

Free - Take One



Shaqah

שפאקא

*“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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Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we covered a lot of ground by covering a lot of stories in the time line of Abraham's life and family. However, we did so in the process of discussing the age of Abraham's father at Abraham's birth, and the family traditions Terah helped Abraham overcome in order to follow God's will for his life. What this means is that while our discussion may have covered many facts, we did not truly look at each verse at the end of chapter 11. Thus, we will back up a bit and do a few things that may be somewhat of an overlap as we go forward in a more direct way in talking about the life of Abraham!

For that purpose, we will start at verse 28 of Genesis chapter 11, which tells us, out of the three sons Terah had, only two: Nahor and Abram went on to live full lives, because their brother Haran would pass away. That being true, he did not die before having a son named Lot, and at least two daughters. It also took place while the entire family was still living in their native country and city which was Ur of the Chaldees; and this, of course, means Terah was still alive. However, Lot was a young man, if not just a boy in many ways, when his father passed away, and this left Lot in the direct charge of his grandfather Terah, as if Lot was simply one of his sons. Thus, again, like Noah, this family would consist of three branches, coming through three sons, each of whom would go on to be a people in some way.

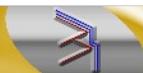
Now, in the case of Nahor, he would simply continue the family line which he was born into, and be the patriarch of what it became. Terah would move away from their ancestral land, and Nahor would eventually inherit his father Terah's land, title, and everything the family went on to be. In the case of Abraham, who at this point should be referred to by his given birth name of

simply Abram, we have the man the Bible's narrative would begin to focus on; because while he would be the father of many nations, from him would come God's chosen nation. Of course, we can not leave out Lot in all this, and be clear on the fact, while he would leave the family's home country and end up with Abram in Canaan, he too would become, not just a part of Abraham's eventual nation(s), but two distinct peoples who would live alongside Israel through much of the Hebrew Bible's narrative.

What we see starting in verse 29 is that the family was not going far and wide in order to find spouses at this time. This empathizes just how much the people being spread abroad after they left the tower, split down the family line of the three sons of Noah. Then, even among the specific family group of Shem, Terah's family stayed very much within their house in order to find wives. Both Nahor and Abram would marry daughters of their late brother Haran. Nahor would marry Milcah, and Abram would marry Sarai. Nahor and Milcah would go on to have a son named Bethuel, whose daughter Rebekah would eventually become the wife of Abram and Sarai's son Isaac. Rebekah would also have a brother named Laban, whose daughters Rachel and Leah would become Isaac's son Jacob's wives.

By today's standard this would not be acceptable, as there would be many birth defects likely to show up in the children of such inter-family marriages. However, we know today's truth has a lot to do with changes or what might be better described as deterioration in the human form over the centuries. We know this because we see God originally built the entire human race from only one

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man and one woman. This is why Adam names his wife, who was even taken directly from him to begin with, "Eve." Eve would be the mother of all humans. (Gen. 3:20) After the flood, we can not be sure how much intermingling there was between Naoh's three son's families before the leaving off of the tower, but there certainly had been a keeping track of who was of Ham's, Shem's, and Japhath's lines. This would have, at the very least, been done by looking at the line the males were from. As the families spread abroad, there developed more specific tribes, and what might be considered ethnicity out of these three groups. What we see take place in the development of Israel is the process that truly creates an ethnic identity distinguished by the solidification of a genetic marker, which would certainly make Israel truly a distinct group.

This would be accomplished because both Abram and his brother would start it off by marrying women who were of their father Terah's direct family. Both Milcah and Sarai were Haran's daughters. That would make them Abram and Nahor's nieces. Which means the second generation in Abram's family, through Isaac, would marry a woman who today we would say was his cousin once removed, when looking at it from his father's side. This, because Rebekah was the daughter of Bethuel, who was the son of Abram's brother Nahor. This means Isaac would technically be in the same generation as Bethuel, making Rebekah's father Isaac's cousin. When looking at it from both Isaac's and Bethuel's mothers' side, Isaac also married a cousin once removed; because Milcah and Sarai were sisters, again making Bethuel and Isaac cousins. The confusing part comes in when crossing over from the mothers to fathers. Because Abram was Milcah's uncle, Isaac and Milcah were cousins, making Bethuel Isaac's cousin once removed and Rebekah a cousin twice removed. However, since Nahor was Sarai's uncle, Sarai and Bethuel were cousins, making Isaac and Rebekah second cousins.

