

Free - Take One



Shaqah

שפדאן

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

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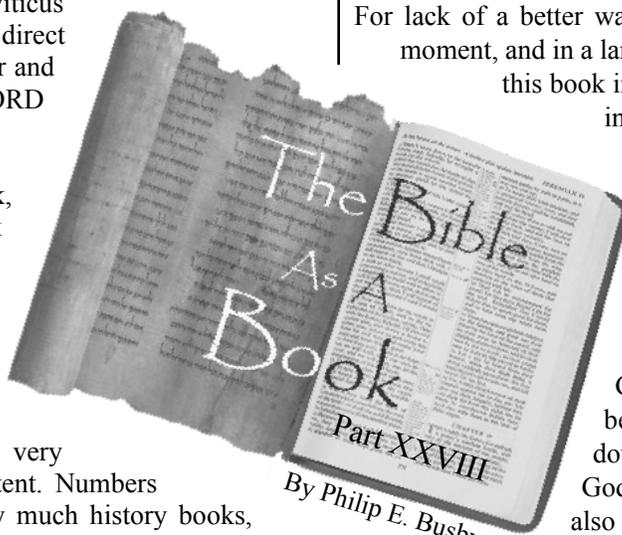
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In our last segment, we finished our overview of the book of Exodus, and this brings us in our study to the book of Leviticus. The book of Leviticus is the third book of the Torah. The Torah, of course, being those first five books of the Hebrew Bible, or what is often referred to as The Old Testament. This book, like the two before it, is written by Moses, and of all the books of the Torah, there can be no argument this book was given to Moses directly by God. This we know because Leviticus is composed almost entirely of direct commandments we are told over and over come because, “...the LORD spake unto Moses...”

Being the third book, Leviticus is also the middle book of the Torah, with Genesis and Exodus preceding it and Numbers and Deuteronomy following it. What is interesting about this is both Genesis and Exodus are history books with a very chronological feel to their content. Numbers and Deuteronomy are also very much history books, and while it is the nature of Deuteronomy to repeat a lot of information as an overview of what has come before, there is still a story line in both these books that follows a chronology of events. What stands in between these four history books is one book that is not really a history book, but a book of almost pure law. Even the handful of direct stories Leviticus contains are not really about Israel's journey through events, but about singular events that brought up something that needed to be clarified as to how they should handle that kind of situation.

Because all this is true of Leviticus, we do not really need to talk about how much time there is in between this book and the last one. This book also does not cover a specific time period that we can point out, because covering time is simply not the point of this book. The events of Leviticus are really more about instructions. While a book such as Exodus is focused on telling us history, Leviticus is more of the details

about God's specific commandments and how to administer them. This is why we see things such as the anointing of the priests once again. Exodus was giving us the historical view that the tabernacle and the priesthood were in fact established and put in motion. Leviticus actually tells a little more detail and specifically a mistake made by two of Aaron's sons, in order to show us the serious consequences this brought, and would bring, to any priest making such a mistake in the future. For lack of a better way to say it, it was a very teachable moment, and in a large way this sets much of the tone for this book in showing it is no light thing to serve in the priest's capacity.



Now, when we began our look at Exodus we touched on the subject of there being a break into books which made the Torah consist of five instead of just being one. We also discussed the fact Genesis had brought us from the true beginnings of everything we know down through all the reasons for why God established a chosen nation. Genesis also tells us the stories of the individual family units which would be that nation's

ancestry. The book of Exodus then jumps over many of the details of those years during which Israel came to grow from just a family or tribe into a true race of people who were ready to become a nation. Exodus then shows us the story of how the nation would be established, taking Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness where they would be given the laws and precepts they needed to become a nation. Exodus would specifically end with the construction and dedication of the tabernacle. Its last words would be a kind of wrap up, describing the fact that from then on the tabernacle would be a central focus, in no small part due to the fact God's presence would be on that structure as a cloud by day and fire by night. God's presence would also lift from the tabernacle to go out in front of Israel to indicate it was time to move forward, as well as direct them on the path.

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This information tells us clearly, Israel was no longer in Egypt, nor was turning back an option. They were no group of runaway slaves just wandering in the wilderness! Israel had not just a god and religion as other nations did, but the God of the universe was leading them, and they were as much a nation of people or more so than any other group on earth. It would be under these completed circumstances Israel would move forward and they would continue to organize around the fact they now had this structure in and for their lives. This, in truth, is what the book of Numbers begins to show us, and why it is called Numbers. Deuteronomy continues the journey all the way to the transition of leadership which would take place upon Moses' call home to glory; but again, Leviticus stands in the middle of all this information!

The reason for this is really wrapped up in I Peter chapter 4 where we are told, "...judgment must begin at the house of God:..." I often like to point out, and do on many occasions, that Jesus was asked one day what the greatest commandment was. His response was that we love God with everything we are, and the second, which He said was like the first, is to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matt. 22:34-40) These are not just a couple of items Jesus came up with on the spot. These are commandments contained in the words of the Torah! However, the point I would like to focus on here is, the fact Jesus did not just say these are the two greatest commandments and then there are other things you should consider as well. No, Jesus said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets." Matthew 22:40 In doing this, Jesus was making clear a fact that is seen all through the Bible. There is a core value to human existence, and that core value is to know God and be what He designed us to be! Everything else is not just out there around this core value, or derived on the basis of what God thinks is generally best for human existence. Everything else God has said and done has to do with pointing us back to this core!

This is why judgment starts at the house of God. That which is closest to this core is of most value. Some may say this is not true, but it is very much so, and it has directly to do with what the word Holiness means; for it means to be separated for the purposes of God. The simple fact many do not desire to be a part of this is why there will be a Judgment Day where the sheep are separated from the goats. (Matt. 25:31-33) Those individuals who are not interested in serving the purpose God created them for will have whatever time they have here, and then the judgment. (Heb. 9:27) The bottom line is they end up being nothing more than useless to the plan of God. This is why the beast in Revelation is said to go into "perdition." (Rev. 17:8) Those things which are not for God are against God. (Luke 11:23) The simple truth this shows us is that in order to truly have and be what God designed us to be, there must be a removal of everything not taking us further down the path to God's perfect will, because those things are constantly dragging us away from it. There are no acceptable stopping points where we can leave good enough alone - as the old saying goes. God designed us for growth, and from our perspective in the here and now we should see this as having no real end. (Matt. 5:48) Yes, there

are many at different points on the path of righteousness who will still be saved in the end, but this has to do with the fact none of us are perfect, therefore it is not possible that we be saved by our works. (Isa. 64:6) However, this does not mean there is not a focus we are headed toward, and the closer we get, or should I say, the more focused in we get, the more value our lives have to God's purpose because that is His purpose for us!

