

Free - Take One



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*

Issue #119

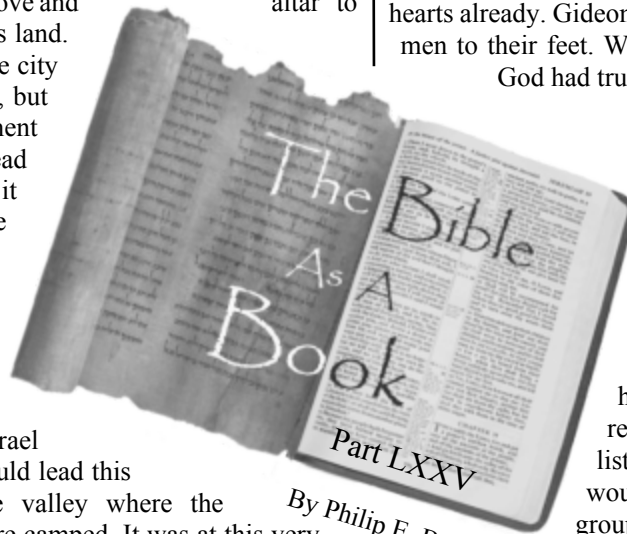
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As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, last time we started into the story of Gideon. We saw how an angel came to tell Gideon that God had chosen him to go out and defeat the Midianites who were invading the land. Gideon was not totally sure he believed this angel, but his doubt was really more of a cover for his fear. In the end we know Gideon knew he was talking to someone special as he desired to give this angel a gift, and that gift was to kill and prepare a young goat along with some unleavened cakes. This the angel consumes with fire and then disappeared from Gideon's sight. Gideon is then given a very specific task from God which was to take down the grove and altar to Baal which was on his father's land. After doing this the men of the city were very angry with Gideon, but his father makes the argument that if Baal wanted Gideon dead for his actions Baal could do it himself. Of course, as time passes the men of the city see Gideon did not die. When the Midianites invaded the land once more, Gideon sounds the trumpet and was able to get thousands of men from the northern tribes of Israel to come join him. Gideon would lead this army to a point above the valley where the Midianites and their allies were camped. It was at this very late state in the situation that Gideon fleeces The Lord to be sure he was the one to lead this army. After God confirms he was, God instructed Gideon to downsize his army twice. Before Gideon ever stepped onto the battlefield his army went from tens of thousands to just three hundred. All that brought us through Judges chapter 7 verse 8, and we are ready to begin with verse 9 this time.

As Gideon stands with his now much reduced army we are told that very night God instructs Gideon to go down to the Midianites camp to spy on them. God had told Gideon if he was afraid he could take his servant Phurah, which Gideon did. These two men would go down to the enemy camp where the army was like grasshoppers in number along the banks of the river. God had told Gideon that spying on the enemy would give

him the courage he needed to know God would give him success. As they got close to the camp they heard a man telling about a dream. This man dreamed that a cake of barley came rolling into the Midianite camp and when it hit a tent it totally tore the tent down and left it strewn along the bread's path. Another man is confident in interpreting this dream as being Gideon coming to fight their army and having the victory over them all. Hearing this very much encouraged Gideon as it had to be somewhat of a surprise they even knew of him, especially by name! However, the fact they believed a dream had shown he would overthrow their army meant there was fear in their hearts already. Gideon would worship God and return to get his men to their feet. With his new found courage he tells them God had truly delivered the enemy into their hands.

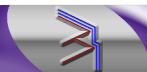


By Philip E. Busby

Gideon divided the three hundred men into three groups and gave each of them a trumpet, which would have been a ram's horn traditionally called a "shofar." They also would each take a pitcher and put a lamp inside that was lit and ready to shine. The pitchers would be a way to hide the light until they were ready to reveal themselves. Gideon instructs them to listen for him and follow his lead. Gideon would go to just outside the camp with his group of men and spread themselves out. The other two groups would approach from different directions and spread themselves out which would put men of Israel all around the enemy camp. Gideon would time this to take place just after the midnight watch had changed shifts, assuring the watchmen were awake and ready to see what Israel was about to do. Gideon would then blow his shofar, causing the men with him to follow and the other groups would do the same. Since this would reveal their presence to the enemy they would all now break their pitchers so the lamp lights could be seen. They would all then shout "The sword of The Lord and of Gideon!" Upon hearing and seeing all this the watchmen must have been startled to say the least! In the darkness it would appear Israel had them surrounded on all sides and already so close there was no time to organize a defense.