All this becomes even more complex when talking about the next generation of Abram's family, for Jacob was Isaac and Rebekah's son, and he married Laban's two daughters, Rachel and Leah. Laban was Rebekah's brother, and in this aspect Jacob was Rachel and Leah's cousin. However, in the same aspect that Jacob's father Isaac and mother Rebekah were second cousins, so too were Isaac and Laban; thus, making the sisters, Rachel and Leah, third cousins with Jacob. To put it more simplistic, this kind of intermarriage made for three distinct generations of the family who would become God's chosen nation, very genetically tied together!

That being said, some find the wording in verse 29 very odd; because there we find what appears to be three

women mentioned, leaving one of the most important unidentified as to who she is and where she comes from. The easy one out of the three, of course, is Milcah. Nahor married her, and it is made clear she is his niece by way of being his deceased brother Haran's daughter. The other identified woman was named Iscah. She also is clearly identified as Haran's daughter. However, the woman Abram married, named Sarai, seems to some to be unidentified until later events, which take place in Egypt and Canaan. Without taking the time at this point to go through the ends and outs as to why it comes up, Abram makes Pharaoh very upset with him for describing Sarai as his sister in Genesis chapter 12. In chapter 20, the king of Gerar, Abimelech, was put in a very similar position; and Abram (by then renamed Abraham) describes Sarai (by then renamed Sarah) as being his sister. He tells the king she is the daughter of his father but not of his mother.

Now, this would seem to indicate that Sarai was Abram's half sister. However, this is looking at it from our modern and/or cultural terminology and standpoint. There are two things we need to understand here. First, terms such as brother, sister, and the like were often used to denote close family relationship, not necessarily to specify that someone was literally a brother or sister rather than something such as a nephew or niece. Second is the cultural aspect of family members being practically owned by the elder father or male of a clan, almost as if they were property. For centuries the tradition of families in many cultures was not to get married and then go out on your own doing your own things. Not only did parents select the spouses of their children, which is actually a practice that has only faded in more recent centuries and is actually still strongly held by some cultures to this day, but often the man would build a new room or set of full living quarters directly onto his parents' house, which might already be directly connected to what we would call his grandparents' house. Living under one, so very connected, roof altogether made the terms of brother and sister more ambiguous than we see them today. There are also places where linguistic weaknesses in English leave us, in some cases, without the slight variant of a word that in the original language may have given us the clue we were not talking so literally.

Of course, some would argue here that Abram makes the specific point Sarai is his father's daughter but not of the same mother. While this may seem to emphasize she truly is his half sister, we have to take a look again at that responsibility and ownership thing, especially when it came to females. We don't know how old Sarai was when her father Haran died, but she is only about ten years younger than Abram; and it would not seem from the verses in Genesis 11 that Haran was around to be involved with the decision of Nahor and Abram taking Milcah and

What About God's Chosen People?

Part II

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."

I said at the end of our last segment that Jesus was delivered by the religious leaders of the day to be crucified by the secular authority of the day, not because the religious leaders believed Jesus was by no means of God or received His power from God, but mostly because Jesus was not The Messiah their religious beliefs had taught them He should be. I could add to that the fact it also had a lot to do with what they knew Jesus would mean to their own positions as leaders and their religious authority in making the rules as they saw fit. Even Pilot knew it was for envy that they had brought Jesus to him, asking for capital punishment to be carried out. (Matt. 27:17-18) However, I truly ended last time by making the statement - the church, which now calls itself the Christian church, is guilty of nothing less than this on so many points!

