so that few to none of the priests had to live in Jerusalem all the time. This rotation cycle created a condition where the family truly came to be divided into the 24 courses. David's only intent was to use them to assign responsibilities, but at the time of the return it became about who was of what group among the priestly family. In a way it was about who was in charge at any given point.

In this we see how much even the idea of power caused corruption in the minds of this family long before they mostly became the Sadducees. Of course, the Hasmonean line disrupted

even this system in the Maccabees becoming the High Priests, but these 24 courses continued to administer the temple overall. In a way you could say the true power the High Priest was meant to have was lost at this time. As the Hasmonean Dynasty came to a close with the death of Hyrcanus II, these courses of priests were still there to take charge of the temple and High Priesthood without missing a beat, but who should be the High Priest was not clear. This is another reason why the Herodian Dynasty and rulers of Rome had a say in it. Settling for just allowing these courses to feud over who should be was not acceptable, and these rulers wanted control over the position anyway. To keep everyone somewhat happy, High Priests came to be selected out of about four to five families considered of high regard among the courses at the time a replacement was needed/desired. This is how aristocratic the system had become!

When we look at John the Baptist's father, we see a man who at the time the angel came to him was simply serving according to the course he belonged to in the duties that had fallen to him. He was at that time given the high honor of taking the fire off the altar of burnt offering to the altar of incense inside the Holy Place. What we are told in the Gospels is that he and his wife Elisabeth were blameless because they served The Lord in truth in spite of all that may not have been perfect about the system. John, on the other hand, simply did not go on to serve under this system. He did not have the simple job of taking part in performing the rituals of the Law. It was John's job to show how much it was time for all of them to step out of the way in order to make room for The Messiah. In this way I do not think many who read the Word understand just how much John gave up. It was the kind of power, wealth, and prestige that others would literally kill for, and indeed the other religious leaders did just that to keep Jesus from taking their positions.

In the end of it all they could kill The Messiah but they would not maintain their position for many more years, yet the plan of God lived on. God had established the entire thing so that no matter what path they took, God's will was going to be done. The true High Priest according to Aaron's earthly family had been lost, as the position became mostly political until it came to an end as the temple was destroyed. This truth is why we are told in Hebrews that whether Jew or non-Jew we only have one High Priest in the man and Saviour Jesus Christ. (Heb. 2:16-4:16) When people talk about how the sacrifices ended because Christ came, they are ignorant, but when it comes to there being a High Priest it's even more clear that things coming to an end had nothing to do with God bringing it to an end, it has to do with man failing to maintain it. However, every important piece of what we need that we see men do this to, we find God has already made a way to take the matter completely into His hands alone. This is what Jesus did with the High Priesthood, and it's another evidence that Jesus was The Messiah!

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

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



#### **FBS continued from pg. 4**

could Jesus' return be a surprise if we are told so many things about when it will happen? The point is to understand we allow things to sneak up on us, even things we believe are very important events! We say, how could Abraham, being told he would have a son of promise, not remember to name his son what God had told him? Well, we should remember that long before this, Abraham and Sarah were so sure the promise of a son couldn't mean him and her were going to directly have one together that they tried to make the promise come true by Abraham having Ishmael through Hagar. When God came to Abraham after that, Abraham had trouble not laughing at the idea it could still be possible. After no doubt telling Sarah all this, along with the name God had given him to call their son, God Himself comes to visit them at their tent and tell them more about exactly when it would happen, and Sarah laughs.

So yes, Sarah goes through nine months of carrying the child, but how much were those months spent by her wondering and worrying whether she really could give birth? How many times did they wonder if a child born to such old parents would be healthy? All the previous signs are there to emphasize to us this couple was not superhuman. They felt the kind of things you and I feel. On a physical level they would have had the same worries many of us would today. Thus, when the child was finally in their arms and the wait was over, how much do you think their minds were on the idea of anything other than the relief of that moment? Yet Abraham was not caught unaware or forgetful of, not just the general promise that God had said this would happen, but the details such as what he had been told the child's name should be. Thus, it's kind of an important point, and one we should not overlook, that without hesitation Abraham, and Sarah as well, do as they should in this moment!