Because of the facts we just covered, it should be obvious we can not continually reach for a higher level of God's goal for our lives while here in a world of sin which is constantly at enmity with God. (James 4:4) Eventually, we can reach a level where sin creates too much drag on our progress, and we must have different circumstances in order to move higher. This is why God told Adam the judgment of sin would be death. When man brought sin into the world, God removed man from the source of his physical immortality: the Tree of Life. (Gen. 3:17-24) This is also why we are told, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." Genesis 5:24 For those who reach the ceiling of progress the here and now creates, there is a need to exit this world even before experiencing the death of their physical forms. Again, desiring to walk God's intended path in an attempt to reach the ultimate goal is what God is looking for when determining who will be saved and who will not be, because ultimately all things which are not for God must be disposed of for us to reach it. Under the new circumstances, those who desire what God designed us to be can move upward, uninhibited by those things not of God. This is the ultimate description of heaven, and this brings us back to the fact those things closest to the core are of greater value.

Some do not like this idea, but if getting closer to the core of things was not of higher value, there would be no reason for us to strive for it! Any old state of mind and being would suffice. I fear far too many people do not understand or have chosen to reject this fact, and this is how we get a world full of people who claim they serve God but think little to nothing about how they go about their lives. (Titus 1:16) Too many believe in the idea of a formulated Christianity where if we simply fulfill certain requirements we will be saved or already are, but that's not how it works. It does not matter what your formula is, whether difficult or easy, you are still trying to be saved by works. (Prov. 14:12, Eph. 2:8-10) Works cannot save you because God is not just looking for "good people." While that may have great value here in our current existence, that desire alone is not heading toward the ultimate goal for why God created us. This is why the commandment to love one's neighbor like themselves is still a secondary commandment to loving God with everything you are. God is looking for people who love Him with everything, so He can mold them into what a freewilled being can become according to His plan. Now that is valuable!

The point for our discussion here is that in building the tabernacle, God was creating a physical core for Israel to focus on. Creating something physical which would point to things eternal was a way of reaching down to where man had

What About God's Chosen People?

Part I

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."

Because this question is very general as it comes to the subject of Jews being God's chosen people, there are three arguments I believe we can and should take the opportunity to look at. The first one is the very general argument of, is there or has there ever been a chosen people? The second one, is that nation God established through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still the chosen people or have they been replaced by something such as the church? The third one, are the people we know today as the Jews really the same people as those God chose to establish through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? In truth, there is no way to fully separate these three. In answering one, you at least show your opinion as to the answer of the others. Thus, where I stand as a teacher of God's Word on these three should be fairly clear quite quickly. However, it is important to look at all three of these as separate arguments, and answer them as separate discussions; and that is exactly what we will attempt to do!

In covering our first argument of, is there or has there ever been a chosen people, I will not likely go after the angle many might expect me to. This is because I believe the answer to this is clearly, yes. However, more importantly, I believe the Bible makes this so clear that to argue there is not and/or has never been a chosen people, would indicate you simply do not believe God's Word; and that is outside the scope of this writing because that's a whole other problem. In fact, I'm sure many reading this writing will be tempted to ask why, when the Bible makes this issue so clear, would we even cover this particular thought? The answer to that question is that the discussion contains some crucial facts I believe need to be covered in order to make the other discussions clear. This is because while there may not be an argument in many people's minds about was or is there a chosen people of some kind, I find the point as to why there is, is not well understood.

A point made in the words of the submission is that the premise of the question is based on the fact a "Christian friend" has been the one making the point the Jews were not God's chosen people, and this is where we want to start. To be clear, I am not trying to put anyone in one category or another, for only God can truly do that; and I hope all those reading this understand one of the great things about the ministry God has called me to do is that I get to write what God directs me to without worrying whom I might offend. I believe all ministers should do this, but very often they do not because they are too close to the people they are talking to. Many of the questions I write answers to come from very anonymous

sources, and even when they do not, I don't really write from a perspective of personally answering any of these questions. Instead, I write with the understanding that what I say should be clear Biblical teaching, and something that must go out as teaching for all who read it, not just the question submitter. This means I write in the spirit of what Paul talked about in I Corinthians 2:2, which is that I know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I say all this because I will be very critical of Christians and Christianity in this writing, but I want people to be clear it is the theology not any individual I am talking about. We will discuss some prominent "Christian" viewpoints out there, but one of the main points of this article will be that each individual must choose for themselves where they stand on all these issues.

It has been said of both Christians and Jews that we are "People of the Book." While many religions have a book(s) they consider sacred or foundational to their belief, it is truer of no other people than Christians and Jews that we should be people who base what we believe and how we live on the words of God. How do we find these words? Well, anyone, anywhere, can find God's words through their direct relationship with God, which is Biblically called "faith." We know this because we are told in the Bible, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17 This means that somewhere along the line we had to hear God's Word in order to obtain even a beginning measure of faith. What does this tell us? Two very important things: First, it tells us we did not obtain faith on our own, but it is something God granted us by being willing to speak to us first. (Ps. 139:7-16, Rom. 5:6-8) The second fact it shows us is just how immensely important the Word of God is! Now, what we read in II Peter 3:9 is that it is not God's will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Putting this together, we should clearly understand that God speaks to humans and wants to have an eternal relationship with each and every human who has, and ever will live! Thus, from the beginning of it all, God has spoken to individuals. How do we know this? Because the Word of God has not always existed in a written form, so to believe God does not speak to people directly is to believe God did not desire to save anyone until He gave His written Word among men!

This may seem to some an obvious point, but it is one that we do not apply well. This is shown in no greater way than the arguments this question is addressing. There is, in fact, an argument out there which states God never did establish a chosen people. The argument is that the entire idea of a chosen people was, at best, a misunderstanding on the part of certain individuals who then elevated themselves. As I said, this is to believe almost everything in what Christians

call the Old Testament is incorrect and/or the story of some of the most misguided people that ever lived! As many will shake their head at such an argument and the poor ignorant people who believe it, what they do not realize is many so-called Christian philosophies are just as absurd, which is something I hope one will see as we go on.

Much of the trouble in arguments about the issue of God's chosen people stems from the fact that instead of looking at the subject of God establishing a chosen people from the standpoint of evangelism, which would go hand in hand with the points we covered above, we look at this subject as exclusion. One should ask one's self, how can it be true that God wants everyone to come to repentance if He is always creating these clubs of exclusion? The obvious answer to some people is simply that He never did establish a chosen people, and the belief that whole teaching is a fallacy. Well, if you think looking at almost the entire Old Testament, and the Jewish nation specifically, is nothing but a story of misguided people, sounds outlandish, we should stop and look at the philosophy many Christians believe. One of the most widely held of these beliefs is that God replaced one group (Israel) with a new group (the church). Especially when it comes to the idea of throwing out most of the Bible, the two theologies are not really as dissimilar as many might think!