Now, I have no doubt that in saying this, I may and am sure I have upset many; but as I also said in our last segment, it is not my goal to judge any individual, only to teach what God tells me to. The simple point of the matter is that the Christian religion may never have gotten the chance to kill The Messiah, but disposing of things we know very good and well are of God because they do not, in our minds, go along with, or facilitate, our thought patterns as to what is best in this world, especially for our "time," is something people readily do! That brings us back to the point at hand, which is that we believe in an Old versus New Testament. In believing even the better theology that Christianity is in someway(s) rooted in the Old Testament, it is still the definition of the Christian religion that you believe Jesus changed something about the way people are saved. Thus, there is a belief there is a new religious way to serve God that did not exist until Jesus came. Along with this, many, of course, believe that makes the "church" the new authority, and it ultimately negates Israel as a chosen people, at least in many aspects.

Many Christians may simply get caught up in mistakenly using the words such as "rooted" and "founded" in the Old Testament, because we do not often have the room to teach the fundamentals that make up the truth. However, when we use these words, whether intentionally or unintentionally, we often still portray a belief that there is something new which grew or was built out of the Old that Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Daniel, and all those who

were true believers before the coming of Christ did not have, and this is untrue at its core! We believe we live in a special dispensation of time because we only have to call upon a name to receive something or take advantage of someone who was unavailable to earlier people who walked this earth! The truth of the matter is, that in believing such things, we believe the same things that brought Jesus to the cross. We do not believe Jesus was/is truly God!

This is the key to what I said before about the salvation issue making our viewpoint clearer! The Christian religion teaches, and many believe, there is something new or different on this side of The Messiah's coming, pure and simple. If that point is not clear to you, please allow me to break it down as simple as possible. Quoting once again, not from the Old Testament but from the New, John makes it unequivocal in the opening verses of his Gospel, by point-blank telling us Jesus was/is God. He has not just been with us from the beginning of all things, but is responsible for our creation! If we do not believe that Jesus, our Creator, has always been involved in the process of this human existence and available to all people, then we are calling John a liar! We use lame excuses for explaining ourselves out of this by saying, "Well, all we are really saying is that people did not know the name of Jesus before He came, or that Jesus had not yet died for our sins and that changed everything." However, that is a very weak point to try and make, especially when it does not show up in what you teach. What both "Christians," who practically throw the Old Testament away, along with those who believe Christianity is founded or rooted in the Old, believe is that the ceremonies, such as animal sacrifice and the law in general, which God gave to the children of Israel, could and would save a person, or at least preserve a person for salvation, if they followed it at the time before Jesus' sacrifice. The new belief is now that formula is old and will not work because we have a new one! This is true even of those who teach that the law must still be followed, at least to some degree, even by non-Jews who believe in Jesus, in order for one to be saved!

The Christian religious belief is simple! Those who still depend on the Old Testament and the Laws God gave to the children of Israel will die in their sin on this side of Jesus if they do not complete the Christian formula. However, those who convert and accept Jesus as their Saviour will be saved. The fact different theologies teach there may or may not be other qualifying actions that need to go along with this base idea is irrelevant. All this is what I like to call "formulated

Christianity.” It is the belief that a formula will save you instead of the belief that we are saved only by grace through our faith, which God has offered every man from Adam forward!

Paul goes over this thoroughly in Romans chapter 3. He says the circumcised - those who are following the Law God gave to His chosen people - can be justified before God by the faith they are born into. In other words, what they have set in front of them through the teachings of the Law, from the time they are children, is God speaking to them through the very life that Law teaches them to live. They are, by tradition, being taught God's Word. Now to be clear, tradition will not save their souls, especially tradition not truly founded on what God's Law says but on what man makes up on his own. This is what the religious leaders of Jesus' day show us people are capable of doing, to an astonishing degree! However, the practice of truly looking into and attempting to live the Laws of God offers the circumcised faith; and if they are only willing to accept the free gift of a relationship with God instead of just following the words as a religious tradition, this faith will justify them before God.