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The watchmen would begin to sound the alarm startling an entire army that was fast asleep. The men would jump up believing they were already under attack, and in the panic of grabbing their weapons to fight they would end up attacking each other. Mass confusion set in and the enemy began to flee generally to the south with a desire to head east, but the Jordan River would make going east hard. One way or the other they would find themselves primarily in the territory belonging to the tribe of Manasseh, and that tribe along with the men of Asher and Naphtali would pursue the fleeing army. Gideon would also send word to the men of Ephraim to come join this pursuit by defending along the river that served as a border between them and Manasseh. From the Jordan going west along that border, this would put men of Israel to the south of the fleeing Midianites assuring they could not just slip away by continuing to run toward home. In the process of pursuing and destroying the enemy the men of Ephraim captured two of the Midianite princes. One of these they would kill at a specific rock and the other they would kill near a winepress, but both these men's heads would be brought to Gideon showing their success. At this time the men of Ephraim also expressed anger Gideon had not called them to the fight in the first place. In a show of his diplomatic skills Gideon asks if the fight at the enemy camp was really better than the pursuit these men had been called to? He points out that while he got the enemy on the run that's all he did in comparison to Ephraim capturing two of Midian's princes. This quieted their anger and they were satisfied.

With his three hundred men Gideon would cross to the east side of Jordan and continue his pursuit of the Midianites, specifically two of their kings. Coming to the city of Succoth meant he and his men had traveled a long way since they first began this fight. They were tired, but most of all hungry, so Gideon asks the people of the city to give his men bread to eat. Considering how Israel had been hoarding all they could preserve from being stolen, the people did not want to do this. They specifically point out that he and his men had not captured the kings as yet, meaning the threat still remained as far as they were concerned. Gideon, trusting God would bring him the victory, tells these people that once he has captured the kings of Midian he would return to take vengeance out on their unwillingness to help. Gideon had reason to be angry as God had called him to this task, and on one side he had the men of Ephraim complaining they were not originally called and on the other the people of Succoth wouldn't even help. Gideon crossed the river Jabbok to the south and came to the town of Penuel. He asked the same of them and got the same answer. Gideon told them he'd be back to tear down their tower.

As hard as the pursuit itself had been, capturing these two kings was not going to be an easy task by man's standards. While Gideon and Israel's actions had killed 120,000 of the enemy, these two kings had what remained of the army, which was still 15,000 men. They were held up in a place not too far south of Succoth and Penuel, but Gideon found a way to approach them which would catch them off guard once more. They would run but Gideon did a lot of damage to them, and in the end took the two kings captive. Gideon returned to Succoth before the sun was up and caught a young man from there who knew there was seventy-seven elders of the city and what they

looked like. Gideon shows the people of the city how he now had what they had mocked him for not having before, and that was the two kings of Midian. He reminds them of the horrible crime they had committed in not being willing to feed his men who were fighting for their freedom. He then takes the elders and punishes them using the branches of native bushes that had long thorns on them. This was likely a whipping of sorts, but in any case it would have been brutal, even causing death. Gideon would also go back to Penuel and keep his promise of tearing down their tower which no doubt they depended upon for defense, if not storage of the very food supplies they had refused to give a portion of to feed his men. He also killed the men of that city.

Next, Gideon asks the two kings what they thought of the men of Tabor which was a place where they had killed many during the time Midian had been attacking Israel through these years. They answer with what might have been a bit of an attempt at flattery as they say those men were as Gideon, looking as if they were all children of the king. This is an expression used in the east and its meaning shouldn't be hard to discern. Of course, one might just think of this as being a way to say they looked like royalty, but the reason any such expression denotes a good quality is that kings usually lived in the lap of luxury; at least to the degree possible in their environment and culture. This in turn meant his children not only lived that way but also the very likely truth they grew up that way. Farming and other trades of the day were very hard on people. Unlike most modern societies, there were few to no jobs that did not require one to be out in the elements. Labor was manual and people often started into a trade or took part in the family's agricultural affairs from a very young age. Your complexion would wear the scares of this labor and only increase with time. The children of kings would not face any of this, especially if they did not go to war, and even then they usually held a position of command that didn't bare the brunt of the fighting.