Where we so often go wrong and certainly where we get into a lot of bickering about the chosen people subject is actually not so complicated. In truth, it comes from a simple but very large mistake. The mistake we make is we are continually connecting the message of salvation to the idea of a chosen people, and this is where the real fallacy lies! It would be wrong to say one has nothing to do with the other, but one (a chosen people in the here and now) is meant to lead to the other (salvation), and not the other way around. Simply put, what defines us as true believers in God is not what group we are, or are not, a part of in the here and now, but our faith! This is why we should all be people of God's Word. It is not man's words or the words of a doctrine which will save us. It is not the following of a law, the execution of sacraments, or anything of the like that will save us. It is our direct relationship with God Himself!

Of course, there is coming a specific judgment day in which God will separate humans into two distinct groups. Jesus refers to this as the separation of the sheep from the goats. (Matt. 25:31-46) However, the reason we are told so specifically about Judgment Day is that it will be a different day from the days we have been living in the here and now. This is one of the main reasons Revelation makes it clear this day will not take place until the here and now is completely gone and over with! (Rev. 20:11-21:8) This division of souls will also take place at a point when there is no changing your mind, because where the two groups go from there is eternal, not temporal as our world is now. We need to be clear on the fact, creating exclusive groups of people to designate who is saved, or saving people by bringing them into a specific group is not what the Bible shows us God is doing here. Nor is it what Judgment Day is about for that matter. On Judgment

Day the die will truly be cast for each individual, based on what they chose for themselves while in the here and now!

Thus, to gain an appropriate understanding of why God established a chosen people, we must follow the Biblical fact that God is not willing any should perish on that day. God would rather see all choose to come to repentance while they are here: which is turning from the sinful things of this world, desiring God and His righteousness instead. However, the other key Biblical fact we must add to our understanding is that God is not going to force anyone to choose repentance, nor make them live here until they choose it, no matter what group or bloodline they are part of. The opening story of human existence and the fact man even had the chance to eat from a tree - which God had instructed them not to because it would bring death - placed right there in the very garden God had placed man, proves this point. (Gen. 2:8-17) In this light, we clearly see any design in God's plan for a chosen people is not to set some window or framework for who is and who is not eligible for salvation. Nor is it a way of designating who is and who is not saved. Individual's choices will make the difference for every individual. Thus, we should see that God choosing a particular people is for a particular reason, and it is an evangelistic reason based on the fact repentance leads to salvation through faith, which is obtained by the hearing of God's Word!

This is what brings us to that all important verse in Romans chapter 2 where Paul asks, what benefit is there in being of God's chosen people? The answer is that unto them is committed the oracles of God! When Paul talks about the oracles, it is important to remember he is not talking about the Bible as we know it today. To be clear, he is not referring to a book or collection of scrolls containing Old and New Testaments. He is talking only about the Hebrew Bible or, again, what Christians know as the Old Testament; and even more specifically he is talking about the Torah or Law, which is just the first five books of the Old Testament. Paul was pointing out that the chosen nation is special because they are the holders of the written Words of God. Again, this is not the only way to hear the Words of God, because many heard His voice long before there was a written Word. However, in a fleshly-minded world, a tangible Word is of great value! Aside from people themselves, the most precious tangible thing on this planet is the written Words of God; and because this is true, there was a people chosen by God to hold It and be Its primary caretakers and exemplifiers! This was not so the Bible could be exclusive, but so it would always be available and never just be lost in the history of men as some old archaic history, religious, or novel writing. This is why both Jews and non-Jews who are true believers in God should be people of the Book. The chosen people's primary work is to preserve this Book and live it, so those who are not of the nation may see it, recognize what it is, obtain it, and grow in their faith through It! This is where we have things turned around backward in our heads as Christians, and we end up approaching, and thus debating the issue of a chosen people from a completely wrong viewpoint.

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

We ended our last segment by coming down to the end of the genealogy chart presented in the last issue, where one particular number is a debated issue. That number is the age of Abram's (Abraham) father at Abram's birth. The chart lists this number as 70 years old, and this is perfectly fine when looking at just Genesis chapter 11 verse 26. However, there are two other facts given to us in the Bible that, when added to this, causes some to doubt the 70 number and put Terah's age at 130 for when Abram was born. The lead consideration in this argument is the fact that at the point in Genesis 11 where we are told the 70 year old age of Abram's father, it is not like the verses leading up to it. The lead-up verses tell us the person begat his son at a certain age and then went on to beget children through the course of a particular number of remaining years of their life. When it comes to Abram's father Terah, we are simply told he lived 70 years and begat three sons, which are named Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

This is a lot like the issue of talking about Noah and him being 500 years old when he had his three sons. Like Noah, there is no information telling us Terah's three sons were necessarily triplets. Thus, there are two main ways to look at what this verse means. One is to say Terah was 70 years old by the time he had all three of these sons. The second way to look at it is to say this verse is telling us Terah was 70 years old when he became a father for the first time. Now, when discussing Noah, I said the first viewpoint was the way to look at it, and as the chart pretty much shows, I believe, this is true of Terah as well; but this is where those two other facts I mentioned above come in to the discussion. The end of Genesis chapter 11 tells us Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot out of Ur and a ways down the road of their journey to Canaan. Terah makes it as far as a place named Haran. This is a place far to the north of where the family had lived in the Mesopotamian Valley, but still along the major routes of human travel. In fact, it's just at the point where one would drop back south to enter the area of Canaan proper, the direction Ham's family took, or turn northwest toward what is Europe today, the direction Japheth's family took.

Terah would die in Haran at the age of 205, and the opening verses of chapter 12 tell us Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran and went into Canaan. This causes some to say Terah only became a father at the age of 70, because they say the number for Terah's age at Abram's birth needs to be 130. This, because if Abram was 75 when he leaves Haran, this would put his father's age at 205. Again, 205 is the age we are told Terah died, and there is the belief that Abram, being a righteous man, would not have thwarted tradition and left his father until after his father's death. This might not be such an issue except for the fact this interpretation seem to be reinforced, if not necessary, when turning in your Bible to the book of Acts. In the seventh chapter, a man named Stephen, who

was full of faith and power, is laying out the truth of the Gospel before a group of religious leaders who had accused him of blasphemy. In his words, Stephen says of Abraham, "Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell." Acts 7:4 Stephen's "Charran" is the same as Haran in Genesis, and the "...land, wherein ye now dwell." is Canaan. Thus, what it would appear Stephen is saying is that for one reason or another, Abraham did not go into Canaan until after Terah had died.