On the other hand, the uncircumcised - those living outside the law - do not have the guidance the written Law automatically brings so directly into the life and actions of a child born into the chosen people or a person who comes to live among them and as them. They do not have the opportunity to realize from the start, or even wake up one day to the realization that all the things the Law taught them to live was God speaking directly to them and using their lives to speak to others. In spite of this, they can still have faith brought about by the hearing of God's voice, which will come to them through the work of The Holy Ghost. It may possibly be the reading or hearing of God's written Word, which very much can include exposure to God's chosen people; or on this side of Jesus' first coming, it may originate through the teaching of the Gospel, which is the truth The Messiah has, in fact, come, that God has truly provided Himself as The Lamb to be slain for the ultimate washing away of our sins! (Gen. 22:7-8) Also, as we discussed before, it can be God simply speaking to them, not through someone but more directly to their heart. The fact this can be true is one of the reasons why Paul also talks in Romans about how Abraham himself was called to be the father of a chosen people, himself not yet having the Law of circumcision. (Rom. 4:1-14) If those without the Law also choose to reach out and take the free gift of faith God is offering, they too will be justified before God by their faith!

This is how it works. No one will be justified by the works they do or formulas they ascribe to: whether following the Law or not; whether saying a “sinners prayer” or not! Only what is done in their life because of and based on their direct relationship with God will be considered in the

granting of eternal life. This, in turn, means those who are without the Law who do not walk in a relationship with God are doomed, and those who follow the Law, even to the letter, who are not doing it as part of their direct relationship with God, are doomed. What we see is that there is little to no difference between the Jew and the non-Jew, those who were commanded to carry out the ordinances of the Law and those who have not been, those who understand the man Jesus was The Messiah and those who have not come to receive that good news as yet, which includes those who have not yet understood or even heard of Jesus at all, nor had the chance to read, and/or hear read, God's written Word. This is true for both Jews and non-Jews in all parts of the world, and not really any different than it was for those who lived before The Messiah's first coming. The only real difference is the element that we now have the good news that The Messiah has, in fact, come, and can teach that truth to those who have not yet heard or come to understand it! The only thing that separates anyone from anyone else when it comes to who will and who will not be saved is there are those who at all different levels of understanding, and in all different time periods, walk or have walked in a relationship with God; and there are those who did or do not!

All this is key to our understanding of the question we are addressing here, because the first thing that must be understood is there is a language weakness. Not just English versus other languages, but the inability to speak with simple words and convey full understanding. When we say there is a chosen people, we all very much understand we are saying there is a group of people who were chosen to be used specifically by God. However, the clearer and more full understanding is that there are those who, as a bloodline, were designated to be God's chosen nation, and unto them was committed the oracles of God. (Rom. 3:1-2) At the same time, when it comes to there being an overall category of people chosen by God, we should understand the fact there are people of all ages, time periods, and from all groups who chose, choose, or will choose to walk in faith. On Judgment Day, these will forever be separated from all others and taken to the place Jesus said He was leaving this earth to go and prepare for those particular individuals. (John 14:1-3, Rev. 20:11-21:8) This is the answer to our first question of, is there a chosen people at all? Yes, there are chosen people, and yes there is a chosen people. Chosen people are those who have a relationship with God, but the chosen people, as in the bloodline of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob may be more clearly understood by referring to them as God's chosen nation. We should all understand what is being said either way, because the clear point is simply this, there is a specific people chosen by God to be His nation among the nations of the world. This, because through the course of time man has made choices as to how to conduct his life and this world, and at a specific point in the time line, there became

a good reason to have such a nation on this earth! At the same time, God did this because it is not His will that any should perish, but that all come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

This brings us solidly to our second argument of this discussion, which is the question of, 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? As I said at the first of this Q&A, it is hard not to know what my opinion is on this argument from what we've already talked about. However, we will look at this as more of a stand-alone issue, nonetheless.

