

Free - Take One



# Shaqah

Shaqah

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

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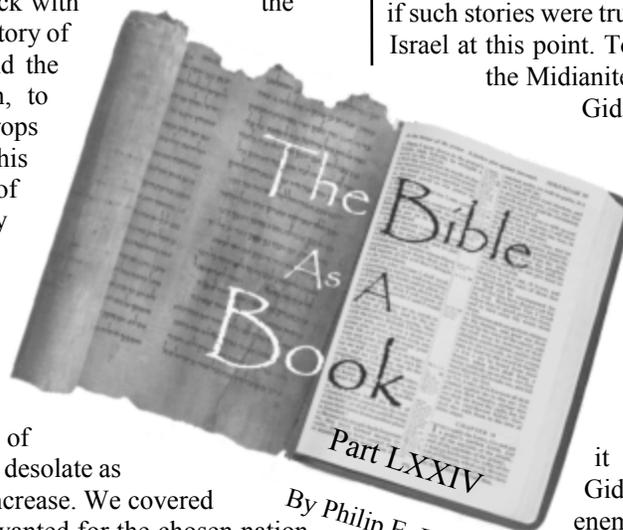
As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, we go forward discussing the specific stories of the judges God rose up to defend Israel. Last time we mostly covered the song of praise to The Lord which Deborah and Barak sang after the defeat of the Canaanite king. This took us a little off our overview as we got into subjects and symbolism used in that song and how it relates to the experiences Israel had been through. In this we can see exactly the kinds of things God wants us all to see in the chosen nation, which are the mistakes they have made and why we are all prone to make them but God is still able if we look to Him. By the end of our last segment we were back on track with the overview and started into the story of how the Midianites came, and the Amalekites along with them, to invade Israel; stealing their crops and provisions of all kinds. This continued invasion of Midianites would lead to many Israelites beginning to hide in the caves of the cliffs, and even if they did not hide there they began to hide all the food and supplies they could there. In spite of this defensive effort on the part of Israel, many in Israel were left desolate as the Midianites stole all their increase. We covered the fact this is not what God wanted for the chosen nation but it is what they had brought upon themselves by rejecting The Lord Who then had to lift His hand of protection from them allowing this to happen. Israel would, once again, need someone who could still hear the voice of God to rise up and save them by God's direction. All this brought us through Judges chapter 6 verse 10, and we are ready to start with verse 11 this time.

Verse 11 shows us it wasn't easy to find someone able and willing to hear God's voice as God sent an angel to a place called Ophrah, which is in Manasseh on the east of Jordan but to the north in Israel. The angel would come and sit under an oak tree for he was sent specifically to a man there named Gideon. Gideon was nearby threshing wheat, not in a place one would normally do threshing work, but he was staying near a

winepress in an attempt to hide his work from the Midianites. These words indicate to us just how bad these raiders of the land were, as everyone did this kind of work with caution always attempting to hide what they had to keep it safe from theft. The angel becomes apparent to Gideon as he calls out to tell Gideon The Lord is with him, even calling Gideon a mighty man of valour. To this Gideon shows us the response so many of us would have in doubting The Lord was truly with the nation. He points out that at this time they see none of the miraculous things ascribed to God like the stories passed down to them concerning such things as God's deliverance from Egypt. Even if such stories were true Gideon believes The Lord had forsaken Israel at this point. To this the angel tells Gideon to go defeat the Midianites because God was sending him to do it.

Gideon's response shows us another way we all think. We want and expect to see miracles but somehow God always does miraculous things through other people or means, not ask us to do them! Gideon asks how he could save Israel, pointing out his father was poor even among his own tribe and he himself was the least in his father's house.

To this Gideon is told once more that it was God Who was sending him and Gideon would have no trouble defeating the enemy even if it was just him alone. This “one man” phrasing here is a lesson Gideon would learn better later on when God specifically reduces his army before going to battle just to show how much it was God fighting for him and not he himself doing the work. This time Gideon's response seems quite remarkable in its unbelief as Gideon wants a sign to prove it was God speaking to him. We do this so often when God comes to tell us something; we doubt if we are hearing God's voice or just our thoughts. I will admit this is often hard for us because we don't seek God enough to be clear on knowing His voice when we hear it, and hearing His voice in our own head is as good as it gets most all the time. This is because God wants to lead us as individuals and it's necessary for us to come to recognize His voice in order to lead us on a regular basis. God doesn't want to send an angel to tell us every little thing, and that would be impractical at any rate.



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However, it's one thing for God to ask us to make a certain choice or go a certain direction in an everyday type event, it's quite another for God to ask of us something larger or something more unbelievable. These are items that we feel if we get wrong there will be more dire consequences than there are to an average day item. Maybe we are just afraid we will look very foolish if we step out and it turns out we were not told of God to attempt or do such a thing. In any case, we want something more to convince us it's God in spite of the fact we should be seeking to feel secure on a daily basis we are hearing His voice and not just our own. On this subject alone much could be said, but getting back to our overview, we see in Gideon a man who was not even convinced he was hearing God's voice when an angel of God was standing right in front of him speaking the words!

Now, before we put any judgment on Gideon for this fact, I point out again we all have this tendency within us. This doubt that must be fought by seeking to know God even in the every day when it doesn't seem to us that things matter so much. Again, the difference between when we feel comfortable simply doing what we feel God tells us to do and uncomfortable in even attempting it, lies in what God asks us to do. In the case of Gideon God was asking him to put his life on the line to go to battle the Midianites whom Israel feared greatly. If this were not true Israel would have counter attacked these people long before now. The main point we need to see in this is not that when it comes to such big items it's alright to ask for a sign, but how much our fear and desire to want a sign is driven by our lack of knowing God personally enough to feel secure. Nothing in this world will show us how much we need a closer walk with God than events such as these. This is why we call it the testing of our faith. It's not the question of do we trust God to make a way to do what He wants us to do, but do we know His voice well enough to know when and how to move in every situation. Gideon's faith was being tested, and in a big way he shows he failed to have the knowledge of God's voice to feel secure he had heard the right instructions.

The next thing Gideon asks for is very interesting considering what we just covered. Gideon questions whether he's hearing from God or not and then goes right into a request that the angel stay in that place until Gideon can go and get a gift or offering to give him. The angel agrees he will stay until Gideon returns, and so Gideon goes to prepare a young goat almost as if he's preparing a sacrifice. Of course, there is a fine line between preparing to sacrifice an animal and preparing one to eat, so there can be some argument on this point. However, there is first the truth that in some cultures people offer as a sacrifice all the animals they kill to eat. This was not uncommon and it's why God restricts the eating of most animals sacrificed at the temple to the priests alone. We should thank God for the food we eat, but a sacrifice to Him is something to be done with more care than the average preparing of a meal. Here we can argue Gideon is simply preparing food for this angel but there is an interesting detail, and that is the fact it's specified Gideon makes "...unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour:..." Judges 6:19 Unleavened cakes are what God tells Israel to eat for Passover, and it's the kind of bread to be eaten all through the next seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Unleavened bread has significance in the Law when it comes to serving God, and one

has to believe this is why Gideon makes unleavened bread for this angel.