Now, when we talked about Abraham being told the name Isaac, we discussed what the name meant. To quickly review, that name goes hand in hand with everyone's reaction to the idea they would have a child together. Isaac means "he laughs" or "will laugh." The reason for the two possible definitions is that it really is both, we just don't speak an expressive enough language to wrap it all into one. This is why some will simply say the name means "laughter." However, as much as the name references laughter in a very general way, it is not a noun, it is a verb. In other words, someone is laughing. The reason it is both he and will is because it covers all that and more. Abraham had laughed in his heart at the thought. Sarah had laughed in the tent when God said Isaac would be born. Now the child was here, and after the relief of it being successful, the house could be filled with laughter for a very different reason.

There was also the fact that the job Isaac would do in this world would be the work of God, and the persecution of those in God's work did not start after Jesus came. Men have been laughing at the people of God and their peculiar ways for a very long time. This is why we take it as a fact that Noah was greatly laughed at for building a gigantic water-tight box on not just dry ground, but high ground. How did he ever expect such a structure to reach water deep enough and large enough

to float it, if it really would float that is. People just couldn't believe Noah's story that God was sending a flood to destroy all the earth and he would not need to take the ark anywhere. When the rain came, Noah got the last laugh because he had been right. Of course, the idea of laughing in such an occasion is only an expression, because as Noah watched God close the door of the ark, it must have been horrifying and sad beyond belief knowing only he and seven other people had chosen to board.

Isaac would give birth to the chosen nation, and that nation would go on to be laughed at many times just as God's people always are. In spite of this, cultures and nations, even mighty empires, would come and go, yet the chosen nation still lives on today. The world can laugh but it does not change the truths of God, and that brings us to our main point about Isaac being a foreshadow of Christ. Jesus would be laughed at. He would eventually be mocked and tortured and hung on a cross to die as a criminal. While on the cross they mockingly said of Jesus that He claimed to be able to save others yet Himself He could not save. (Matt. 27:39-43) Like Noah's experience, Jesus looked down on those who laughed at him and felt compassion and sadness because they did not understand. However, Jesus was able to ask The Father to forgive them due to their ignorance and unlike Noah, it was not the world around Him that was physically dying, it was Jesus. Against those who truly hate God, Jesus would certainly get the last laugh as on the third day He rose from the grave. For those who had and would put their trust in Him, laughter of joy rings out across heaven as the angels rejoice due to Jesus' victory over sin in each life who accepts him. (Luke 15:10)

Moving to verse 4, it shows us Abraham was not slack concerning another commandment of God, and that was the circumcision of his son. God had told Abraham that every male was to go through this procedure, and every one of them did. (Gen. 17:9-14, 23-27) God also instructed that every male born to his house from then on was to undergo it when they were eight days old, and this is what Abraham made sure happened to Isaac. Now, Ishmael had already been born when the commandment for circumcision was given to Abraham. In fact, he was thirteen at the time. Thus, of Abraham's sons, Isaac was the first one to have this completed exactly as it was to happen for every generation in Israel that followed, and I don't think this is a coincidence. God knew Abraham would make the mistake of taking Hagar, and Ishmael would be born as a result. Due to this, God waited until not long before Isaac was born to even give this symbol to Abraham. This is another way in which God shows that the true continuance of the promise God had given Abraham and the start of what the promise was all about began with Isaac.

Verse 5 gives us the solid fact Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born. Thus, it was just in that next year, like God had promised Abraham and Sarah it would happen. To keep some perspective on all this, remember the point about Ishmael being thirteen the year Abraham was ninety-nine. When you go back and think about when Abraham had been told of the promise, we get some idea of how long this couple had waited to see Isaac. However, it adds

just a bit more to think that it was around fifteen years prior to Isaac's birth that Abraham and Sarah thought it so unlikely they would have a son together, they took the "surrogate" route in an attempt to have a son. Not only does it emphasize how much Isaac was a miracle in that the two were just that much older, but more importantly just how long they both had waited even after Ishmael.

Everything we read we need to stop and take the time to think about what it might have felt like, along with how we might have reacted if we were in the position the people in the story were in. The reason all these verses at the beginning of chapter 21 just keep hammering at the point that this happened in Abraham and Sarah's old age is God trying to get us to live a little in their shoes. In many ways, this kind of tangibility has a lot to do with why God laid down a Law for the chosen nation to follow. A Law that was far more than just a guide but filled with physical ceremony. Ceremony that if we stop to think about it is arduous, to say the least. It's easy to pass over the real time when reading a story such as the one we are studying, but people often talk about how hard it is to get through reading the Law. All the details and the need to grasp the understanding of one ceremony to understand another one that is built upon it.