Again, we simply go back to what Paul wrote in Romans chapter 3 where he poses the question about what advantage is there in being of God's chosen nation, and answers it by saying, in every way they have an advantage in that unto them was committed the oracles of God! In answering our first argument about there ever being a chosen people or that there still is, I may or may not have gotten the point across clearly that there is and has been because there is a need for them. To be blunt, that need was/is to hold the oracles of God so the knowledge of Who God truly is would never be lost among men! This brings us to another critical point about what Christians teach and many believe. You see, the reason true Christianity bases what it does on the Man Jesus Christ is because we claim to know who Jesus is. The problem is that many who call themselves Christians do not really know Who He is, especially in the context of the oracles of God!

Just as so many Christians point their finger at Jews for not believing in Jesus, Jews have the right to point back that Christians don't know why it matters to believe in Jesus, or anyone else as special, for that matter. Many Jews do not believe in Jesus because they do not accept the idea Jesus was and is The Messiah. This is in no small part because their religion has not accepted it. The problem with Christians is that they don't really understand what it means to say Jesus is The Messiah! Christians claim to teach the gospel, which means "the good news." However, very few understand that the good news is not simply that Jesus can save your soul. Remaining in this simple understanding is what leads much of what calls itself the church to get into or adopt practices much like the many pagan societies and their religions, which exist and have existed all over the world. If we never grow in our understanding, it's easy, whether we are aware it is happening to us or not, to slip into the idea that Jesus dying on the cross and raising from the dead is some magical event, not unlike the mythical stories of many cultures who believe following death their god or gods await them in a "better place." This may be a starting point for many people outside God's chosen nation, but this kind of thought pattern is not where The One True God of the universe desires our understanding to end.

It is true that many people may never progress to

understand a very great depth of God's plan and how it works. Fortunately, how far we make it on our path of understanding is not what we will be judged on, and that is why we have the words of Romans 10:9 "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Believing on Jesus as your Saviour and reaching out to Him for the relationship He wants to have with you is having faith in God, because Jesus is God. However, as one has time to live this life and experience the trials it contains, as well as hear the philosophies of men, it is of great benefit to know there is greater depth to God's plan for human existence than the pagan idea that we simply go on to be in a better place after death. The misunderstanding of this point is why so many Christians readily believe the word "faith" means blind belief! While we must trust God in the way a child trusts a parent, God wants us to grow and know Him better and better, not just grope in the darkness of mystical beliefs and misunderstanding. (Luke 18:15-17, Matt. 5:17-48)

There is great value in knowing that God, from the foundations of the world, did not create man to be unrighteous; but at the same time, God had a plan as to how to save man if man fell into sin. (Rev. 13:1-9) This is why even in Christian churches we are, or at least should be, thoroughly taught the creation story from Genesis, along with the events that followed. These stories tell us how we got to where we are and why Jesus had to do what He did. Now, Genesis just happens to be the first of five books called the Torah, meaning "Law;" and these five books, after the Ten Commandments, are the first written words God gave His chosen nation to have and to hold. The good news of the New Testament is Jesus came and proved that over the centuries God did not change His mind. In spite of all man's unrighteousness, God never decided His plan for our salvation just wasn't worth it. He still loved us so much, He followed through with the fact that because we fell short of His perfection, He would have to save our existence by coming down in human flesh and sacrifice Himself for us! (Rom. 3:23, Matt. 20:25-28)

Now, all of what I just covered, of course, is a very shorthand version of the idea, but it shows us a simple point. We need the Hebrew Bible, or what many of us would call the Old Testament, if we are to gain a deeper understanding of God and how much He created us in order to be with us! Without the Hebrew Bible, especially the Torah, we can never know or understand what it truly means to say Jesus is The Messiah; and thus, gain the security of knowing He was and is the fulfillment of God's desire to save human existence for the very same reason He created us to fulfill in the first place. You see, Christianity is not just founded on, or has its roots in, these more ancient words. Whether Jew or non-Jew, true Christianity is to see and accept Jesus as the fulfillment of what those who have

and will walk in faith through all the centuries since creation have been waiting on, or looking for!