Even if it was just that Gideon was in a hurry it's strange that he doubts he is hearing God's voice while at the same time acknowledging he's dealing with someone special and wants to give him a gift. Simply put, if this angel was not a prophet, angel, or something directly connected to God, why bring him a present of any kind? This is even clearer when combined with the fact you might think this man is telling you something false, claiming it to be God's words. In such a case the last thing you would want to do is honor him with a gift of any sort, even if it's just a meal. Put that with the fact Midian was stealing everything of value, especially when it came to food, and we see one way or the other this was a sacrifice on Gideon's part to give this angel anything!

Gideon brings the bread and flesh in a basket and the broth created by cooking the flesh in a pot and comes back to the angel. The angel tells him to lay out the flesh and bread on a rock, likely the one Gideon had been thrashing on, and then pour out the broth upon the rock as well. This Gideon does, and then the angel puts out his staff and touches this gift Gideon had brought. When he did, fire rose up as if it came from the rock itself and consumed the gift making it a true sacrifice whether that was Gideon's intent or not. This story has echoes in it to the story of Elijah when he faced the prophets of Baal as well as the story of the first blood sacrifice brought by Abel. (I Kin. 18:17-40, Gen. 4:1-8) We should also keep in mind that God lit the fire originally on the altar of burnt offering that was made for the tabernacle, and again fire came down at the dedication of the temple Solomon built. (Lev. 9:22-24, II Chron. 7:1-3) The real symbolism in blood sacrifices lays in the thought, if not the fact, God Himself consumes them with fire. After doing this and without speaking another word to Gideon the angel vanishes from his sight. Surely all this combined together was more than enough to convince Gideon he had heard from God. Gideon himself admits the man was an angel which he had seen face to face, and upon this verbalization God speaks to Gideon again. This time he assures Gideon he would not die. This is a big fact because one of the greatest fears of being asked to go out to battle was the fear of facing death. After hearing this Gideon builds a proper altar to God right there in much the same way Abraham had done when he came into this land. (Gen. 12:6-9, 28:10-19) Gideon even names the spot to commemorate this meeting. He calls it Jehovah-shalom, which is to say, "The Lord is Peace," and peace from the constant invasions of the Midianites is something Israel desperately desired.

That same night God gives Gideon a task much along the same lines as that which Israel was told to do as they entered the land. In that case God had instructed Israel to remove the altars and groves used to worship false gods all throughout the land. No matter of what people such others living among Israel there might be, such as servants or strangers passing through, no places of worship to false gods were to exist in the land of Israel. In the case of Gideon, he was instructed to tear down an altar and cut down a grove that belonged to his father! This altar and grove were there to worship Baal, which is just a way of telling us his father worshiped the powers of creation rather than The One Who created them all. (Rom. 1:25) Gideon would

# Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment, we continued the story of Abraham's servant being in Mesopotamia to seek a wife for Isaac. At this point in the study we have talked about where he ended up and the prayer he prayed for God to show him the right woman to take back to Canaan. In our last segment, we also talked about how the servant had asked that he be able to request a drink of water from any woman who came and the right woman would be shown by offering to also water his camels. As soon as the servant ended his prayer we see Rebekah comes to the well which shows us how God was sending the answer while the servant was still praying. We also talked about how God had obviously been preparing this woman for this moment's timing as well as from very early on in her life so she could go with Abraham's servant and become Isaac's wife. All this was due to Abraham, the servant, as well as Rebekah all being in step with God's will and plan. We ended our last segment talking about how Rebekah was described as fair to look upon, meaning she was a desirable woman in more than one aspect but she also had not been nor was she now attached to any man. Her purity made her the perfect representation of The Bride of Christ! This brought us to Genesis chapter 24 verse 16, and we will begin this time by looking at the last of that verse.

The ending part of verse 16 sets the stage for Abraham's servant to ask Rebekah the question he had prayed he could ask in looking for the correct wife for Isaac. It tells us Rebekah went down to the well, got her pitcher filled with water as she intended and turned to head back home. This seems a trivial fact that doesn't need specified but it probably shows us more than we think as many of these small facts in the Bible do. One point that it shows is that the servant did not inhibit her from doing what she came to do. This is to say, he was not pushy in going to her with the assumption she was getting water from the well just because she had a pitcher on her shoulder. The servant was no doubt eager to know if she was the right woman but he takes the time to observe her at work. We are not told much about this servant, but to be a head servant, especially one over such a great house as Abraham's had become, we know he had to be a man practiced in overseeing the work of others. No doubt this servant was looking for any and all indications in her mannerisms and actions that would give him some clue as to what kind of woman she was. Now, with all we have talked about in the servant praying for God to show him the right woman and take his opinions out of the way it might seem odd to point this out as if it's a good thing. However, just because we are allowing God to make the choices does not mean we don't learn something by paying attention to the choices God makes!

In observing Rebekah at work the servant was not making a determination as to if he should or should not ask her for a drink, but he was preparing himself to know the woman God would pick for Isaac. This is a good thing and something we should do. We should show patience and awareness of the situations we find ourselves in. Because God is so great almost any interaction we have with Him is like a small child holding

the hand of their parent for guidance, but just like a good parent God wants us to learn and grow. There is no better way to learn than to be observant of the events that pass us as we walk in God's will. Thus, verse 17 tells us when the time was right the servant runs to meet Rebekah. The run part would indicate the servant was not making himself obvious as a visitor to the town who was hanging out by the well in the hopes someone would serve him. He had kept his distance again, not interfering with the activity at the well itself. He waits until the timing is right and then hurries to ask of her a drink of water. This verse also gives us another small detail that we should be mindful of in order to have the picture correct in our minds. The servant asks for a drink of water from her pitcher. This means he let her go down to the well, do what she came to do and turn to go home with the water she intended to get from the well. In other words, her work at the well was done at this point. The servant does not ask for her to give him a drink while she has the bucket or whatever she was using to retrieve water from the well in hand. He waits and asks if he can have water she's already drawn at a time she is already headed home.

In this light we see what the servant asked in his prayer come with just another added weight, so to speak. The sign he had asked for in order to know he'd found the right woman was that she offer to water his camels as well. In talking about that we talked about the idea of a servant's heart and the servant takes that a step further than we already spoke to. If he had sat right next to the well with his camels behind him and ask women who came to the well to give him a drink as they were getting water it might have been something some of them would have done because they were in the act of getting water, so why not. In contrast, if he waited until they were walking away, pitcher full and on their shoulder, it would be more likely that most would simply give him a drink from the water they had and move on. Again, little foxes here, but what the servant was looking for was the girl who showed a willingness to go the extra step of returning to the well for water to give to the camels instead of just going on down her path to home after his small request was satisfied. This would definitely show a woman who thought more with her heart; a virtuous woman or, at least, one in the making. (Prov. 12:4, 31:10-31)

Verse 18 shows us Rebekah was no overly proud woman who in any way despised the servant's request in the fact she calls him "...my lord." This is not as we might think of it in that we call Jesus Lord but for the reason we came to call Jesus Lord. The word "lord" at its base denotes a title of respect and the acceptance of the person's ability to ask of us what they wish. This is not just a woman begrudgingly giving in to a cultural truth that women felt obligated to honor the requests made of them to serve men. Rebekah saw this servant as one whom she respected, and to give us a fuller picture of how willing and ready Rebekah was to serve this man, we are told she does not hesitate but brings down her pitcher from off her shoulder with haste. We, of course, don't know how much effort this all took,

but there was a process here of getting the water out and the servant drinking what she gave him and what he desired. Then as we move into verse 19 we see another one of those points of appreciating not so much what is there but what is not there. One should note the servant does not say another word to Rebekah. He asked his question and she swings into action to give him water. Then, all of her own accord, Rebekah waits until the servant has had the water he desires and without him saying a word she informs him she will water his camels as well.