One might be tempted to ask, with all these things being said why would you not simply believe Terah was 130 when he begat Abram? Well, the problem is based on some truth you see in the chart we had in our last issue. One can clearly see in going down that chart the affect of God's statement that man's years would be 120. (Gen. 6:3) As I have mentioned before, this was not an immediate cut off where people after Noah or after Shem simply did not live more than 120 years, when their fathers just before them had been living for hundreds of years. This is not unlike the fact God had told Adam and Eve they would surely die if they ate of the fruit God told them not to, but God did not strike them down the day they ate of that fruit. No, instead, He removed them from The Tree of Life, and they died after living what - for lack of a better term - we will call their life force was capable of giving them. Under this new circumstance, what we see is they and following generations easily lived for hundreds of years before they faced death. However, just as God said, they did, in fact, die, which would not have happened if they could have continued to access the Tree of Life. In much this same way, God did not cut man's age to 120 years at the time of the flood, but it was as if God turned down the flow gate of longevity for man when He said humans would have an age limit of 120 years. This, like turning down the flow of water from a dam on a river, was not seen, especially in its entirety, all the way down stream all at once. Thus, Shem, who lived for 600 years, gave birth to a son who did not have the life force his father and grandfather had. Arphaxad would not even outlive his father, dying at the age of 438. This was over the 120 year mark by far but not in anyway in-line with what past generations had easily made it to. The next couple of generations would live around that same length; but by the next generation, we see the age drop into the low two hundreds. By the time of Abram's grandfather Nahor, we see an age of only 148; and while Terah would, once again, just make it into the two hundred range, Abraham would himself only live to 175.

This is where the story really gets interesting, because a fact few Bible believing people would even think to dispute is that Abraham was a miracle in a couple distinct ways. One of God's promises to Abraham was that he would live to a good

old age, and again, I point out he lived to 175. (Gen. 15:15, 25:7-8) By far, this is good according to today's standards, because for centuries of recorded history we have lived and see people living under the 120 cap in its full effect. However, even at 175, Abraham does not live as long as his father and only 27 years longer than his grandfather had. Now, the even more pointed promise of God, related to our issue, is that Abraham would have a son in his old age, and have that son through Sarah. This would be the son to carry on with the plan of God for this family's existence. (Gen. 17:18-22) What makes this more important to our discussion is that this second promise had to be specifically emphasized to Abraham because at the age of 86 years old, his wife and he panicked. They decided they were just getting too old, and Abram would be without an heir if they did not do something, and quick! They would use Sarai's (Sarah) maid, Hagar, as a surrogate because Sarai was without a doubt considered too old. (Gen. 16:1-4) Thus, what this tells us is that they were specifically concerned about Abram's age. Through this arrangement, Abram would have a son named Ishmael, but God would inform Abram this would not be the son of promise. Then long after this, in Genesis chapter 17 verse 16, we are told Abram, then 99, actually laughed at the idea he could still have the son of promise at that same time the next year. Abraham does not just point to the idea Sarah was too old, but that he at that point would be 100. All this shows us clearly that Abraham did not believe it was normal for a man to be pushing 100 years old and still expect to have children. One has to ask, why would he be so inclined to think this way if his own father - without any mention of God's intervention I might add - had begat him at the age of 130 years old?

Another fact which goes along with all this is also shown on our chart. If you go back to Genesis chapter 5, you see sons being born at ages both below and well above 100 years old; but when you get to this side of the flood, chapter 11 shows us, after Shem the ages plunge to right around the thirty year mark. As we see today, this does not mean people did not have children beyond their thirties, but it certainly indicates people were having their children earlier in life, which makes sense considering the drastic drop in life expectancy. In light of this, Terah being 70 when he begat his first son, seems odd. At this point it is more reasonable to believe 70 would be an age to have his last son, if not even pushing it a bit at that. Thus, at first glance it might seem you are lining up all the facts by simply saying Terah was 130 when he had Abram, but upon further consideration, it would appear one is not truly taking all the facts into consideration!

So, how does one quantify all this information to understand what was really going on? I believe, again, the right interpretation is that the 70 year mark is when Terah had Abram, who was his youngest son. Like Noah's story, the sons are not listed in order from oldest to youngest. As for the idea that Terah died before Abram left Haran, I believe the words are taken just a bit too literal. As I've said before, I don't think the Bible is being inaccurate, it's just that we don't always see what is there in the right context, and this is often because we do not take the Bible as a whole. Throughout the Bible's text, we see things being laid out in a finish one thought before

moving to another, kind of writing. This can be misinterpreted if one is looking for things to be laid out in a chronological way like a story's text often is. We can also simply forget at times this fact exists about the text. However, an obvious example of this is in the way the genealogies themselves are laid out. We see it here in chapter 11 of Genesis. We are told how old a person was when he begat a certain son, we then do not wait until the appropriate chronological sequence to be told of that person's death. Instead, we are told how old that person ultimately lived and the fact they went on to have other children, who are also not specifically named. The point here is simple. When the specific events of one person's life are not something we need to know the details of in order to understand the story line the Bible is focusing us on, those details are simply not shown to us. We are given their age at the birth of the next son who is part of the path that takes us down to the next important story, and then their life is wrapped up so we can move on to their son's life in spite of the fact their life may overlap their son's life by many years, or even outlive their son.

This is common in the Bible, and I believe this is what we are seeing again when looking at the verses in chapter 12 that tell us Abram was 75 when he left Haran. The end of chapter 11 wraps up Terah's life by telling us he lived to be 205, and he died never having left Haran to go further on their journey into Canaan. The story's focus turns to the journey of Abram, not just to Canaan, but on what God was going to do with him there. After Haran, Terah was no longer a part of that story; thus, the information about his life was wrapped up in spite of the fact he lived for many years in Haran after Abram left. At the very least, we know there is more information that could be given if the details were important to us, because it is recorded that Abram takes, "...all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran;..." Whether Abram left after his father's death or before, they obviously stayed long enough in Haran to build a life there, the substance of which Abram takes with him into Canaan.

This is the point where we have to bring into the discussion another point of argument that people have about this story. There is a notion out there, and strongly held by some, that Terah and his family were simply part of a corrupt Mesopotamian culture that Abram was called out of, he being the only righteous man. I believe this is wrong. We need to put all the facts together and see them for what they are. Genesis 12:1 says that God "had" told Abram he was to get out from his kindred and his father's house. Leaving Mesopotamia and traveling to Haran was all part of following that command. If we jump back to Stephen's account in Acts, he too agrees, specifically saying in verses 2&3 that God spoke to Abraham "...when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charan,..." telling him to leave for a land God would show him. It is an important point that God tells Abram to leave behind his father's house, because under the culture of that day this would have been no minor undertaking. Thus, the story in Genesis shows us Abram's father Terah helps Abram with this task and did not hinder him!