Without the Hebrew Bible, the work Jesus did, and Christianity in general, seems to be nothing more than just another one of the many religions in this world. True Christianity is not, and it was/is vitally important to the saving of many souls that it not be seen in this light! Thus, God was not going to simply entrust the job of ensuring the knowledge contained in the Hebrew Bible and its continuance and demonstrative practices to just the world at large! No, God was going to establish a people who would see His Words as their very cultural heritage, and that is what God did by establishing a chosen nation!

This brings us to the heart of our discussion about, has God's chosen nation been replaced by something such as the church? If one has a good grasp on why God established the nation in the first place, one should simply be asking themselves, how could it? The true church consists of both Jews and non-Jews who have faith in God. This, again, has to do with that understanding there are chosen people and a chosen nation. As a group, as well as individual members, the church, of course, has a mission very directly related to what God's chosen nation is called to do, but there is no way the church could ever replace the nation as those entrusted with God's oracles! As a group, the Law is not part of the church's physical history. It was not intentionally integrated into the history of who we are as individuals, unless we are a member of the chosen nation. This fact is why the Law teaches that if anyone not blood born into the nation wanted to truly live among them, they would have to become as one who was blood born in order to truly become part of the nation. (This truth speaks to why so many also have and do believe to this day that anyone who chooses to follow Jesus should take on the Law as a blood born, in at least some fashion.) The Law also makes it clear that the reverse of this is true. Those born into the nation who did not follow or want to follow the ordinances of the Law were to be cut off from the nation!

There was and still is no point in having a specific nation or group of people entrusted with God's oracles if they are not truly dedicated to them, and this specific point will come up again later in this study as we discuss the Jews truly being Israel of old. There is also no point in making those entrusted with the oracles a secret society of some kind. They were to be exposed to the world, not hidden. This point, again, is shown to us in the Torah, in the book we know as Exodus. As God brings Israel out from being slaves to what was at that time the most powerful nation on the earth, He does not sneak them out in the middle of the night, but literally uses Pharaoh's hard stubborn heart to do it in grand fashion!

All these points apply to the reason God's chosen nation could not be a group composed of a randomly chosen, among all walks of life, group that would be hard to find or identify. God wanted to separate the truth from the general religions of men in this world, by committing a specific people with the task of performing the demonstrative parts of the Law. This, again, is because performing ceremonies and formulas such as pagan religions do is not what having true faith is about. The "church" can create all the ceremonies they want, but they shouldn't; because only those things commanded by God should be part of our lives, and only they truly have the teaching value we need. In any case, nothing the Christian religion could come up with could replace the chosen nation and what was given to them directly by God, and the way it was given. This is why it is a fact that not only were those outside the nation not commanded to demonstrate the Law through the Levitical priesthood and practices all Israel was to perform, but many of these practices are forbidden to those outside the nation. (Lev. 22:9-10, Num. 3:5-10, Ex. 12:43-49) Again, this has to do with the fact God does not want these things to be composed of just whatever various cultural beliefs might make them. God wanted the demonstrative practices to be by His design, in order to show what He had designed for humans, and to be the historical and cultural beliefs of a specific nation.

The Law was/is to offer the world faith, and to teach us what righteousness truly is. Along with this, it shows us what it means to be separated out for the purposes of God, which is what the word "holiness" means. This is why in spite of the fact there are many practices of the Law those on the outside of the nation can't directly be involved in demonstrating, by no means signifies non-Jews should not learn about and observe things such as the feasts and other practices of the Law. This is why God committed His oracles to a specific nation, but gave His Word to all the world! All the ordinances of the Law have prophetic meaning, much of which Jesus fulfilled when He came, and will continue to fulfill at His return. In the end, the point here is, there never is, or at least there should never be, any arguing over whose responsibility it is to be, and who we should look to as the primary holders and demonstrators of these ordinances!