Rebekah even points out that she will draw water for his camels, and this tells us she was not just offering to give to his camels what she had left in her pitcher and then refill it to head home as she had come to do. This little foxes moment tells us she was saying she would take on the entire task of watering the camels, and she even points out she will give them water until they have had their fill. If this was not the answer to the servant's prayer one has to ask what else could she offer! Verse 20 tells us again she does not waste time as she quickly goes to accomplish this task. She empties her pitcher into the trough for the camels and "runs" back to the well to draw more water. All this quickness in doing things is not to note a panic on Rebekah's part and should not be taken as if she was fearful she would be late returning home with the water for the house. It was also not born out of a desire to finish this task in order to be done with what this stranger had wanted and get away from him. What we see is an efficient woman doing the job without wasting time or just being leisurely about it. Her "fair to look upon" appearance had not made her a pampered princess who was too good to do work, or lazy in any way. We truly see in this story a woman who has beauty both inside and out.

Verse 21 tells us as all this happened the servant still didn't open his mouth. He patiently watched to see if God had made the way for him to take a woman back to Isaac as Abraham had sent him to do. He would neither encourage her with his words nor discourage her. He would not distract her from her work and wait to see if she truly followed through on what she said she would do! Verse 22 is where the excitement finally breaks out for the servant. He waits until the camels had finished drinking, and one will note Rebekah had obviously stayed to be sure this was true as well. Again, small but significant point. Rebekah could have assumed by the slowing of the camels' drinking or behavior that they had about reached their fill and assumed she had enough water in the trough(s) to finish the job. With that she could have headed home, but she did not. She waited to be sure the task was complete, showing yet another important quality in her character. Upon seeing for himself the task was complete and in what had to be a complete surprise to Rebekah, the servant takes out an earring and two bracelets to give to Rebekah. These were not trinkets as their description is not just that they were made of gold but it gives their weight. One does not have to do a lot of conversions and calculations to see these were items of great value.

A fact that also helps to know about these gifts are that it was customary in the cultures of the day for men to keep a lot of their, shall we say, liquid assets in the form of jewelry, and more often than not it would be put on his wife. One was putting themselves in grave danger if they touched another man's wife, for as much as women in the culture were subservient to men,

husbands protected their wives and daughters in a way we don't really see as commonplace today. In such a setting it only made sense to put other valuables on the person you already protected as something valuable. Thus, women, especially wives, and valuable items such as precious metals, stones and the like by nature belonged together. Another aspect of this can also be that of showing your wealth. Anyone can choose to put their "money" in a hiding place of some sort in an attempt to keep it safe. Of course, such a thing does not keep the money with you and handy to spend but a few coins of some metals would be enough for daily needs. No doubt a few coins or the like is all a lot of people had which meant they did not have much of anything to keep on their wives, but this shows us the status symbol doing such a thing was.

Now, before we all go off judging this all as a form of arrogance let me just say, sitting now and judging any past culture for their actions is not really a wise thing to do. The significance of showing the kind of wealth you had for some was very likely the result of pride and the desire to show off. Jewelry today has a lot to do with that because in many ways it is to say, I can afford something expensive to put on my personage just because it looks good. Maybe just the idea I wanted it and/or I'm worth it whether I truly can afford it or not! In the cultures of the past, savings and being frugal with how you spent was valued. Showing that you had wealth in store was a point of honor as much as it was ever one of pride. These were just different times, but understanding such things are important to seeing the right symbolism in the servant's actions. In giving Rebekah these items of value he was not proposing to her, and while it might be implied that he was headed toward a question for her father, it was not the main point. The servant was giving her these gifts to show her how much he valued her. One might want to look at this as a really appreciative tip for a job well done but that is not really correct either. This is why it was important to stop and think about how the servant stood back and observed her instead of interacting with her. He did not just appreciate the fact Rebekah had done a good job but he respected all she showed herself to be in how she went about this task.

All this is not to mention the fact she had at this point shown herself to be the woman the servant had asked God to show him! In giving her these items the servant was in a sense worshiping God Himself. He was respecting the woman who at the moment by all indications was the woman who would be his master's wife! I know Abraham was his master, but if this servant outlived Abraham, Isaac would be his master in a full way that could not be overridden by anyone including himself. Again, to fight wrong thinking, I don't point that out to say he was buttering up to the future boss. No, this servant was a servant of Abraham in earthly title but more importantly a servant of The Most High God. This was true if for no other reason than he was sent to do this most important of tasks that Abraham himself would normally by cultural custom have done. It is my belief this servant understood the significance of the covenant God had made with Abraham, and in understanding that he knew whoever Isaac's wife was, she would be part of that covenant in a very direct and significant way! The servant was recognizing all this when he gives these items to Rebekah, and with that we move into verse 23.

# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part XLVIII

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."*

When I started our last segment, I made the statement that I thought it was time we put all of what we have learned in this study together. From there we went heavily into a discussion about how God showed us the idea of do good be blessed, do wrong be cursed is not how He works among men. We talked about how this is truly shown to us by the Law itself! The Law was given by God so that Israel would have a way to prove or disprove if the theory led people to the relationship with God (faith) they needed to be saved. Oddly this was done by God obligating Himself to bless the nation of Israel if they followed the Law even if they did not follow it with the sincerity of heart God was looking for. The end result of this was the nation showing the world that even if a people are given a Law by The One Who created us all, they will not follow it but slip away into humanistic thoughts and abandon the very rules that would bring blessings to their lives. Now, when I say abandon I don't mean to suggest the Law was totally tossed aside and forgotten. No, it was given its due as a cultural base for the nation, but in more than just their hearts we see the nation divert from the Law in order to have what they fancied instead of what God promised. If we won't follow a set of rules laid out by God Himself even to receive earthly blessings, such a thing certainly will not lead us to true faith!

In looking at what the chosen nation has done with the Law, we get to see that none of us will be saved by following ordinances nor will many even be compelled to seek God in general. This in no way means God does not want to bless us, but only He can determine when those blessings are good for us and when they are a detriment. Only He can see how blessing us might be good for us but bad for others we have the ability to reach, an ability we might lose or lose sight of, if we were blessed in the ways we'd like to be. All this screams how much we all need to simply yield to God and His will by yielding to His voice day by day. Only then can we live a life that is more than just living in comfort until we go out into eternity without Him, having lived a life that was useless to both others as well as ourselves! Humbling oneself in the sight of The Lord is not about getting what we want when He lifts us up, but about letting Him lift us up to where He wants us to be. (James 4:10) If we don't trust that is a place we want to be, then God has given us the free will to do whatever we want with the existence we have been granted and the end it will, by natural course, come to.