People of the day who used this expression probably appreciated the contrast far more than we can today, but the bottom line was that the kings felt the people Gideon spoke of were blessed and healthy to say the least. While the kings might have thought they were complimenting Gideon and his people, it likely made Gideon all the more angry that these kings had killed such men! Gideon informs them the people they were speaking of were his brethren and even the sons of his mother. This is another expression not fully appreciated without a little cultural understanding. It was commonplace for a person to call many people brothers or brethren who were part of their same country. We must remember, more often than not, nations were originally rooted in being people of one family that had grown to be a tribe, then many tribes, and so on. This brought a much closer feel to what it meant to speak of countrymen than it does in many places across the globe today. For Gideon to specify they were also the sons of his mother, he was saying they were more than countrymen but not necessarily literally born of his mother. It was common for men who could afford it to have more than one wife in those days, so you could have a fair number of brothers and half brothers, as well as sisters, but the expression is meant to say these were people of my home town. Even that doesn't cover the real intent because as much affinity

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. We have gone further down the story to see Rebekah come to the well and fulfill the servant's prayer. All through the last segment we talked about the little details we often read over and how significant they are to understanding how God works and how we should live our lives; allowing Him to lead us in all things. We ended last time by talking about how the servant worships God for bringing all this about and the way his gratefulness to The Lord demonstrates to us the way we should not live our lives expecting God to do things the way we'd like to have them. We should always be thankful for whatever God has given us but never more so than when He has worked out a path for us that is smooth. We never know how many mountains we will have to climb even when we are doing what God asks us to do, and we should never lose sight of how grateful we should be when those mountains are not large or when there are no mountains! At the very end of the last segment we were talking about how Rebekah knows something special has just begun and she runs to her mother's house to inform them of the events she has just experienced. All this took us through Genesis chapter 24 verse 28, and we are ready to begin in verse 29 this time.

I emphasized at the end of the last segment the fact Rebekah ran to her mother's house. This was because facts such as these are important in continuing to trace the truth, she came not just from the right father but the right mother to be Isaac's wife. In turn, this means she's also the correct mother to form the chosen nation. Another fact we went past rather quickly was that Rebekah had answered the servant's question about there being room in her father's house in a positive way. She even added that there were provisions enough for his camels. However, in her excitement Rebekah runs off to her mother's house, leaving the servant standing there at the well. We see this is solidly true as we move into verse 29. The main fact of the verse is that we see the introduction of Rebekah's brother, and his name was Laban. This, of course, is a man who we will not just see in this story but in the later story of Jacob returning to this same family. While Jacob's return to this family might have seemed more just the course of his life in needing to flee his brother's wrath, it actually put Jacob in the correct place to marry the correct woman which in his case would turn out to be two of Laban's daughters, but the long details of that we'll cover when we get there. Suffice it to say, Laban is important not just in that he goes to the servant but in that we will see he knows the full details of how his sister came to be off in Canaan married to Isaac which resulted in the birth of her sons. One of these sons (Jacob) would return and Laban would get to know him very well.

Stepping aside from the specific details within the

verses for a second, I wish to point out that verse 29 and 30 here show us yet another example of how the Bible is worded. This is no trivial thing as it speaks to a couple points important to our understanding of the Word of God. It is hard to put a label or term on this "style" of context but we see it more than once throughout the Hebrew Bible and in some very important places; such as in the story of Genesis. What I'm referring to here is that if we read verse 29 we see a very condensed version of the same basic information we see in verse 30. Maybe a better way to see it is that the two verses cover the same time period of particular events. As we read verse 29 we see the basic introduction of Laban and who he was. We could say it this way, there was a man of the house whose name was Laban and he was Rebekah's brother. The second part of the verse tells us he went to the man at the well whom his sister had encountered there. By the time we hit the end of that verse we could move on with the assumption that Laban was there in the house and, to use a term, within ear shot of what Rebekah had to say. His sister's words then compel him to go out and meet this man she had left standing at the well. In other words, Laban's motives for caring about the man at the well enough to go to him are easily surmised.