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. 2

Sarai as wives. This means, Sarai could easily be Haran's daughter, but being raised so directly and the responsibility for her having fallen so completely to Abram's father Terah, it would be a simple cultural viewpoint for Abram to identify her as having the same father, but, of course, they specifically did not have the same mother. Sarai's mother, being the wife of Haran, may not have been in any way so closely related to the family in the ways we just covered about Nahor and Abram. This may have been very true of Abram's mother, he being the direct son of Terah. Thus, there would be no terms under which Abram and Sarai would have been considered to be of the same mother; and Abraham shows his honesty in making this point.

Some would bring into this argument that much later in the Law of Moses, marriages of truly direct sisters or half sisters were forbidden. (Lev. 20:17) However, this is not really a point in the argument, because the written Law had not been given yet; and we even see that the Law about a man not marrying sisters was made so as not to "vex" either sister. This likely has its basis on the fact Jacob had done this long after these stories about Abram, and it definitely caused some family tumult. (Lev. 18:18) Also, by the time the Law was given, God was certainly laying out rules that would deal with the growing physical deterioration we talked about as to why we do not consider this a good practice in anyway today, even beyond the social taboo it is in most cultures now. I covered all this to simply point out that it is not unreasonable in any way to say Sarai was Abram's niece in the same way Milcah was to Nahor. However, that brings us back to the simple question of why is Sarai not listed with Milcah as one of the daughters of Haran? The answer is that she is listed - for what's in a name?

Chapter 11 verse 29 identifies two daughters of Haran directly in relationship to the fact Nahor marries Milcah and Abram marries Sarai. One of these is, of course, Milcah, thus the point about her is clear. However, the other is a woman named Iscah. I believe the answer lays for the most part in what we talked about in our last segment. Terah may not have been a perfectly Godly man, but I think the story shows us Terah wanted to help ensure Abram was not hindered in following God's plan for Abram to move out of his father's house. Terah wanted to facilitate it as much as he could without violating God's directive that Abram leave his father's house completely! In Acts chapter 7 verse 2, Stephen clearly states that Abram was given this command while still in Mesopotamia before he left for Haran. The fact this command does not show up until after the record of Terah's death, which did not take place until he, Abram, and Lot had lived in Haran for some time, also goes back

to a point made in our last segment, which is that the Bible is written in a finish one thing before moving on to another, kind of way, even when the events may chronologically overlap.

Last time, I also made the point in talking about Stephen's speech in Acts that his reference to Terah being dead before Abram goes into Canaan is not as literally specific as some want to take it. However, Stephen had no reason to specifically point out Abram was given his command to leave his father's house while still in Mesopotamia, and specifically before leaving for Haran, unless it was a widely accepted understanding that this was one of the specific and literal points of the story. This would mean Terah was almost without a doubt privy to God's commandment given to Abram, and it is one of the reasons verse 29 in Genesis 11 clarifies that both Nahor and Abram were married before Terah leaves for Haran. Terah had fulfilled, what was for that time and place, his fatherly duties. Both the house Terah was leaving behind in Mesopotamia and the one he was trying to help Abram establish according to God's command were given their starting basis. This is what brings us back to that all important point of why is a woman named Iscah, whom Terah would be just as responsible for as Lot, and more so since she was a female, listed, but not Sarai? The answer is that Iscah is Sarai, and this explains all the things we covered about Abram saying she was his father's daughter. The real question for most people then is, why is she listed as Sarai and Iscah?

One fact we should put out there right off in this discussion is the point that you will get no real argument from most all Jewish teaching that the names are referring to the same woman. However, in getting straight to the matter of why, we should consider the fact that this is the only place the name Iscah is mentioned in the Word of God. This point is important because it leaves little doubt that we may be talking about another woman mentioned later in the narrative, and we are just ignoring that fact to fit what we want to say here about her being the same woman as Sarai. Especially since female bloodline did not usually count for much in the development of a tribe, this really begs the question of why Iscah would be mentioned in this set of verses, alongside the record of Nahor's and Abram's marriages, without any other references to her, both later on in the story or what happened to her once Terah left for Haran. Why would Terah take Abram and Lot, but leave a fatherless unmarried female he was responsible for behind? Again, the answer is that he did not!