Now what does all that have to do with putting together all we have covered? The answer is to see how a study of Jewish history can help us discover not just where they went wrong but where we all go wrong! To see, not just what God asked of a chosen nation, but what God, at the core, wants from us all. It was never about serving ordinances, it was about doing a

ministry work that could reach the world. This work included the chosen nation's response to the coming of The Messiah Who was prophesied to come through them. People can be very hateful toward Jews and all things Jewish, but as one who calls themselves a Christian I can't imagine what you could be thinking. Whatever it is, there is nothing Christlike about it! Jews are the chosen nation of God, but they are that because they are one of many people living on this planet. From Abraham forward they have been set in a hard place, a place many of us would not enjoy being in. It's not easy being the ones set up on a pedestal to be judged by the eyes of the world. As all true believers know, it's not easy to serve God day by day, doing what we know is right, in a world that increasingly tells us we're wrong, even evil for being who we are. (Isa. 5:20)

The Jews were born into this position and they still are today. That fact causes many who claim to be Christians to envy them, but that envy is misplaced. When we talk about the incidents in the Bible, and more specifically those we read of in the New Testament, where we see the church or teachers such as Paul struggling against Jewish Christians who think all believers had to become Jewish, we can use those incidents to build conspiracies against the Jews as if they are attempting to force us all into something. However, the truth is many find reason to hate by reading those stories due to an envy of the position the Jews hold. Many who claim to be Christians don't like the idea the Jews are still the chosen nation of God, and what they are really envious of is the fact that it is very hard to become a Jew, especially one with any say or power among the nation, when you were not born a Jew. The hate deepens further as this becomes more obvious, and so people want to create a new "Christian" authority that does not have to answer to the Jews. What calls itself Christianity has done that quite well. The "Christian church" in times gone by has held vast power in many places across the earth, but what is really missed in all this is that each of us will still answer to God.

There is no reason to be fearful of Jews and their authority over the things of God because what God has been trying to use the nation to show us is that we each must answer to Him in the end and not man! It does not matter if you are a Jew obligated to Jewish culture and/or religious practices or a Christian who answers to the so called Christian authority and/or religion. We each have to stand before God as who we have chosen to be. If we have handed the guidance of what we are and will be in life to some religion, it won't matter what that religion is, we won't be welcomed into the Kingdom. What I have said over and over in this study is that the real proof the Jews are the chosen nation of God is in their continued existence and influence in this world. Why do we care about this small nation of people and their tiny speck of land on the planet? Why do we care about the book they hold sacred? Why do so many people hate them? Maybe most of all, why has time and actions of men failed over and over again to eliminate them, or at least diminish

them to the point of irrelevance? The answer to all these questions is not hard. God has maintained the nation to do His work on this earth and to ensure the message of Who He is will never be lost, so that each individual will have a chance to find Him for themselves!

God made the nation a focal point and it is that which has put them in the proverbial hot seat through more than three millennia now. The more direct answer to why the nation is still there is proof that what Jesus told us is true. The work is not done yet. Jesus has yet to return to this earth as He said He would do. (Matt. 24:29-35) In order for us to know where to look as we wait for this event God has done as He did before the first appearance of Christ. God has maintained the nation of Israel through all the struggles, hatred, and everything this world could throw at it. It was to them Jesus came the first time. As the kings saw the star almost two thousand years ago, they knew it was important. Why? Because a king had been born, and not just any king! These men came seeking The King of The Jews! Today it does not matter who likes it or who does not like it, we await the return of that King, meaning we still seek after The King of The Jews! Go ahead and look toward some city in Italy or Saudi Arabia or anywhere else you'd like, but when Jesus comes back your eyes will be turned toward Jerusalem. That fact and the ability to say it with assurance no matter how loud the hateful voices may ring nor who those voices belong to is why God maintained a chosen nation to this day.

We don't have to debate the subject, the Bible makes it clear where our eyes should be and it's the same place Jesus was when He asked His earthly parents, did they not know He must be about His Father's business. (Luke 2:41-52) God has tried to make it simple. It is man who attempts to complicate it and it's almost always about power and the desire to gain it. However, as Jesus told Pilot, who had asked Jesus if He knew His fate was in Pilot's hand, the only power anyone has over the things of God is the power granted to them in order to accomplish the will of God on this earth. (John 19:8-11) Jesus not only said it but He gave us the ultimate example of the truth by allowing Himself to be put on that cross and die due to our sin. The Gospel message is that The Messiah has come! Beyond that we see even a world that attempted to stop Him failed in the most spectacular way possible. Jesus left us with no doubt it is God's will, not man's, that will prevail in the end, and that is why I say we are putting it all together concerning the history of the chosen nation we have covered so far.

Now, we have made it (historically) to a point in our study where all things Jewish had been beaten down. Many things Jewish had literally been outlawed. The temple no longer stood and the hope it would again one day was nothing but that, a hope with no reality (in earthly terms) in sight for how to accomplish it. To make matters worse, Jews had been spread out like never before! There were still those who lived in the promised land but many Jews had found their way to places through what would become Europe and parts of what today we call the Muslim world. Jewish communities were making headway in far too many places to list. They were joined loosely together by a religion that attempted to maintain what it was to be Jewish, but many were so far apart that in a time of little world communications, each of at least the major groups of Jewish communities, developed their own specific, shall we say,

“flavor” of Judaism. Even today there are many differing practices among how Jews observe their Sabbaths, feasts, celebrations, and even their day by day lives that came from this separation of communities. In the modern nation of Israel there is likely not a one of these differing practices that is not observed by at least a small group in spite of Jews in Israel once again being in close enough proximity to each other to develop very common practices.

While it might be interesting to cover many of these, it is not the point of this study. What we do wish to do is take a bit of a leap ahead in time from where we are to the next major events that affected the Jews and what we know as Jewish today. By around 200 A.D. most all the Jewish institutions in the promised land, or maybe it's more accurate to say Judea specifically, had been closed. This truly brought to an end any solid authority of Jewish religious practices and observances coming out of Judea. There would be centers of Jewish learning and “authority” in more of the northern areas of the promised land, but they would not hold sway long as we already covered world communications were not as we know them today. The world would also go through some major changes which would set the stage for what we see as the modern world and the Jews would find themselves in this wash of changing people, cultures, and nations as the world struggled to its “modern” feet.

What this requires us to do is look away from what some might call Jewish history to more of a world history at this point. We do this so that we might understand why the Jews faced what they faced in more recent centuries and understand the underlying problems of the world which many somehow twist in their minds and blame upon the Jews. In order to do this I will start by simply pointing out, we all know that the Roman Empire did not last forever! What is known to historians as the Golden Cord of world powers would come to an end with the Romans, but what the Bible tells us is also very important. The ideas of what the former empires left would remain the driving force behind how the world at large would develop in spite of their absence. This too gives us a focus for this study. As we have talked about the chosen nation dealing with the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, then the Greeks and finally the Romans, we will go forward with a focus on understanding the world the Jews were forced to live among; that being what became of the Roman Empire. We will do this first because of what I just said about the Bible showing us how these powers and what they left behind would go forward to shape the world we know today, but also because the powers that derived from the ending of these empires play a major role in the modern formation of the nation of Israel today.

That last statement is very important indeed! We need to understand, there are and have been many “empires,” “kingdoms,” and the like which have existed all over the world, but none of them have been as important to understanding where we are now than those the chosen nation was caught up in. As it was/is important to understand the development of say the Greek Empire more so than it was to look at what was going on in the Orient, so too it is more important to see the development of Europe than it is to study the history of the Middle East. In Daniel's vision there comes a point when he sees a goat charging from the west headed east. (Dan. 8:3-8) This goat represents not just Alexander the Great and/or the Greek Empire, it represents

the direction the power struggle would move in. If we step back and look at an overview of the world power struggle we see it was actually formed in the Mesopotamian Valley. All evidence points us to the belief the Tower of Babel was built somewhere in that valley. The families of the three sons of Noah would leave that valley and head in different directions after the confounding of man's language. This would spread humanity across the world, even to places in what we now call the Western Hemisphere, and it would do it far quicker than what would have likely happened if God had not confounded language.