Then we go into verse 30 and we see his motives had a little more to them than just hearing Rebekah's story. In that verse we are told Laban got a chance to observe the earring and bracelets the man had given her. This was his first clue to the fact something had happened to his sister that consisted of more than just meeting a stranger at the well. It's a detail that tells us the why and how Laban came to be very interested in her story. This is not to suggest Laban would have otherwise ignored her as some excited girl going on about nothing important, but to emphasize before, or as, he was hearing her story there was evidence something out of the ordinary and important had, in fact, happened to Rebekah at the well. The words Rebekah spoke are the part very condensed in this verse as we already know the story by reading the verses leading up to this verse. That said, as we go down the verses of this chapter we find the servant will recount the story; both parts Rebekah was able to tell as well as the details about how he came to this place and what he had prayed before she came. I point this out to say, the fact verse 30 does not fill in the words of Rebekah's story which Laban heard is not because they were not worth repeating on the basis of what I said above about us already reading them as they happened. It's because we will get to hear them again a bit later.

If you don't see where I'm going with all this, let me stop and make the major point I'm driving at, and that is the fact every verse, every word, in the Bible is there for a purpose! As we each approach the Word of God we can think many different things, but no matter who we are we must understand what I just said is true. This is a great reason why one of the most common phenomena you will hear people say happens to them as they read God's Word is that they can get something out of It or just a part of It, that they did not get before! Some look at verses like

these two and see only redundancy or the retracing of facts already assumed or known. However, it is in these little windows we get a peek inside, a clue if you will, as to how God created His Word to be something we can just keep finding new things in as we read. It is not the simple idea that any story may have points or facts we missed or forgot when we read through it the first time (facts we pick up on the second time we read it); it's that the Bible has so much depth to it there is likely no end to what new things you might see no matter how many times we've read It!

I have been in the Bible since I was too young to read. I used to spend a lot of time at my grandmother's house, especially after my grandfather passed away. I would very often spend the night, and my grandmother had an unshakable habit. She would sit down at the kitchen table and read the Bible each and every night. I would sit quietly and listen to her read until I learned to read a bit myself. Once that happened she would have me read a few verses to her and, of course, I read longer and longer portions the better I got at reading. However, it did not stop there. I continued to read the Bible very often for myself and I experience the phenomena I mentioned above. At times I believed it was just because my reading wasn't good enough to really see something right at first. I figured I must have read that part wrong or was struggling to pronounce the words enough that I didn't really get the jest of what I was reading. As anyone who struggles with reading can tell you, reading and comprehending what you read are two different things. However, as I began to know the words well enough that like a favorite story you know what's coming long before you get there, it became more and more obvious that there was more there than I originally saw no matter how good I could read. As I have conveyed at other times in my writing, I have been in the ministry since a very young age. In fact, I was doing ministry work at such a young age there were those who rejected some of what I did simply on the basis they felt I was too young to be doing what I was doing. Add to that the fact that at the time of this writing I'm approaching fifty years of age and you'll get a clue as to how long I've been absorbed in God's Word. I say all that to say this, I still find myself being amazed by something new in the Word of God, maybe just an absolutely eye opening depth to something I have known so well for a very long period of time. In the world they have a saying, "Never stop learning." When it comes to God's Word and learning all It has to say to us, you never can unless you just stop reading It!

Again, these two verses are a view of why that's true. You see another issue I go back to and hit on time and time again is what God did at the Tower of Babel. It is such a fascinating thought that in the beginning of man's existence, language was more than a set of verbal sounds. There literally are no words to describe what that means, but I attempt to point to it all the time because it has importance to who we are and have been! Coming to find and figure out such important things in the Bible happen when we follow what the Psalmist said which was that he meditates on the Word of God both day and night. (Ps. 1:2) Just think about what it means mentally for us all to speak one language. We look back into past cultures, even something the empires preserved for us such as the Greek language and see language was, even by then, more than just a set of verbal sounds. People could make up words to describe

something, something such as what I'm trying to point out here, and others would understand those words even if they had never heard them before. We see hints to this being something that could be true even in a weak language such as English. However, I'll take the opportunity to point out, English has gotten even worse because so many of those who teach English are very harsh on those who attempt to make up words. We will even make fun of people who do it, even at times we clearly understand what they are saying. That's not a good thing because it's one thing to just make up a "word," a sound we say is a word with a meaning to it, a "word" that has to be explained for anyone to know what you're talking about. It's quite another thing to make up combination of sounds which already exist, using language rules that most all of us have been taught. We might just use emphasis we have never used before, but when doing any of this if almost anyone else speaking the language could understand what we're saying, it's a good thing, especially if no word already exists that means the same thing.