This is so true that many who claim to be Christians today, and for sometime now, have looked at the Law of Moses and been so worried by the thought non-Jewish believers might have to follow its letter, they have come up with theology that basically rejects God's Law right down to telling Christians we do not have to study It. It's as if somehow it's so unimportant in our day almost the entire Old Testament could be wiped from our Bibles. In truth, what a study of the Law will, at least eventually, show you is how impossible all the details the Law make it for even Jews to follow right now. That being true, you will go on to find how it certainly is not something that could ever be accomplished by non-Jews for whom it was never prescribed to perform.

God intentionally narrowed the working of ceremony down like this in order to exclude many from being involved in the arduous task of performing ceremony. For most of us, reading through it and attempting to understand it should be enough to make the main point. Ceremony can be used as a way to worship God, but not if it replaces the true worshiping we should do. Ceremony can be used of God to teach us many things, but just as Cain killing his brother the first time God demonstrated how He would react to a blood sacrifice shows us, it can greatly get in our way. (Gen. 4:1-8) As I have said many times before, you can judge Israel for the way they handled the Law, or failed therein, but the real lesson is to see how we all would have failed. We should praise God our salvation is not based on a set of rules and ceremony we must perform. We need to gain some perspective on how much our lives while walking this earth will never stop being about right here and right now. While we can not afford to stop thinking about the bigger picture, we can not stop thinking about our every action and whether it is rooted in righteousness or

something such as fleshly pleasures and/or the direction the cares of this world would push us. Life is not just accepting salvation and waiting for God to take us home. It's about living for God every day!

This is why the Law does serve to teach us many details about how to walk righteously. Some of its teaching is purely figurative, and some of it is literal. However, one of the main physical points of the Law is to show us both the beauty and arduous task of living our lives for God in a world filled with sin. Isaac's name is about laughter, even the kind related to getting the last laugh at those who have laughed at us, but there is still the work to be done and the being laughed at part to live through. We must always be aware of our time and place. For those of us who are alive and remain at this point, who serve The Lord, our place is walking this world and attempting to grow in righteousness as the world degrades at an ever hastening pace. Our place is to continue teaching the truth in a world that calls good evil and evil good. (Isa. 5:20) Our place is to continue studying to show ourselves approved, to be able to give to everyone who asks of us an answer as to why we walk in the faith we walk in; this, while those who ask may very well be laughing in our face. (II Tim. 2:15-19)

This is what can cause us to become very impatient at times as we wait for Christ's return, and as Jesus warned, this can be our downfall if we allow discouragement to convince us it's alright to begin smiting our fellow servants. (Matt. 24:42-51) One of the reasons the Law could not succeed is because the nation would not follow, to a great degree. They would for a little while, but eventually they would get tired of trying. They would see the pleasures false religious practices seemed to bring, and choose to go after those things whether completely or by incorporating them into what they were suppose to be doing. After trying for a while we can find ourselves not just becoming lazy in serving God and striving for righteousness, but the thought can take over that what we do while we wait for what seems to be a very long time to receive the promise, can make it seem that it just does not matter or that we have plenty of time to turn back just in time to be ready.

We can not afford to do this. We must be individuals like Abraham and Sarah. Yes, they made mistakes, but even in their mistakes we see a desire not to go out and become like the world but to accomplish God's will in their lives. Did such mistakes with such good intentions leave scars? Of course they did, and difficulties that never would have had to be faced if they hadn't jumped ahead of God's will. This happens in our lives as well, but we should never stop thinking about what we are striving for. Abraham and Sarah had made mistakes, but the fact they obviously never truly gave up nor forgot what God promised He would do, caused them to keep watching and waiting. Now they could finally laugh with joy as the remaining years of their lives would be lived with their promised son.

Until next time, Shalom!

## **The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2**

learning and judging from the same set of Laws the priests of the nation would be. This would keep him humble before The Lord, able to judge righteously, prolonging the days he was able to live and rule over the nation.

Again, there is the reminder that the priests who come from the tribe of Levi, as well as the entire tribe, would be given no inheritance in the land. This would make them reliant on the offerings of those of the nation who did have land to work and profit from. Because of this, the nation is told what portions of their sacrifices were reserved for the Levites. As was stipulated, the priests would receive the right shoulder and the breast. However, here, while the shoulder is mentioned, there is also the addition of the two cheeks, which is a reference to the head as well as the maw of any ox, sheep, etc. that was offered. Out of the multiple stomach arrangements that exists in animals that chew a cud, the maw is a reference to the one where digestion is completed. Both the maw and the head were considered delicacies in ancient times. Other required offerings such as the firstfruits of all fresh produce, grains, wool from the flocks, etc. also belonged to the Levites.