This is not to suggest the migration was unnatural because man was still making his own freewilled choices. However, man was making those choices on the basis of separation far more than unity, which is how the tower began. If man had used his unity to serve God or, at the very least, not attempted to use it to blot out the knowledge of God, this would not have needed to happen, but that's not how the human story goes. To make a long story/point short, is to recognize man made the choice to spread out across the world due to a lot of the same selfish desire that caused them to want unity. The end result of this was that man came to be too spread out across the world to ever have a centralized power like they were developing at the tower, which shows us God's actions accomplished the goal. However, in spite of this fact man never stopped wanting it, even dreaming about what could be "accomplished" if it could be so! While cultural influences came from all over the world to effect the empires the Bible focuses on, what these empires were and became, in spite of never truly ruling the world, drove what the world is today. The Assyrians founded their empire in the north of the Mesopotamian Valley area with their capital as Nineveh. Graphically this city's location was at what many might agree is a good dividing point between east and west. This was even more true in the days of this empire than it is in our modern time. Many today would call anything east of Europe "East" in some form, and as we go you'll see how that relates to my point here.

After the Assyrians came the Babylonians. This is the empire we clearly see the chosen nation entangled with during the history the Bible shows us. Their capital was Babylon, and many believe this put them right at the very same spot as the original Tower of Babel. That said, only God knows, but the point is that the line of east to west was maintained. The Medes and the Persians would come to take down the mighty Babylonians, and these are people who came from what is definitely east! In spite of this they did not move the empire capital eastward and the east/west divide remained about the same. That would all change with the march of Alexander the Great as he would storm from the western world that had been antagonized by the empire(s) and eventually storm his way into Babylon itself to seize power. He wouldn't live long after this and his empire would be divided into four main divisions. This can seem hard to follow but not when one turns to what is most true and treasured about the Greeks. If we look at their culture we see what their focus was and no matter where any imperial capital may be set, Greece is the land from which this culture truly flowed! In this we see a significant shift in the east/west line. What was once considered by the "world" to be the western most reaches of organized human power suddenly became the center of world culture!

Because this is true, we see the Jews embroiled in this

empire's doings like never before. I will stop to point out this is why many believe the Jews to be blamed for much of the world's woes. They look back in history and see facts like this combined with all of humanities failures and declare, "See, those Jews are always around when things go wrong!" This is a backward view and unfortunately one many who claim to be Christians have been taught. The Jews were not there causing the problems, they were there because God was using them to offer Himself as the solution to man's chronic problems! From that statement I would love to go into a page after page lecture on why Jesus came when He did and why He was sent to the Jewish nation, going into a much deeper view as to why it needed to be that way. However, that is not what this study is for so I'll attempt to hold the course here. The Greek "end" would come at the hands of an empire that needs no introduction. The Roman's seat of power also needs little pointing out as most everyone knows it was the city that bears that name to this very day. Once again, the center of power would shift, going even further west and this is why that point is specifically made to Daniel. More importantly than the shift in location of a specific capital city is the fact world power shifted from east of the promised land to west of it. This is also to show us something we see today. Human power, as in those powers that would significantly effect world affairs, shifted from the Mesopotamian Valley to what would become known as Europe!

It is for this cause that we will turn our historical attention in this study to a brief look at the very convoluted "end" of the Roman Empire and the development of Europe. I put that word, "end" in quotation marks because that is the point. Just as the line of imperial powers are looked at as a golden cord in human history, meaning they were all very much connected, what we see in the fall of the Roman Empire is not a total end. Just as each culture whose name is used to denote each of the preceding empires morphed the ideas and the look of their individual times, so too the cultures of other people from outside the Roman Empire would filter in and have an impact on the look of the world. However, to be a bit shorthand at the moment, I will state that the tensions which rose and developed into what we call World War I and World War II took place due to an unanswered question. In short, that question is one that still nags at the world today and gave birth to governing authorities such as the European Union and United Nations. Since the Tower of Babel man has wanted a unified world, governed from a centralized location. God struck that idea down, but as Revelation shows us, in metaphor, this was a deadly wound in the head of a beast, man was creating on this earth. (Rev. 13:1-9) While the intervention of God would put a true end to men ever being able to create a one world government, it did not stop men from desiring it!

This is God showing how much He works for our good but He will not force us to do things He knows are best for us. God put a stop to man's ability to form a one world government not to take away our free will in any way but to preserve the free will of individuals. However, as I said, man would still desire the idea and even believe it was/is the best way for the world to have peace and universal prosperity. In a thought that takes us back to what I talked about in our last segment, there is the truth that in the end God will send Jesus back to this earth and He will establish exactly that; a one-world government centralized in Jerusalem. God will not allow man to do it because man is evil

in his heart and we see that in governments the world over. Thus, what God will do is once again give man what he has shown he wants, but with a perfect King in the man Jesus, it can be done correctly. What the Bible tells us is even then man will not be happy, he will even be angry that he cannot have the authority and ability to carry out his selfish ideas. Revelation tells us when Satan is released from the bottomless pit he will have no trouble persuading men to follow him in an attempted coup against Jesus, and we are shown that will not be allowed to prevail. It will be at this time God will put an end to this world and we will all stand before Him for judgment. (Rev. 20:7-15)

Now that's jumping ahead big time so let's get back to the fall of what could be called, the proper imperialistic system, which ended for the most part with the fall of Rome. Of course, there are many ins and outs as well as details galore we could cover in looking at this, but we'll try to keep it simple as I've attempted to do throughout this study as we touched on the secular events that would affect the chosen nation. What's important is to understand that as the events of what we have already covered about the Jewish-Roman wars' aftermath took place, the Roman Empire was already suffering greatly. There were attempts by the Romans, as there had been by past empires, to continue to expand the reach and power of the empire. This was driven by the desire that we see driving the Tower of Babel. The Romans wanted to rule the world. In their minds they already did or, at the very least, thought of themselves as the world. Of course, unlike what happened at the tower and because of what God did at the tower, this was far from true! While the Romans ruled a truly vast empire there was still a greater world than many of them could conceive of which was out of their grasp.

I suppose the correct way to see it is that they had a knowledge this was true and that's what drove them forward, but at the same time, they were oblivious to how true this was or they might have had the sense to be happy with just what they had. To put Rome's end in very sweeping terms, what we see when one studies the details of what took place is that the "curses" God put on man after he took of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil played a great part in all this. The Romans needed resources and much of what they sought was in the land to the north of them. The irony of the situation was that the people in the North needed resources and they saw the Romans as possessing what they needed! Now, I don't mean to say the Roman's push to the north of the empire's heart was only due to resources because the desire for power was truly the driving force. However, the Romans were getting lazy, and in many ways, whether they knew it or not, they needed fresh blood in the empire. The Romans believed a push into the North would take in territory with people who could be put to work as slaves and the like while also expanding Roman rule just that much further.