So why do we resist this so badly? The answer to that is the Tower of Babel effect. What we fear is that people will do this sort of thing enough we won't end up agreeing on what a lot of words mean or that an already cluttered with words language such as English will just get harder to understand. Language always drifts whether we like it or not. Thus in order to add words to our language we really need a consensus among the people speaking the language that we all see a word as meaning this or that; maybe even this concept or that concept is best described by this word or that one. We go through all this because at the end of the day we want to guard against language shifts which will create branches of our language; branches which the people speaking it will no longer understand us or us them! We are perfectly free to try and stave off language shift, but what this means is it can be very hard, if not impossible, to express new ideas or speak of new information. This is certainly true if we feel we need to make up a word others might not understand, but our guard against shift to the point we can't use new words most others would understand is not saving a language, it's killing it. The language is still usable in a very everyday sense, but this creates a stagnation in humanity we were not suppose to experience. It's a stagnation we never would have had if God had not confounded our language. So is God to blame for all this? No, because confounding our language didn't/doesn't force us to do this. We choose to do it in an attempt to fight the shift we cannot fully stop.

God confounded our language for our good whether we see it that way or not. However, just because God put a mechanism in place that by nature causes language shift, it doesn't mean we had/have to be taking ourselves down due to it. God created us with so much we can't begin to understand the depth of who we are as humans nor can we begin to scratch the surface of our potential without God's guidance in it all. That said, we have chosen to fight everything God has done to keep us on track in an attempt to get back what we lost. This only results in even more loss. It is this fight, like a fish on a hook, that has driven the damage further and further. We and we alone are responsible for this. However, that's why God put His Word together the way He did. Not only does it never cease to amaze me how deep God's Word is but it's also an astonishment how resilient It is in the face of the Tower of Babel effect. As those

What About God's Chosen People?

Part XLIX

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

"Is it true that the Jews are God's chosen people? I have a Christian friend who says the Jews were not God's chosen people."

In our last segment, we made the leap from talking about the history of the chosen nation to talking more about secular history and more specifically the fall of the Roman Empire. We made this transition not because we want to end our look at Jewish history but because we need to see how the world changed during the time Israel was no longer a people with any control over the promised land. This in no way means the chosen nation was not a nation. Their very survival as a people during this time is a great evidence God was still using them and intended to use them in the future. Talking about how the world changed during this time is a way for us to understand how men who do not want the things of God still saw the Jews as a threat. Thus, they still attempted to destroy them. In the end we see these attempts failed and Israel is a nation among us today. However, to understand the main players in how that all came about, as well as why it came about, requires knowing how the nations of Europe emerged from the fall of the Roman Empire.

As we got into that we covered the fact Rome went to war with the people to the north of the empire's core territory. Who these people were, along with how Rome saw them, is why we know them as and generally use the word "barbarian" today. I find the study of this word interesting because it speaks to what I like to call the Tower of Babel effect. In other words, the fact language will always morph and change to make it hard for everyone in the world to communicate as one large group. Men being sinful take this and find themselves often offended by those who do not speak their language. At the very least one can find it frustrating, and that's why people often look at those who do not speak their language as outsiders of some sort. No one in the world (at least of those groups that are largely known) can be said to be more arrogant and prideful of their language than the Greeks. You don't have to agree, but it's a thought to keep in mind when we look at the fact the word "barbarian" comes first from the Greeks who used the word, "barbaros."

There is indication that originally the word was meant to describe people of valuable cultures ancient to the Greeks themselves. Such as the Egyptians and Persians. In this form the word wouldn't seem to hold a derogatory connotation. However, later on the word was used for those who did not speak Greek or follow "classical" customs. They also applied this term to those on the outskirts of Greek territory who spoke other languages. In the most formal sense the word was simply the opposite of "citizen." It was a way of denoting someone as a non-Greek. In a more honest way the word was derogatory. The Greeks thought those who spoke other languages sounded

like they were babbling. Today we might say something like, "blah, blah, blah" to refer to someone talking about things we don't care about. That idea was in the Greek word but they might say, "bar, bar, bar." In more of a word form it comes to be, bar-bar-os. The Romans, as it was with so many things, picked up this term and to them it was a way to label those they thought of as being from a lesser civilization or culture. In Roman thought there was no one more uncivilized and of a lesser culture than the people who lived to the North. In a word, they were barbaric!