Genesis 11 verse 31 tells us Terah was the one who gathered the people who would take this journey and leave

their home city of Ur and the region of Mesopotamia. This was no coincidence, and I believe in many circles we discount just what a blessing Terah was to his son's ability to follow God's plan. God was not waiting until there was only one righteous man on the earth to call Abram as He had with Noah before the flood. The confounding of the language and the call of Abram to his work show us God working preemptively to keep sinful man from falling into a useless state so quickly, as God had allowed man to prove he would do without God's major intervention before the flood. This means Abram needed to get out from the unrighteous ways of his family to do what God wanted of him; but as we have talked about before, God did not move Abram among righteous people. If anything, He took him among people more unrighteous than what he had been in. This is all the more reason Abram is told he will go to be a stranger in a strange land. Abram was not to blend into the people or build something out of them. Abram was being isolated, among a people he would not want his family to become lost among. This is because he also needed to make a break from his direct family. If he hadn't, he may not have had much choice in being lost among them. However, making the break from his family as well as having the resources to not end up a servant or common laborer in the new land was a challenge to this concept. Terah helped Abram do what he would have had great difficulty doing otherwise!

Terah likely leaves much of what they had in Ur as they go to Haran. We certainly see that the family is not struggling in later times. This family is still very much established in the land much later as Abraham's servant returns to get Isaac a wife, and again when Jacob returns for much the same reason. (Gen. 24:15-28, 29:1-14) Terah certainly did not bankrupt the family in Mesopotamia, and he specifically takes the younger men of his family (Abram and a fatherless grandchild, Lot) with him and leaves. These men would not be heirs to the house, but as we see in the story of Jacob and Esau, it would have been the tradition they be obedient to that heir once Terah was gone. Terah did not want this to be the case; thus, he spares Abram (along with Lot, whom he was directly responsible for) from the family upheaval which might have erupted had Abram waited to leave until after Terah was gone. At the same time, we should find it interesting that Terah did not simply give Abram the permission to leave Ur and send him off while Terah was yet alive. To do such a thing - again staying with tradition - Terah would have sent Abram away with very little, if not empty handed, and he did not wish to do this. Thus, what we see is a father who believed in the work God was going to do in his son's life, and while we know God could have and did simply in many ways provided for Abram, Terah chose to be a part of what God wanted for Abram!

What we see in Terah is not the response of a father who was hard stuck on tradition over the will of God! These are the actions of a man who desired the things of God in this world. All this is not to say Terah was a perfect man, and we certainly see later that the family he left behind was not fully righteous. This comes out in the life of Laban very clearly in that he was not a very honest man, and he certainly has idols that are very important to him. (Gen. 31:17-35) In spite of this, there is little evidence Terah was an unrighteous man. One of Terah's three

sons had died before him in Ur, and as with Jacob and Esau, Terah very well may have seen in his two remaining sons two very different men. One, Nahor, who was not so concerned about righteousness and was the rightful heir to his house; and another, Abram, who greatly desired the things of God. In taking Abram to Haran, Terah breaks Abram away from the family ties which could have bound him. Terah also is able to take what they needed to start fresh while leaving a rightful inheritance to the traditional heir of the family. Once in Haran, Terah is able to build again a house of inheritance to send with Abram as he goes on the journey God had called him to take. Another fact we are never given is how old Terah or Abram was when they left Ur. We have little idea how young a man Abram might have been when they left. The Bible shows us the important fact is that he was 75 when he truly began his journey away from his father's house into the land God had shown him.

Some may say all this strengthens the argument that Terah died before Abram left, but, again, I disagree because we must look at the heart of intent here. If Terah was trying to lift the weight of tradition off of Abram so he could do God's will without family malice, he would not have done this only to trap Abram from moving forward on the basis tradition would also dictate Abram stay with Terah until his death! Not only would this have delayed Abram from going on into Canaan, but it would have brought again the risks we just covered. The argument that his father's house was still something which belonged to his father's heir would have once again been there. This is likely why Terah also did not take the course of traveling on into Canaan with Abram but stopped at a crossroads point where he was not abandoning his family in Ur, but also not inhibiting Abram from truly leaving his father's house by going with Abram into a land where his family had no footprint!

Again, it serves to mention the substance Abram took with him - both things and servants - are said to be those things they had gotten in Haran, because this truth also does not confirm Abram stayed until Terah died. Abram broke from his father's house far from empty handed, but only with those things he and his father had built up by being industrious there in Haran. If his father had in fact brought wealth with them to Haran, those things and people would still be free to be part of what Nahor inherited upon his father's death. Terah would also not be left empty handed for the remainder of his life and maybe forced to go back to Ur himself. He likely would have had his most trusted servants with him, and plenty to live out the remainder of his years in peace, not so far from his home that even those there could not come to him if they wanted, but also not so out of Abram's reach that news of his life might be unattainable. This fact may have some to do with the words in Genesis chapter 22 where before Sarah's death, Abraham learns of his brother Nahor's house and children, from which he has the assurance to send his servant back to get a wife for Isaac.

With that, let's look at some numbers. If Abram was born when his father was 70 and left Haran when he himself was 75, Terah would have been 145 at that point. Abraham was 100

years old when Isaac was born. (Gen. 21:5) Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to wife. (Gen. 25:20) This means, depending on birthdays and how long the servant was in Mesopotamia, Abraham was about 140 when Isaac married. This would put the story of Isaac marrying Rebekah just five years after Terah's death. It is not clear if Abraham was aware of this fact or not. Nonetheless, Abraham is very concerned about Isaac. He did not want Isaac to take a wife from among the daughters of Canaan. At the same time, he is equally concerned, if not more so, about his son going back to the family in Mesopotamia, because he does not want Isaac to remake ties they had fought so hard and for so many years to break! (Gen. 24:1-9) In contrast, Abraham's grandchild Jacob is sent by his parents to the family in Mesopotamia, for two reasons. One, to get away from his brother's wrath; and two, because he also needs to not take a wife from among the Canaanites! (Gen. 27:41-28:5) The concern Abraham had about family ties had lessened by this point, and in spite of just how much Isaac and Rebekah cared about the family ties issue does not matter in light of the fact God did nothing to alter Jacob's course in this matter until it was time to set Jacob free from the family in order to return to Canaan!

The point here is, Abram left for Canaan with his father's blessing to do so, and removed the substance from his father's house well in time for that substance not to be considered part of Nahor's inheritance in any way. Abram also took Lot with him, because it is likely his father, again, being a man who believed in God, wanted Lot to be with Abram and not left with the family in Ur. This way of looking at it is more in line with what we see in the entire story of this family. Much past the time of our story here, God would be specifically referred to as The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but let us not forget, long before this time, Noah had said He was The Lord God of Shem! (Gen. 9:26) From Shem to Abraham there was an inheritance of faith in God available to those of the next generation, meaning it is a blessing to live in a family who desires God. However, each individual must still choose for themselves!