It is made clear that any Levite who chose to come to the place where God would put His name, with a desire to serve The Lord, that Levite was to be granted the right to serve in that place along with others of their tribe. They were to share in an equal portion of all that came in just as any other Levite serving there, without regard for how poor or rich the Levite might have been when coming to the job. Speaking of the ministry, Moses goes on to emphasize the fact false religion is not just about the physical elements such as planting groves or setting up idols. No one of the nation, no matter what their justification, was to take up the kind of practices people of the nations they drove from the land practiced when it comes to religious or spiritual things. This includes things like attempting to tell the future by watching the sky, contacting spirits, enchanting animals, sacrificing children, or any other practice of the like. These things are the reason God had planned to give Israel the opportunity to utterly destroy the nations currently on the land, but Israel would become no better than those nations if they took on these same practices.

Instead, the nation was to understand, just like the time they stood at the mountain to receive the Laws of God and were too afraid to do so, God would rise up among them someone like Moses if they needed direction. That person would speak to them the words of God very directly, and not need the kind of religious practices and tricks to know what was right for the nation like witches and sorcerers use. A person God provided in this way was the kind of person the nation was to listen to, and when God rose up to give them such a person, no one in the nation should refuse to follow their words. People claiming to be prophets who came speaking to them words contrary to the Law God had given the nation, or who spoke in the name of false gods or other religions, were not just to be ignored but put to death. If the nation was to doubt the words of any prophet, the real proof would be if the words they spoke came true or not. When they found a prophet to speak things that did not come to pass, then they would

know they did not have to fear or listen to such a prophet.

Moses then goes over the stipulations concerning the cities of refuge and handling of those who might kill by accident. This was already in work to some degree as the nation had taken enough land on this side of Jordan to set up cities for this purpose. However, they are reminded that once on the other side of Jordan the land was to be divided into three sections, and cities of refuge were to be set up so those in each area would have a chance to reach them. Moses gives an example of when such a thing might be necessary in that two people who had no history of animosity between them went into the woods to cut wood, and an axe head came loose hitting the other and killed them. The person who handled the axe would then have a chance to run to the city of refuge before a family member or friend of the one who died would have a chance to kill them out of anger for what happened. This would be good for both the person who had accidentally killed another, as well as the person who out of anger might want to kill them.

Three cities were to be made cities of refuge on the west side of Jordan, and if the day came that Israel was large enough to fill all the land God had promised to give them due to their following His Law and received that blessing, they would need three more cities. These they were to establish as the need arose. These cities were a way to keep innocent blood from being shed in Israel, not to save the life of one who had murdered someone and just wished to get away with it. Thus, if the person had waited for an opportunity to kill another, and after doing so ran to one of these cities, the elders of the place where he lived were to send for him. In such cases the person would be delivered to the one who had the right to take vengeance on them, and they were to be killed for the crime of murder. In doing this, there would be justice for the fact innocent blood had been shed in the nation.

The nation is also instructed that once on the land, when people set up landmarks to worship God, establish a position, etc. these landmarks were not to be removed as time went on. Especially because a landmark was old and established it was not to be removed, so generations that had come to depend upon it could continue to use it as a marker no matter what around it might change. Also in any criminal charge against another it is not to be believed or taken as fact if there is only one witness against a person. In any accusation it was to take at least two or three witnesses to establish guilt. In the case it is thought that any witness has falsely accused another, the accuser and the accused were to be brought to the priests at the temple for them to ask The Lord to reveal the truth. If it was determined the witness was telling a lie, that witness was to be punished for the same crime they were falsely accusing the other of doing. This would serve to keep the entire system honest and just for all. Because this was the intent, there was never to be pity shown on the wrong doer. Their punishment was to be carried out so those who saw it would be reminded to never make the same mistake.

The next instructions have to do with after the nation is settled on the land and face times they must go out to fight.