One thing I'd like to point out while on this subject of barbarians collapsing Rome is the way history has looked at this time period. Why should we see that? Because it is the nature of humanity and a lot of what we talked about last time in a nut shell. For the most part the history of what is called the Middle Ages (or at least the Early Middle Ages) has been looked at as an inconvenient interruption in the progress of western civilization. While it's true this view is debated, the fact remains that what most would simply call the "Dark Ages" is still looked at as exactly that. Why? Because educational and civic accomplishments which seemed to flourish during the time of the empires took a major backseat to other concerns. The Middle Ages were filled with almost endless war and bloodshed as the powers that were came and went like the rising and falling of the tides. Mysticism seemed to dominate so much of the landscape as the barbarians brought their new and strange cultural/religious ways into the much more organized Hellenistic world the Greeks had given us. However, there in is the point. As much as Rome, by this time, had taken on this new religion that sprang from the Jews, called Christianity, the dominate thinking was still Greek.

What we must never forget about Greek or Hellenistic thinking and philosophy in general is that it is still all rooted in the same pagan beliefs people the world over held and hold to this day. It is a system of Baal worship where men worship the creation rather than the Creator. (Rom. 1:25) A system of worshiping many gods instead of The One True God Who created it all. What Hellenistic philosophy had done so well, that is to say much better than any other well known religious system, is to organize all that thinking into a streamline story that said what we want to hear. In Greek belief, from the very beginning of the story, are gods who created lesser gods only to see those lesser gods rise to destroy their creator gods and take the full power for themselves. This cycle happens over and over in the Greek myths until one day a conquering set of lesser gods made their own mistake of creating humans. The human story then becomes a journey, or a process, of us outgrowing our need for our creators. We are said to do this through both knowledge and stature. It's what the Olympic games even of our modern era are all about; faster, higher, stronger - together!

Of course, there is nothing wrong with honest healthy competition and sport, but what humans easily lose sight of as they delve into sports and being fans of sports is how much these accomplished athletes do not represent a growth of what humanity is. They may represent a height of talent for a certain set of physical abilities in any given pool of humanity but they are no more one step closer to becoming gods than any everyday person on the street. If the idea that you or others actually think they are sounds absurd to suggest, all you have to do is take a step back and look at how we treat our top athletes in the world. If that is not the worship of men by men I don't know what is! This is not to suggest sports is the only place this happens because we can latch onto any person who has talent that impresses a fair number of people. Here in the United States it's pretty unbelievable how sought after people are who can sing or act or play an instrument. We think of it as just entertainment, but our actions and responses to such people tell a different story.

What's great about Hellenistic ideas is that they give us what we want and they are fairly universal. The idea of growing to no longer need any kind of creator is what the human struggle is in Hellenistic thinking and this can be applied to any pagan god, set of gods, or even The True Creator. This truth is why within the chosen nation there could arise a Hellenistic thinking group that did not have to deny the existence of God to be Hellenistic. However, this Hellenistic thought did tell them they did not have to be so obligated to follow God's commandments. This became one of the two most popular religious groups of thought in Israel, and we know them as the Sadducees. Now they are an old dusty group relegated to the pages of history. However, what we see in all this (if we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear) is how Hellenistic we still are today. It may look totally different on many levels but at its core it is not! This is why we look back on a time period of war and disorganization as so dark, and as such an interruption in human progress. The people of the Middle Ages had strange mystical beliefs. Ask anyone in, or familiar with, western culture what comes to mind about the Middle Ages and they will almost immediately think of a time of castles, kings, knights, and what else? Wizards, witches, and witchcraft. It was a time of spirits, demons, and magic of all sorts. It shows up in the stories we tell and media of all kinds. The Middle Ages were a dark time of disorganization and chaos, but of what?