If one studies the history for themselves you find Rome not only attacked the people in territories to the north of them, there quickly became an intermingling of what was considered proper and civilized and that which was looked at as barbarian. As Rome pushed north they found people who were strong and hardened due to the harsh climate they lived in. Such men, even with primitive weapons, were by no means outmatched by the

professionally trained Roman army with its glittering swords and shields. This fact meant Rome did not steamroll over these people in any way. What Rome actually came to realize was that these barbarians were so formidable they were going to have to fight fire with fire. This caused Rome to literally force or conscript men of the North from the few times Rome had success of some sort to create an army of barbarians to defeat the barbarians. Defeat is actually the wrong word to use here because even at the time, it became apparent to Rome that defeating these people was not really a war they could win. What Rome eventually came to see as needed was to just hope they could defend themselves from these people invading the empire. As time moved forward compromises were made to the point it becomes hard to tell who was who.

Rome would maintain themselves as an empire made up of people who were citizens of that empire of which these barbarians were not in spite of doing a lot of the fighting. In time the Romans would have to make even further compromises in an attempt to protect themselves from these barbarians, both external and internal to the empire. These events are why it's not really possible to put a date on when the Roman Empire came to an end. Rome would come to an end as an empire but in a very different way from the empires before them. Assyrian to Babylonian was a major political shift. Babylonians to Medes and Persians was a decisive military victory by one party over the other. Medes and Persians to Greek was for the most part very much the same. Greek to Roman was again political and military power shifting from one capital to another with little cultural change at all. By that point a great mix of people had been stirred together. It was the cohesion, or close to a cohesion of people, who all saw the world in a very similar way; through the eyes of vast government power. If the barbarians who would eventually be the fall of the Romans can be said to be very different people, branded with such things as "uncivilized" and the like, it's because they were a far more basic people. Having lived in a much harsher climate their desires did not originally lay in conquest but in how to feed their families for another year.

The world would change in a drastic way, but as the old saying goes, the more things change the more they stay the same! To understand a great element in why this held true as the heart of what was the Roman Empire passed into what we call Europe today, as well as what continued to bind a lot of the east to the west through these dark ages, we will need to back up once again in our study. We do this in order to talk about another phenomena which took place and changed the Roman Empire from the one we see fighting the Jewish-Roman wars to the one that eventually stumbled and fell, yet still remains. This element is also why what would become of Rome would continue to hunt the chosen nation to destroy them as well as attempt, to the best of its ability, to villainize the chosen nation's involvement in the world!

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

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

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

Immediately upon giving her the items, the servant asks two questions without giving Rebekah the chance to answer the first by going ahead and firing off the second. In a way this shows us how much he was not asking these questions because he really needed an answer. He knew God had led him to the right woman. However, in spite of the fact we have already been told in the narrative that she was of the right house, the servant asks her to declare whose daughter she was. He also asks if there is room for him to stay with the family. This second request is another close mirror to the actions of Christ. As Jesus walked this earth there was a short man named Zacchaeus. This man was someone of some importance but that mattered not to the crowds that swarmed around Jesus as He walked along. Zacchaeus did not allow his stature nor the crowds to dampen his desire to see Jesus. No one might have respected him enough to let him get close to Christ but he also did not let pride stand in his way. Zacchaeus climbed up into a tree like a school boy so that he would not miss getting a chance to see Jesus as he passed by. Jesus, knowing of the man's deep desire to know him, comes to that tree, looks up at Zacchaeus and tells him to climb down because his house is where Jesus is headed that day! (Luke 19:1-6)

Once again, I seem like an odd teacher with all the things I draw correlations between, but I can't help but think of that story when I read how this servant asks Rebekah if there is room for him to lodge with her family. As we have talked about so much through this story so far, this servant was in step with God's will. He doesn't say what he's going to do as Jesus did and, of course, the servant is not The Messiah. However, in much the same spirit the servant asks the question as a mere formality on so many levels. He knew God had led him to this spot and to the right woman by being here. Now it was time to continue his journey by going to her father's house and that's where he was headed next. In verse 24 Rebekah answers his first question by laying out the facts we already have been told, but again it's important to see it as no assumption on the servant's part but confirmed by Rebekah's own mouth that she is the daughter of Bethuel who is the son of Nahor through his wife Milcah. She is exactly who the servant was sent to find, and it's no coincidence that she is the first person we see the servant meet as he comes to this city.

In verse 25 Rebekah answers the servant's second question, not just in that there is room for him but in a bit of an echo to what the servant asked God for in watering the camels, she points out there is plenty of room for him and room and provisions to keep his camels there as well. Once more, small foxes, but it was not beyond reasonable that a man on such a journey would pay a stable of some kind to keep and care for his camels while he stayed with someone or rented a room for himself. If he was afraid to leave the valuables he carried on his camels he might simply stay with them in the field, street or even at a stable, but the point is, being invited to stay in someone's house did not necessarily mean they had room and provisions to take care of ten camels! Rebekah makes it clear her father's house was big enough and stocked well enough to handle it all.

Verse 26 is where we see confirmation that the

servant's heart was filled with gratefulness to God for His direction in this matter as we see the servant bow himself down and praise God! As the next verses layout his words we see in his praise the same terms and wording he used to ask for this miracle. In verse 27 the servant blesses The God of his master Abraham just as he had asked in his prayer that The God of his master Abraham show mercy. He also points out how God had not forsaken Abraham and left him without what he needed to accomplish what God had asked. Again, an important point. We look at a story like this and say the same thing we say often in our own lives about our own doings. One of the main reasons God gave the third commandment He gave to Israel has to do with exactly the opposite of what we see here! God tells Israel they are not to use the name of The Lord their God in vain. (Ex. 20:7) I know I've covered this before but let's go over it again. The purpose of this commandment was not simply to show respect for God in that He is special so His name is special. This command has to do with the fact when people get upset, scared, or some negative reaction to something, they call out a curse. Such curses may seem more like just modern language to some but that is not how it came to be used. Cursing has to do with holding someone responsible for the negative the person just experienced.

It is to recognize the power and at the same time show anger the power was not used to help them! This is a pretty serious indictment to lay on anyone but that someone who gets blamed is more times than not, God Himself. Language morphs things so often in English you will hear someone who's upset with another person directly say their name alongside some reference to God. This is a twisted way to declare a curse on the individual, and it is done because it is so common to curse God for all our sorrows that His name or any reference to Him becomes a curse for all kinds of uses. It's just the psychology of language in the human mind that causes this, but I'd hope one can see how important it is to be careful how we use the name of God or any reference to Him with great care. God could reach down and correct all our wrongs, even keep us from doing them in the first place, but if you understand what the Bible is showing us you'll easily see how much God proves that won't be met by humans with anymore thankfulness than not stepping in. If we don't suffer the losses we often don't see the problem with what we wanted to do. In fact, we humans are so bad, even when we do suffer the loss we still don't often see where we went wrong! In any case God has shown us what it will all come to, and while it's hard to accept all the ups and downs in the here and now, only our faith in Him will matter on Judgment Day. We can't make it past that judgment throne as one who is welcomed into the Kingdom if we have made a habit of blaming God for everything we perceive as negative. Like this servant we must trust God, and that shows us another point in his words.

It would be easy for the servant to assume God was going to bless his journey, especially this particular one. It was not he who had chosen to come here but Abraham who sent him. If Abraham was truly the man with God's promise upon him then anything that needs to be done should be an expectation that God will fulfill, right? Unfortunately while we may not say it with our mouths far too often we show in our actions how much we think exactly this way. There is an expectation of blessings in what we do just because we are striving to serve

God. I can't tell you all of why it does not work this way except to keep pointing out how much we as freewilled beings reject God forcing us to do anything. Beyond that there is the truth we don't see the whole picture like He does. We don't know what is good for us and we certainly do not know what is good within the picture of God using us to accomplish things that benefit others. Some items in our life might be obvious or come to be obvious some day along the way, but others will remain a mystery, at the very least, until we get the chance to stand with Him in that place He has prepared for those who love Him. (John 14:1-3) In many ways I question how much we will even care or wonder at all once we are in that environment because we can't imagine in the here and now how wonderful it will be!