When they face an army in battle, even one that is larger and seems stronger than Israel, they were not to be afraid, and encourage themselves in the fact The Lord is with them. The priests are given specific words to encourage the nation before such as a battle. Then the officers are to ask questions that might send some men home. They were to ask if someone has built a house they have not yet had the chance to dedicate and live in; was there anyone who had planted a vineyard they have not yet had the chance to eat from; and was there a man who had been engaged to a wife he has not yet taken? All these are to return to do what they have not had the opportunity to do, because if they were to die in the battle another man would reap the benefit due them or the reward of their labor. The officers were also to ask if there was anyone afraid to go into the battle. Any such man was to return home because he might cause others around him to start to doubt. It is far better to have fewer who are focused on the battle at hand and trusting in The Lord for the victory, than to have many with some who are not. Once this process has taken away all those who are not ready, the officers would choose men to serve as captains among the remaining men.

If they were to go against a city, and as they came the city sent out a message declaring their desire for peace and opened the city to them, Israel was to make them servants to the nation, not destroy them. However, if the city resisted Israel, they were to put the city under siege until The Lord gave them the city, at which time they are to kill all the males of that city and take the women and children captive. They could also take the spoils of such a city and use them for their own benefit. Then it is emphasized this is only for cities of enemies outside the nation, and none of this applied to the cities and people in the land God was giving the nation. When going against the people living on the land God would give them, they were to keep nothing alive. Moses then gives a list of six specific groups which were chief examples of those they were not to let live. This because the people of the land God was to give the nation would surely teach the people to do the same kinds of wrong they currently were doing on the land, and God wanted Israel to have a fresh start.

The next item is an interesting one, as God instructs the nation not to cut down fruit trees in order to build structures normally deployed in a siege of a city. God says they are to only cut down trees that do not bear fruit men would use. This was basically because of the fact Israel would ultimately win the battle, and this means they would get the chance to eat from those trees at a later time. If they were to cut them down, such trees would have to be replanted and take time to grow. This shows how much God wanted Israel to benefit from the work their enemies had done. They were to destroy the people themselves along with their cultural/religious practices, but the good of the land itself was to be preserved.

Next, God talks about what to do if a person is found murdered out in the open fields but there is no one to witness or testify as to what happened and who might be to blame. For this the elders in the area are to determine which city is closest

to the dead body, and the elders of that city were to take on the responsibility. They were to bring a female out of the cattle which had not yet been used for breeding, nor any work done or training for future work. This animal would represent the pure innocence of all those involved. The heifer was to be taken to a natural valley that was not used to plant crops in, and there with the priests as witnesses, the elders were to strike off the head of the animal at the neck. This would allow the blood to freely flow out of the animal, and as the priests drew near the elders were to wash their hands over the animal's body. They also were to pray confessing that none of them were responsible for the murder, nor had any knowledge that would help them find the person's killer. Due to this, they would ask for God's mercy on the nation and ask that God not hold the nation responsible for the innocent blood that had been shed. All this was a way to confess before God that they had not simply come to accept people being murdered in the nation, and were still trying to administer justice whenever it was possible.

The next instructions go back to what one should do if after taking the women and children of a city Israel had fought with, a man of Israel desires to take one of the women to be his wife. In such a case she is to be taken back to the man's house. There her head was to be shaven and her nails cut short, leaving all such things to grow back anew. The clothing she was captured in was also to be changed out of and gotten rid of. She then was to be given a month's worth of time to grieve for the people of her former life that she had lost, in particular her mother and father. After going through this process of letting go of the past, she could become the man's wife. However, to emphasize how much she truly was then a wife and not just a slave as she would have been if simply taken captive, the man is instructed that if one day he decides he does not want her, she can only be divorced and let go as a free woman. She is not to be sold as a slave just because of where she came from. This because in having a physical relationship with her she truly had become the man's wife.

Also if a man takes more than one wife and he dislikes one of them while loving the other very much, and both these women give birth to sons through him, if the one he does not like is the one who has his first-born son, that son is to be given all the rights that go to the first-born. When the man is ready to give his inheritance to his sons, he is not allowed to jump over the first-born just because of who his mother is and/or give favor to a younger son just because of who their mother is. The first-born is to be respected and given a double portion of inheritance compared to the other son(s). This God did to keep the nation on a track of respecting the traditions and logic behind a first-born son, being the oldest, likely having more responsibility thrust upon him than his siblings and deserving a reward for that position. It is also done due to the fact God did not want the early stories of the nation's beginnings, such as Jacob and Esau, to be used as an excuse for those of the chosen nation to set an opposite tradition or use it any time they felt it served their purpose.

Let's stay in God's Word!