Religion that's what! The golden era of organized religion that had been honed so well by the empires, and in particular the Greeks, had vanished into a dark time of fear, but what had not happened is a change in core beliefs. The barbarians of the North did not really believe anything different religiously than those of the empires. They worshiped many gods and most of them were the powers of heaven or that of humanity. Along with worshiping the sun, moon, and stars man also worships physical powers that lay within us. Things such as fertility, which is the ability to reproduce. Humans have long worshiped this aspect of human ability. In the hopes of appeasing the god or gods that they believed had/have power over it they sacrificed countless animals and in some cultures, even the very children they are hoping to have! Because humans need food we worship gods that supposedly have

power over the sunshine, rain, fertility of the soil, and who knows what else. All these things are the things the Greeks and the Romans worshiped, and the barbarians worshiped them as well. It simply does not matter that the name of the gods were different and/or there was a god or two some worshiped that another didn't. It's all the same worship of many gods (Baal worship) that was first organized at the Tower of Babel.

The only reason we really see all these pagan religious thoughts as not the same thing is because different cultures prioritize different things, but there would be no different cultures if God had not confounded the language. Language was just an effective tool to accomplish an end result. It was universal religion that God struck down. He did not take the base premise of it from us because we choose it with our own free will. Thus it remains, but we are not all obligated to the same system/religion. We do not all live in a system that blocks out the truth, there is another way; a True God Who cares about each one of us! That's the simple truth we have talked about over and over in order to see God will also continue to use the chosen nation to ensure the knowledge of Him never passes from the minds of men. That is why the world and the beast of a system it has created seeks to destroy the chosen nation in one form or another. We hate the things of God so much we desire to not even retain the memory of God's existence in our minds. (Rom. 1:24-32) We want to go on believing someday we will rise to a place where we will be gods and just like those who elevated Nimrod at the Tower of Babel, we believe there are those people who already stand somewhere out there, higher than the average person but not quite a god - yet. We want to hold our fate in our own hands!

The barbarians wanted no less but their systems of religion were not as unified as the empires. Their gods were also much more harsh and formidable than most had come to believe the gods of the Greeks and Romans were. This was a problem because it made humanity seem like he took a step backward becoming more at the mercies of nature's power instead of harnessing and using them for our desires. This was primarily due to the same facts that made the barbarians such powerful warriors. The climate in the North from which they came was harsh, and if you had lived where they lived there would be no wonder as to why they believed many of their gods to be less giving, less caring, less of all those positive aspects we hope to get from a god. The land did not give much, at least not for long before the ice and cold came to destroy it all. Winters were long and summer past fast as one attempted to farm enough to feed a family for another long winter. No worship of or prayer to any of the gods they believed in changed these facts. They lived in conditions that would have had Greeks and Romans on their knees believing the gods had forsaken them!

These are the factors that made the barbarians – barbaric! They hunted with a cruelty and intent of purpose. They lived hard lives and died young. Survival was at the heart of all they did and thought. On the flip side, the Romans had become lazy as they indulged in luxuries and comfort the barbarians dared not even dream of having. These barbarians threatened everything the “civilized” world stood for, and once they took power their barbaric culture would dominate. The

golden era of Hellenistic thinking and accomplishment would seemly end and western civilization could only hope to one day move forward again. These are the facts that cause so many to think of the Middle Ages as a dark time. However, the Romans had long before degraded to such a reprobate state western civilization was already stagnate at best. The barbarians did not bring the setback of humanity, they simply put the dying conglomerate of human civilization the empires had become, out of its misery.

This too has its truths for us to see. We look back at the end of the Roman Empire and weep for what could have been instead of seeing where such desires take us. We are seeing much of the same death throws in the world today with no hope of barbarians to save us from our ultimate decline. If we can look back and see what really became of the Romans or would have become of them, we'd be thankful to the barbarians for the fresh blood they brought to humanity's quest. This causes one to wonder if the wording in Revelation 16:10 concerning darkness being poured out on the seat of the beast is referring to what we call the "Dark Ages," or more to the closing days of the empires. Reprobate stagnation is also something God saved us from when He confounded our language at the Tower of Babel. We don't see how that's true on so many levels, but again I repeat, we are watching it happen once again in our day. Comfort in a sinful state is not a good thing. Confidence in the ideas, ways and "accomplishments" of men is not wise! The bell rings loud and clear telling us we need God to, once again, step in and act in order to save us from totally bringing an end to ourselves, but are we listening?