The point is, God does not always do what we would expect even when we think of the situation as something where He should be The One to act and make it happen. We often climb over some big rocks if not mountains along a way we clearly understand God could have flattened for us. If we don't understand that going through these things are times we must trust God concerning the reason(s) it's happening, even when it doesn't make sense to us, we build an arrogance that is very unrighteous and can, even does for many, lead to a turning away from God. However, when we trust God we understand we don't know if smooth sailing or rough waters lay ahead of us; we only know He can walk on the roughest of them all and if we can just keep our eyes on Him we will not sink either! (Matt. 14:22-33) This was an understanding lodged solidly in the mind of Abraham's servant. He prayed God would show His mercy in accomplishing this task and now that it had come about with unimaginable ease, he falls on his knees with thankfulness, not just that the task was seeing great success, but that God had chosen in this incident to make it all so clear and easy. We should not take the blessings of God for granted and this servant shows he does not!

At this point we see Rebekah running again, and it's wonderful to see her excitement. What the servant had done and said was not lost on Rebekah. As if she knew something special she had been prepared to accomplish in and with her life had just began she runs to her father's house not even taking the servant with her! If we read the actual words of verse 28 we see it does not say she ran to her father's house but that she runs to tell all to her mother's house. This might seem an odd thing at first glance but the specifics of putting it this way is important. All through this story we have talked about how important the right women were to getting the chosen nation started. How it was not just about the right men from the right genetics but the right women. Again, I repeat that just as Abraham could not have the chosen son through Sarah's handmaiden Hagar but needed Sarah to be the biological mother, so too Isaac's wife needed to come from the right man and woman. Bethuel was the son of Nahor, and we already know from reading this story that the city the servant comes to and which Rebekah lives in is named Nahor. Now we talked at the time of covering the verse where we find that information about how the city could have been named that for different reasons, but there is an obvious one. The city of Nahor is just how it comes to us in English which is a weak language that can't make specific words to

describe things. If we knew the language of the day and the true word use as a name for this city it likely would be a word that meant, "land of Nahor."

Even in the English we can see how this is so often the case that a land made famous or of noteworthiness to receive a name is often due to a person in the area who truly makes a name for themselves, as we might say today, and the place will be named after them. We will often even drop such things as "The City of" part and just call the city or place by the name of the person. It all means the same thing. Thus, in this case we see a servant going into a land named for the man whose family he's looking for. Due to age differentials he's actually looking for the next generation in that family. This is definitely true when we see how old Abraham was before he and Sarah had Isaac. For the age of Isaac to line up with a woman from Abraham's brother's house she would be a granddaughter and that's exactly what Rebekah was. She is the daughter of Nahor's son Bethuel, but she is also the granddaughter of Milcah which we have pointed out is important. When this verse tells us she went to the house of her mother it is saying this for clarity of that issue as well as an issue we might not even think about today.

If Nahor was such a wealthy man that this city and/or region was known by his name it is very likely he had a large family. Much like we see kings of later times do, this large family might have been due to the fact he had more than one wife. Just like a king we see later in history, a man of great stature might take several wives not just for the sake of having wives and/or tons of children but to make connections. Today we would call these political connections but we know this is clearly a habit practiced for ages all through the world. It's like what we now call the "old" saying, it's not necessarily what you know but who you know! Whether it's for the sake of goodwill or sealing a pact with another family or leader of another people there can be obligation to take other wives. Daughters could even be given to men of great stature as presents; as a thank you to a leader for his protection or most anything. The skies the limit to why this might happen but what we know is that families of great stature, prestige, certainly those of so called nobility and royalty have a long history of intermarrying. I say all that to point out not that this was true of Nahor or anyone in his family such as his son Bethuel, but only that we are given a little fact here that confirms if one even suspects something like that might be true, Rebekah was truly of the house of her mother, be that reference to her grandmother Milcah or her direct mother. The servant asked this woman of local nobility if her father's house had room for him, but the house Rebekah specifically runs back to is the house of the correct blood and genetics to make her the mother of the chosen nation. Rebekah runs to her mother's house!

Until next time, Shalom!

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

dismantle all this at night because he feared his father, the men of his father's house, as well as the men of the city they lived near. This shows us what a serious violation of God's Law and Will these items were. This was not some personal deviant behavior on his father's part in having these things; something the nearby Israelites turned a blind eye to. This had become the religious practice of the area. To throw down an altar of Baal was a serious offense in the eyes of this community, which shows us how far at least certain people of Israel had fallen away from The One True God!

After destroying these things of pagan worship Gideon was to build an altar to God upon a spot God would designate. On that altar Gideon was to sacrifice his father's second seven year old bull using the wood from the trees of the grove he cut down as fuel. All these are wonderful illustrations of putting down the worship of Baal while turning to God. God would have no altar used for Him that was built and dedicated to Baal. It was commonplace for such altars to be built with cut stones even sometimes carved with writing or images to denote what god(s) the altar was for. God had commanded in His Law that any altar built to worship Him was to be built using natural stones. (Ex. 20:25) That is to say, stones found in the field not altered in anyway by the hand and will of men. In this command we see a recognition of our own sinfulness. It's ironic that stones for altars built to worship nature and natural powers are so often crafted by men but stones for altars to worship God were to only be shaped by the course of nature! (Gen. 3:17-19)

Thus, the altar man crafted to worship Baal was to be returned to natural forces by being dismantled and thrown down which would often break and seriously damage the stones the altar was made of turning them to rubble. God would have an altar made of natural stones, but the bull would be burned using wood from the trees that made up the grove. If this seems odd to return the altar to rubble while using the grove wood, we need to understand what a grove was. In our modern history we are all familiar with at least the concept of men building large structures for worship. Whether such structures are built to worship God or some false god(s) the elements more often than not a call back to the Tower of Babel. In the first place the structures are usually grand; that is to say, very large. Economics is really the only consideration in most cases as to just how big we go. When man set out to build a tower that would reach the heavens, that was as much a reference to the structure's size as it was its height alone. (Gen. 11:1-9) Though height is also part of most all such structures built for worship by man. Even steeples on the top of Christian churches are put there in at least a symbolic attempt to, "Reach God." From the building of altars to the building of buildings, man's thoughts about how to worship God are not far removed from our thoughts about how to worship false gods.

Now, a grove was much the same idea. Building large was not in the budget of your average person and/or community in days gone by. Nor was the knowledge of how to build very large tall structures something in the minds of most men. However, trees get tall all on their own, and if one arranges them in say, a circle, leaving the center cleared and open, you can create quite a spectacular place of worship! That is exactly

what men of old times did. Cutting down this grove was the equivalent to burning down or tearing down some temple that had been built to a false god(s) and far harder to replace once done. However, you might still be asking why use the wood to burn the sacrifice? The answer to that is the fact the trees, in spite of what they represented in the eyes of man, were still just natural trees, like the stones of the altar Gideon would build. Man can water, work the soil, and do all he can to see the trees grow, but only God can bring the increase. (I Cor. 3:6-7) It was a way of showing this truth and reclaiming in the eyes of men something that was always God's.