The truth is, Genesis does not record that Terah died before Abram left Haran. The only two reasons to really believe that he did not are, tradition, and the words of Stephen. I believe we have more than covered why tradition would not be a factor in Abram staying instead of following God's command to leave his father's house, so there is only the words of Stephen left. On that point, there can be two things said. First, there is another truth we see in scriptural text, which is, dead does not always mean dead, as in a person being in or ready to be in the grave! Throughout the New Testament the word "dead" is used to signify completion in one's life. This is why we see verses such as Colossians 3:3 "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Neither your flesh or spirit is dead in this statement, but it is referring to the fact that if we have put away sin in order to live for God, that part of our life is over. There are also scriptures such as Ephesians 2:5 "Even when we were dead in sins,..." referring to the fact we were, or are, in a very

real sense dead even while we live, unless we come to obey God. (Luke 9:60, I Tim. 5:5-6) There is also an example where Paul talks directly about Abraham in Romans 4:19, "...he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:..." Now, not to be graphic about it, but in one respect what Paul is talking about here is the simple fact Isaac, while a miracle, was not conceived by supernatural means. To be clear, Abraham and Sarah had to try for a baby in order to have one in spite of the fact that kind of thinking was a part of their life, under normal circumstances, which would have been behind them. This is what Paul means when he describes Abraham's body as "now dead," not that Abraham was truly dead.

This kind of context is what Stephen was using in Acts. Lest we forget, Stephen was not some non God fearing man who didn't care for the Bible but was forced to use It in this particular situation. Stephen was a great man of God, speaking in the power of The Holy Ghost. He would have spoken matching the sense of what we actually read in scripture. This fact is one of the ways we can be helped in discerning if a man's words are truly those being spoken through him by God versus those who are just twisting things for their own purposes. In speaking about Terah, Stephen was likely referencing things in the same ways as the facts we discussed earlier about how the Bible tends to finish the loose ends of one story before going on to the more focused points which may be chronologically prior. Stephen is saying, once Terah had taken Abram as far as he could in helping Abram follow God's command without hindering him from fulfilling God's command to leave his father's house, Terah's life, for the purposes of the story, is over, and the focus is then on Abram's journey into Canaan without his father.

The second point, which I believe is the better point, is also something we have really already covered. Abraham was not truly "removed" into the land of Canaan and all ties to his father's house until his father was dead. His father, according to tradition, could have called him back to Haran or even Ur for that matter. Again, this is why Terah took Abram as far as he did but no further, and then Terah let Abram go with his blessings. Instead of hindering Abram from following God's command, Terah facilitated it. He needed to do this for Abram because the family traditions could have greatly hindered Abram or scarred his good name! Thus, the entire set-up shows us Terah put Abram in a position to live his life according to God's command, and be fully removed from family ties. However, this would not be completely true until after Terah's death. If nothing else, Stephen is referring to the solid end result of the process which broke Abraham into a new and fully autonomous family group. Upon Terah's death, Abraham was truly removed into a land where he would live as a stranger!

Until next time, Shalom!

What About God's Chosen People? continued from pg. 4

Many Christians have approached and still do approach the Bible from an Old versus New Testament stance, but also from the wrong side of things. They look at things from a very religious, if not mysterious viewpoint. The Catholic church has even rejected the title, People of the Book, on the basis that church doctrine and ordinances are what people should really be about. This clarifies my point for what I mean by saying people look at Old versus New is that so many people see what God did in the Old Testament as separated from the New. They come at it from the wrong side, because they have the thought that what God did in the New is better or more relevant because it is "New." This is totally wrong, because whether Jew or non-Jew, true believers should be people of the Torah first and foremost. This is because without it there is no true and certainly no in-depth understanding of the rest of what we call the Bible!

Now, there are many who would quickly stand up and say the attitude I just described about the New being more relevant is not true about them or their teaching because they do see the "foundation" of the New in the Old, or they will say they see and teach "The Jewish roots of Christianity." The second statement is the most telling in that people use two key words: "roots" and "Christianity." In truth, this is a good description of many who believe they are better off because they do not so much throw out the Old Testament as others do. It's true they may not throw out the Old as wrong or irrelevant, but they still see the Bible entirely wrong in that they look at the Old Testament as a thing that "was," and the New Testament as the thing that "is." In the end, there ends up being very little difference!

What almost all Christian religious theology boils down to, and at the heart of the belief, is the thought God started in a place and with a plan that then had to be changed or did change over the centuries of human history. Now, I will not dispute there have been changes in what we see throughout the Word of God. However, the important thing to understand about what we see is that God was not and is not changing, nor is His plan! God is following His plan through it all. What we see changing is due to the fact God's plan was, from the beginning, one that included a free will for man. This means we see man exercising that free will and creating the course we have followed. The problem is that this course has taken man further and further away from God's desire. Because God did not set us up for failure, God started us out with what was best for us if we were willing to follow His desire for our existence. The steps we see as change that God has taken at particular times are due to the fact God's plan was designed to make the adjustments from what is best for us under ideal circumstances, to what is best for us in the unrighteous circumstances man has chosen.

This, again, is a truth we see right off as man took of the fruit God told them not to; and because of what it brought into their lives, man was driven from The Tree of Life. What many lose sight of is that in man doing what he has done, man has never forced God to do anything God was not prepared to

do from the foundation of the world. It is a truth that God had to go in one direction instead of another because man chose one direction instead of another, but neither of these directions were something God had to figure out as He went along. God told Adam that in the day they ate of the fruit He told them not to, they would surely die; and being separated from the source of the flesh's immortality - The Tree of Life - was exactly what happened when they did it. Man has disappointed God in that man continues to choose the unrighteous path in life which just keeps making things in the here and now harder; but this was from the beginning, according to God's plan, man's choice to make!

Talking about man's free will takes us back to the discussion which may clarify the subject better, and that is the subject of salvation. When we talk about people seeing or believing in the Jewish roots of Christianity, or the Old Testament being a foundation to the New, what we are more often than not talking about is the base idea that God has changed His plan of salvation for man. Thus, we say the salvation plan that we call Christianity is rooted in the events of the Old Testament, but still something new or different which grew forth as God changed the mode of salvation. This is a most basic fault in the thinking of those who claim to be Christian. The concept of a Christian is to say Jesus is the only way; and let me be very clear on what I say next: this is totally true. However, what Christians do not understand is that this has always been true!