We are not given details as to why the two names were mentioned, but again, we can keep looking back at things we already know. That's why we talk about the

fact there is little to no doubt Terah knew God's order for Abram to leave his father's house and kindred. This means we should have little doubt he also knew the point of this was because God was going to make of Abram a great nation! Abram certainly had been told directly by God He would make Abram a great nation; thus, we have no doubt Abram believed his wife would be the mother of that nation. This is why it was such a concern that Sarai was barren, and continued to be as the years went along. However, we must keep in mind the fact no one involved with this situation knew this before Abram and Sarai were married; and in spite of the fact we are told about Sarai's condition so quickly in verse 30, this would not have been an established thought or fact in Terah's and Abram's minds until some time deeper into the marriage, and down the time line. In fact, it was not until many years later that this became such a leading cause for concern in Abram's and Sarai's mind that they felt they had to take matters into their own hands - for how could Abram be a great nation if he had no heir?

At this point many are probably thinking I have totally lost sight of the subject about Sarai's name. Thus, let's get to the why all this is important, and that leads us to the subject of talking about the meaning of names. Again, we will start with the easiest one, which is Nahor's wife, Milcah. Milcah was most likely the name her father had given her. (Of course, the names were often given by the mother, but were approved by the father or the name was changed.) It would seem from the facts given later about the family, Milcah was the elder of the two daughters. Milcah's name, of course, would have been given from the language spoken in Mesopotamia; and no matter what direct meaning it may have had there, it is related, or maybe it should be said it translates into Hebrew as a word for "queen." This makes sense, because Milcah was likely the first daughter of Haran, who was no doubt the elder brother of Nahor and Abram. We don't know the specifics, but Haran was probably giving her this name to simply say she was going to be a queen or, at the very least, she was his queen.

The next name we need to look at is Iscah. This too was most likely the name given or approved by her father. We won't take the space here to go into all the ways this gets derived, because it's a lot about crossover from spoken sounds between languages, and maybe more

importantly the written letters developed for those sounds in different languages. However, Iscah was later rendered into English as Jeska, and is the way we eventually end up with the name Jessica and a few variations of this name's spelling. Because words get used and names come up into languages in certain ways, there can be changes or a bit of a dispute about the meaning of the English name Jessica. However, the Hebrew it is derived from means "fore-sight." There could be a thousand reasons why Haran gave her this name, but the most likely reason for it being changed was because Terah wanted her to have a name on par with her sister if she was to be the wife of Abram.

This returns us to that fact about how all three men: Nahor, Abram, and Lot would go on to be a people, and we certainly know this was true of Abram and Lot. We don't know for sure when the name change might have taken place, but the verse here in Genesis simply gives us the picture that as the daughter of Haran, she was Iscah; but as the wife of Abram, she would be known as Sarai. The later name change given by God from Sarai to Sarah definitely was a way of saying in Hebrew, this woman was also a queen! However, working with the language Terah had as a native in Mesopotamia, he may not have had the freedom to be so direct in renaming Iscah as a queen, because she would then have had the same name as her sister, or at least one so close, it would have really caused confusion! However, he does what he can to come as close to giving her an equal title like name, in using Sarai. He uses the name Sarai because it means something in the way of "noblewoman." This gave Iscah a title of high rank, and what we might say was a name fit to be the wife of a king. Abram may never have been looked at as a king by anyone he lived around in the strange land God had called him to sojourn as a stranger in, but he certainly was deserving of a high title according to what God had in store for him, and how we see him today as both Christians and Jews. This would go for his wife as well, and that is why Iscah was renamed!

Until next time, Shalom!

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