The other main point in these instructions is that Gideon was to take the second of his father's young bulls. This might lead one to ask, why second? The answer to this lies in one of two things most likely, but first let's all just note that in the Law God asked Israel to give the first-born to Him. (Ex. 13:11-13) Thus, it is not just the question of why is second specified but why second and not first? The first possibility is that with the way the Midianites were stealing most things of value it's probable they had already made off with the first-born bull. In truth, the Midianites were not interested in stealing everything. No they wanted Israel to do the work of feeding and breeding the animals so they could steal the increase such work brought. The second possibility as to why the second bull was to be taken instead of the first is twofold. It might be that the first-born had already been offered to Baal and was not available for that reason, but the reason to take the second might lie in symbolism alone. The first-born bull might have been fattened up and already dedicated as an offering to Baal. This would make it much like the stones the altar to Baal had been built with; something changed by the thoughts of man. God would have the second bull which had been left to the natural course of growing and being whatever it was. Since Midian had been stealing a lot of the food and provisions Israel had, this bull might have been thin and a great symbol of what turning from God had done to Israel.

Gideon would accomplish all he had been instructed to do by taking ten of his servants with him. In a small but needs to be pointed out fact here, Gideon had told the angel his father was poor and he himself was of least significance in his father's house. Now, we see it was upon his father's land that this altar and grove to worship Baal had been created, and Gideon, even fearing his father's house, had ten servants of his own willing to follow him in doing this task. Of course, none of this meant Gideon was a man of significance that others in Israel would follow, but when he said his father was poor that was stretching to make a point Gideon hoped would get him off the hook for whatever God was about to ask of him. In any case, Gideon did as God told him and when the men of the city rose up the next morning it was obviously quite apparent to them that the grove and altar were gone. This likely had something to do with the fact these men were so dedicated to the worship of false gods, in a way they wouldn't begin to be for The True God, that they came to the altar and grove about every morning to pray and/or offer something. What they found instead was no grove and an altar to God upon which no doubt the smoke from the sacrifice Gideon had offered still rose. There was also no reason to doubt the wood used to accomplish this was the trees from their grove.

One more possibility concerning the bull is that in the worship of Baal it might have been customary to keep what was considered best for one's self or that in some odd but considering how man is, not so odd way they still worshiped God at the tabernacle while also worshiping Baal nearer to home. No matter if they kept the first-born for themselves or to take to the tabernacle for sacrifice according to the Law, this would mean the bull they intended to sacrifice to Baal had been sacrificed to God. No matter which of these possibilities are true, the fact was these men were greatly upset by all of this. It had gotten their attention, which was actually the main point of the exercise. They wanted to know who had done this, and if by no other means by process of elimination they came to recognize Gideon was the man they were looking for. For his "crimes" they demanded Gideon's father Joash bring Gideon to them to be put to death, but in another fact reminiscent of the later prophet's actions, Joash makes the argument that Baal should not have a need to be defended by them if he really was a god. If true, it was an insult to Baal to suggest he couldn't deal with this on his own, so anyone who suggested he couldn't should be the one(s) put to death. He would give Gideon a name to denote he was the one Baal himself should take vengeance on. This has significance as the men of the city would remember this name and probably call Gideon that from then on. However, the longer Gideon lived the more it was obvious Baal was powerless to do anything to him!

Sometime after this the time came for the Midianites and all their co-conspirators to come up against Israel. In other words, they came like all bullies come, not alone but in the safety of numbers, and they would camp in the Valley of Jezreel to use as their base of operations in, once again, pillaging Israel. This valley is one in a good location for doing such a thing in the north of the promised land. It's why in the Book of Joshua when the people were afraid of this valley's inhabitants due to their iron chariots Joshua knew that was all the more reason they had to be defeated. (Josh. 17:16-18) When Midian came with this large contingent The Spirit of The Lord stirred up Gideon to act and he blew a trumpet to call the men of his family group together. By this point Gideon's comment to the angel about being a nobody even in his father's house was certainly not true, and all the men of his family group would come to his side! He then sends out messengers to call the rest of the tribe of Manasseh who also came to him. To grow the force even more he then sends out to the tribes of Asher, Naphtali, and Zebulun. This was all the tribes that had been given land in the North save Issachar and, of course, in the very far North Dan owned a small chunk. However, this represented the men who in this area Midian was set to strike against stood the most to lose, and all of them gathered to Gideon.

Gideon after all he had been through up to this point still held doubts about if this was really God's will or not. God had told him it was and went on to bring him the notoriety that would easily bring this fighting force under his command as a man who stood for God, but Gideon still had reservations. This is when we see Gideon "fleece God," which has become a term in Christianity for doubting and desiring a sign from God. One should note Gideon does not go to God asking if it was His will

to spare Israel from the Midianites; Gideon wants to be sure it's God's intent to do it by his hand. As a sign, Gideon wants to lay out a fleece for the night and in the morning he wants to see the dew on the fleece but have it surrounded by dry ground. In the morning Gideon comes out to the fleece to find it sitting in a dry spot of ground but the fleece was wet. To be sure he even wrings the water out of the fleece and finds a ridiculous amount of water is in it. As amazing as this was, Gideon still held onto his reservations. He understands at this point he's pushing God to ask for more which in and of itself should have told him something, but anyone of us could be guilty of pushing past such a thing in doubt and/or desire we won't have to do what God wants of us.

This time Gideon would ask for just the opposite in that the fleece would be dry but the ground have dew on it. The next morning when he goes out to check that is exactly what he finds. At this point Gideon gives in and begins to move. The army of Israel that had gathered to the man whom Baal was suppose to have have taken vengeance upon would move to a strategic spot by a well where Midian and their armies were just to the north of them in the valley. It is at this point God tells Gideon he has too many men with him. This must have come as a shock to the man who doubted if God had really called him to this task even after such a great army of Israel had assembled to his leadership. However, God tells Gideon if He delivers the Midianites and their armies into the hands of Israel with this large a force, Israel will believe they accomplished it on their own. God wanted it to be clear it was He Who had delivered Israel. Gideon was to go out and tell every man, who now sat with the enemy nearby, that if they were afraid they should go home. Upon hearing this 22,000 men, more than two-thirds of Gideon's army, got up and left; leaving just 10,000 men.

God again comes to Gideon and tells him the army of Israel is still too large and he should take them to the river to drink water. There God would show Gideon who he should take and who he should send home. As they came even closer to the enemy than before to drink from the river, God told Gideon to separate out the men who got down to lap water like a dog would from the men who kept their eyes on the enemy by dipping the water in their hand to bring it up to their mouth. Out of ten thousand men only three hundred used their hands to drink. God said these three hundred would be the men Gideon was to take and tell the rest of them to return home. These men God had chosen would take the supplies they needed including their trumpets while 9,700 men would pack up and leave. There Gideon stood, the man who just had to be sure in the first place God wanted to use him to lead this fight, with only 300 men left of the 32,000 who had originally been willing to gather to him and the large army of the Midianites in sight down below them in the valley. At this point Gideon had no idea how God intended to defeat such a large army with just three hundred men but God had shown him he was left with the bravest and wisest of those who had come. Gideon would put no more fleeces before The Lord or ask questions of doubt. He and his men would stand their ground and wait upon God's instructions for what to do next.

Let's stay in God's Word!