Revelation 13:8 describes Jesus as The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and John chapter 1 makes it clear Jesus is The Word and was not only with God from the very beginning but was/is God! This is all part of what we just discussed about God being prepared for whatever path man chose. Not absorbing this simple fact is a major tripping point for many Christians. They believe what Christianity teaches is new as apposed to old. In doing this, Christians then split into two camps, both of which are fallacies! Some believe the thought that God replaced that which was old with that which is new. Others believe God built what is new on or out of what is old. It's true, the second thought has some superior elements to the first. To believe God replaced what is old with that which is new is so far off base, it opens the door to many things that have plagued the Christian "Church" for centuries. To say the old is replaced is to disregard the old and open the door for whatever new theology you believe you can come up with by teaching (or twisting) the words of the New Testament.

This is what created the beast we see in Revelation which has the appearance of a lamb but speaks with the voice of a dragon. (Rev. 13:11) A religion formed which calls itself by the same name given to the apostles very early on - "Christian." It claims to be the holder of the truth the apostles taught and the administrator of how to interpret and apply those truths to everyday life as the years go by. If the New Testament is not anchored in the Old, this seems plausible; and thus, we have a marquee example of this religion in the organization that calls itself the Universal Christian Church,

or Catholic. This organization believes what I just described very unequivocally. In its history is even torture and bloodshed as it fought those who were truly attempting to follow God, or just form their own church outside the Catholic "authority." However, before many of us take comfort in pointing fingers at the Catholic church for all its woes, we should realize that outside that church is still those who are much the same, just within their own organizations and groups. We can be violent or we can be passive, but what is important is that we be Biblical not organizational, individual not collective. God will not save an organization. Nor should people feel secure being in one group over another as a way to save their soul. We will all stand before God for the sins we have done, and no church, title, or grouping will matter on that day.

Why is this true? Because all have sinned and come short of God's Glory. (Rom. 3:23) This is true no matter what group you are or have been a part of. Thus, only our faith - which is our personal relationship with God - will make a difference while standing before God for judgment! (Eph. 2:8-9) While finding a church which teaches truth can help us with our walk in faith, and other true believers can as well, it is also true that we can be led away from faith if we are part of something that is wrong. How do we know the difference? By knowing the Word of God for ourselves. While on the subject of how personal our walk with God is and how much we should be spending time looking at our own lives instead of being glad we are not as "wrong" as others, let me point out a real problem we can have. People often do not have the right understanding about God's chosen people because they contain the same faulty thinking the Jewish religious leadership had at the time of Jesus' earthly appearing!

Far too much we put our hope in the merit of believing something and being part of something such as a group. In doing this, we begin to think of our ability to develop doctrine and theology as higher than our faith, which in truth is a basic flaw God gave us a tangible written Word in order to combat. We tend to think, a whole group of people can't all be wrong, but they can and often are! At its best, believing there is merit in simply believing something, especially if many others subscribe to it, is a death sentence for an individual to have. However, what can happen when we truly take it to heart is a point clearly in the story of the Gospels, which is very much passed over or never seen at all.

Jesus was not crucified because the leadership completely refused to consider He was The Messiah. Jesus was killed because He was not The Messiah they expected. They could not deny He was unmistakably more than the average prophet. (Matt. 12:22-30) In the third chapter of the Gospel of John, one of these leaders named Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night so as not to be seen by the others. Nicodemus begins his conversation with Jesus by saying, "...Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be

with him." Nicodemus does not go so far as to admit Jesus is The Messiah, but this does not really dampen what he did say. Nicodemus says they know Jesus is sent from God, because there is just no other explanation for it. This, of course, is the first and crucial step in recognizing Jesus as The Messiah. If you do not believe someone is from God, you certainly should not believe that person is The Messiah; and the entire reason for Nicodemus to admit this point is to, at the very least, indicate the question was on the table. The debate of whether He is from God or not was actually settled; and because this was true, Nicodemus wanted further information about Jesus no matter how unpopular it was.

The ultimate problem they had with Jesus is made clearer when one understands, the Jewish religion does not believe it is necessary, if even possible, for The Messiah to be God. (John 10:22-33) Jesus was not only clearly from God, but spoke with the authority of God. Because of what they believed, this was a big problem for them! (Mark 2:1-10, John 5) In fact, when looking at Jesus' trial before these religious leaders, we see that idea is what wraps up the matter of them having cause to take Jesus to the secular authority for capital punishment. In Mark 14:61-64 Jesus was asked by the High Priest, "...Art thou the Christ, the son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Upon hearing this, the High Priest rent his clothes and asked, "What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death." You see, the Apostles were not men who just accepted the fact Jesus was The Messiah the world had been waiting for, but that The Messiah was actually God. (Matt. 16:13-17, 22:41-46) This was/is not a new truth, but exactly the knowledge Abraham had, and showed when he told his son Isaac, God Himself would be The Lamb. (Gen. 22:7-8) This is why we see verses in the New Testament such as Philippians 2:6-11 where Paul explains that Jesus, "...thought it not robbery to be equal with God..." yet Jesus took on the form of a man, and allowed Himself to be crucified.

Because the Jewish religious theology said The Messiah would not be God, in spite of the fact they knew very good and well Jesus was from God, when Jesus thought it not robbery, they believed it was their right, if not their duty, to dispose of Him, if for no other reason than to protect the people from going after a Messiah Who did not line up with what their religion believed and had taught them! This is amazing stuff, but the church which now calls itself the Christian church is guilty of nothing less than this on so many points!

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.***

Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

fallen in sin and bring him back out of that miry clay of ever deepening exclusive physical thinking. This is shown in the fact God's presence would reside at that core. What we see in Numbers is the physical development of things as Israel would literally be organized around this core, and as a nation they would become a core people for all the world to focus on. The reason to create this focus is because it had value the rest of the world lacked. Thus, one simple point is that if God did not think there was value in creating a core of people, He would not have done it. However, the fact this value does not generally reside among men means the core people had to be further down the path than the average person or nation of people in order to have that value. This is what the book of Leviticus deals with!

In a literal physical way, the closer you got to the tabernacle the closer you came to the physical presence of God! The reason why this cannot simply exist just anywhere on the planet, again has to do with those facts about the things of this world being at enmity with God. Thus, a place had to be prepared for God to come down in this very physical way, or the presence of God would destroy all that came near. Simply put, all could not come near! Thus, the name of our next book is "Leviticus," and it means, "pertaining to Levites." One of the laws God gives to Israel is that all those who are first-born belong to Him. This is true not just of people but also of animals. (Ex. 13:1-2) When celebrating Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication), which remembers the miracle of the temple lights staying lit for eight days when there was only one day's supply of oil available as the temple was retaken after being desecrated during the time of the Greeks, there are eight nights of lighting candles. You add one new candle each night until there are all eight on the last night. When lighting the candles each night, one is to light the newest candle of the group first, and move back through the candles continuing from newest to oldest. For example, on the third night you would place two candles in the places where there had been candles the night before, and place a third candle in the next space to the left, representing the third day. This third candle would be the one you light first out of the three. Why is it done this way? Because, we honor that which is new. This is not in the same thought pattern as so much of the world has today, which is that we always have to be finding something fresh to be trendy. No, we honor that which is new because it can carry on that which is old.

Each new day is a new opportunity to serve God and grow closer to Him; and as a nation, Israel knows that each new generation is the opportunity to see that which God gave them in His Word carried on in this world. The existence of a new generation means the continuance of the nation. In truth, this is not so different from the way many people think, and it is why it is tradition in almost every culture around the world to leave the first-born child the inheritance of the family's property and goods. In a royal family, it is the tradition that the first-born become the next ruler in the line of succession. In some cases daughters are not counted and these things go to the first-born son, but the concept is the same. We may not

live in a culture that follows these things so much today, but we all clearly understand the concept that having a child represents the continuance of the family. This is also why grandparents are often very happy to see their grandchildren get married and have children. To see yet another generation before you yourself leave this earth is considered quite a big deal.

All this relates to why God took the first-born unto Himself among Israel. Fleshly minded people worry about carrying on fleshly things, but God was saying, every new generation of this nation (Israel) belongs not to this world but to Him, just as those who came before had. Thus, it is not just about the idea God takes ownership of the first-born as much as it is a continuing symbol the entire nation belongs to God and is designed to do the work of God's Law, generation after generation. (Ex. 19:4-8) Now the law would give ordinances as to sacrifices that had to be made for the redeeming of first-born among both people and animals. (Ex. 13:11-15) This was done in order to continue making the point we just covered. However, what God instructed overall was that He would not literally take each individual first-born from each family. Instead, God would take the tribe of Levi in place of the first-born among all Israel. (Num. 1:46-50, 3:5-13) This would do two things. First, it would simplify the process of who was, as individuals, dedicated to the full-time work of God. Those dedicated to full-time work, and specifically the priesthood, would be all one family group. The first-born of every household would not have to be given up as a baby, or leave their parents at a young age to be trained and used in this work. Nor would a person have to wait until they were very much an adult, or close to it, before they entered what would be a whole new world of training, which their parents were not likely to have been able to give them.

God set up the family unit when He created the woman Eve for the man Adam. Male and female together were able to bring new individuals into this world; and in spite of what sin has caused in our world, having a mother and a father to raise a child is the way God planned it to be. In choosing a tribe, instead of taking each first-born for God's work, God did not disrupt this natural cycle of the way He established children to be raised; and that brings us to the second point. As a family group, the children were not just raised without having to leave their parents, but they were raised by parents and as part of an entire family who served in the capacity they would ultimately serve. From their very earliest memories there would be this full-time service to God. They also would get the hands on training of being a part of full-time ministry, which is very important for not just full-time ministry work, but true lifetime ministry work!

In the New Testament, we read the instructions given by The Holy Ghost through Paul about who is eligible for ministry work, in particular full-time ministry. (I Tim. 3:1-15) In those instructions Paul says, one who is to be of spiritual leadership in the church should not be a novice. Not following this instruction has been the downfall of many a minister over the years. Far too many people and organizations believe that,

especially after some course of prescribed training, a person is ready to get out there; but there is no taking the place of hands on experience! I'm in no way saying there must be some rigorous study program every minister must pass through before he goes into some internship that lasts for many years, or that every minister must have formal training approved of men or some organization. Men often do not focus on the right things in developing these courses, and there certainly are those who are thrust into ministry work by virtue of circumstances, who do not have the time or availability of such a program. We also should consider the fact we see many in the Bible who did not believe they were able to do the work, even knowing God Himself was calling them to it, because they believed they were untrained. Moses is one of those examples, but this did not change the fact God was calling him to get to work! (Ex. 3:1-4:17) The truth is, no matter what formal training we have had or lack there of, a person in ministry must first and foremost trust God and not lean to his own understanding. Thus, learning to trust God and hear His voice is mostly what we're talking about when saying someone should not be a novice!

Knowing how to hear God's voice in one's life is always a key to every true believer's success; and as individuals, each person grows in this as the circumstances of their life and their desire for God leads them to seek it. However, no where is it more important than when taking on the responsibility of the ministry. One can not afford to be a novice in this area. Thus, to be eligible for ministry, one should have made it a long term focus in their life before entering the field. For that, there is no better way to prepare than to be in a family of people who are already living every day walking this kind of walk. We also should not discount just how much it is true, one learns a lot about what it means to be in full-time ministry and the commitment they are truly making in life. Children who grow up in a family committed to ministry take many things as typical that people entering the ministry from outside this life can find very difficult to handle or accept! God would give all the advantages to being part of a ministry family to those called into it, by taking one tribe, instead of each first-born individual, to be His direct ministers and priests!

This is also why we have a book of Leviticus, and in the place it is. It is not just the most straight forward or raw look at actual laws, but it specifies the job of the Levite tribe and priesthood to prepare them to do the task that with the establishment of the tabernacle was then at hand. However, this is where we should really see the beauty of the book! In many religions there are hidden things which elders know or which reside in writings only some have access to, or you have to reach a certain level to access. However, as God establishes His people and gives them His written Word, He puts all these instructions right up front! God does not set this book aside, but puts it in between two books which tell us where Israel came from, and two that tell us where God took them from there. God created a core, but not only is there great value in the core, its very existence is meant to

demonstrate to us what we are or all should be striving for!

Leviticus is about the establishment of a core inside the core of Israel, given the task of maintaining and going into the place prepared for the direct presence of God! This is why it is more of a pure law book, but we should never think of it as just a bunch of procedural laws no one outside the Levites should care about. Some of what we see in Leviticus has to do directly with what a Levite, or more specifically a priest, should be like or do in order to serve before God. However, much of what we see are also laws that tell us what kind of people the rest of the nation needed to be in order to come and interact with the job the Levite was tasked with. It is not just about what the priest should know in how to perform the right sacrifice in the right way and for the right reason, but so the non-priest could know what to bring to the altar in the first place and for what reason. It's not just about the righteousness the Levite must live continually in order to stand before God and serve in His ministry, but about what is expected of all who desire to come before God!

We should understand that all of what God set up in establishing the nation of Israel is to demonstrate the things of God. It is not about establishing a religion or formula for salvation, even for the people of Israel. It is a physical way to reach out to us and demonstrate what we should really be seeking after, which are heavenly things, not earthly. Thus, the book of Leviticus is a book meant to train the Levites how to do their job; and in showing us what they would be responsible for, it demonstrates the kind of separation from the things of this world we are truly in need of to become what God designed us to be!

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