Now, I've come a long way from where I intended to start this segment, especially considering where I ended last segment. Last time I said we'd have to step back from looking at these barbarians taking down the Roman Empire in order to understand another factor that was involved. That is still true because a very large factor in understanding how the world came to the Middle Ages is to look at how the world handled the message that The Messiah had come. What man chose to do as he intermixed the Gospel message with pagan thoughts to form a religion is truly dark! The Bible points out a truth that should be obvious. We are told a fountain cannot bring forth sweet water and bitter. (James 3:11) God also instructs us that we be either hot or cold because if we are lukewarm He will spew us out of His mouth. (Rev. 3:14-22) We can't have both pagan and what is truly Christ like (Christian) and come out with anything that is good. Nevertheless, this is what man attempted to do and what became the religion of Christianity has a long history of going after those who attempt to teach the truth. This fact both effected as well as furthered during the Middle Ages.

That said, it's important that we go back and understand the Middle Ages is not where it started. First, there are the words of Paul, James, Jude, and certainly those of John in the New Testament all warning the early church about the danger of this mixture. This tells us the problem can not be put down and laid to rest. Instead it plagues us always and it must be constantly combated. Men who founded the church warned of activity within the church that was already allowing pagan

thoughts to guide certain practices. What we read in Revelation's opening are warnings to the churches not the least of which were/are the fact they had mingled worldly things, humanistic thinking, with the truth of the Gospel. This is done as a way to bridge the divide that is felt by so many non-Jewish believers in Jesus. These believers were raised in certain pagan practices which they struggle to dispose of in favor of the cross. When people have been born into a religion and raised in its beliefs there will always be a nagging feeling that giving up such practices and beliefs is wrong. It's the power of religion those at the Tower of Babel recognized. They wanted to harness it and use it to turn men away from God to a philosophy of "bettering humanity;" the ultimate goal being to no longer need God.

One certainly does not have to take the thinking to that extreme to be caught up in religion, and in truth it's why religion exists. Those leading the effort at the tower understood this truth probably better than anyone ever has. They knew the thought was a lofty one which not everyone was going to believe is obtainable. However, it's one that grabs the imagination of those most greedy for power and fame. These people will be drawn to the leadership of religion and worship the thought itself and/or the gains it brings to their earthly lives. The "little people" are not so easily moved. Like the barbarians, common man does not live in such comfort and does not see humanity ascending to this lofty goal. At least not on a regular basis, and what I mean by that is that it's one thing to have a great day or a spiritual moment, it's another to have it on a continual basis. For these you need obligatory practices that make people believe they are going on to a better place in general and/or they will have prosperity of some kind in their lives. It is taught for the sake of making people not just believe if they do such things they will receive rewards but even more so the opposite. The idea that if we do not do such things we will receive punishment is a fearful and driving force that keeps religion potent in the human mind!

This was the power wielded at the Tower of Babel in order to keep everyone on board. Religion is the power to obligate people. Whether for the power of a few who gain from the organization of it all or the grand concept of being for the good of all, the same principal is employed. This means even those with the best intentions for getting people to serve The True God are always tempted to use it, and sadly it has been used a lot and often. We could do an entire study on this point alone but there is only so far we can go into a side issue before we lose track of our main question. We need to see how the religion of Christianity grew to the powerful organization it became, whether with the best of intentions or not. We need to see how it grew to be Anti-Semitic and why it has been one of the greatest forces attempting to kill the chosen nation that the world has ever seen!

To do that, we step back and recognize once again that Christianity, true Christianity as it was growing through the work of the apostles and others in those early days, was an odd religion. If we look at the teachings of Paul we see he struggles a lot against both Jewish forces as well as pagan thought. Why is this needed? Because both were a religious encroachment

into the church. The Jewish version of this was easy to fall to in those early days. The only anti-Semitism in the church was that which came from non-Jews not liking Jews in general. While this was widespread in the world, the truth is it melted away very quickly if one accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Unlike today, the Gospel was clearly a Jewish story about a Jewish man named Jesus whom those who taught the Gospel proclaimed to be The Messiah, not just of the Jews, but of the world! If you struggled greatly with anti-Semitism you probably would not accept the Gospel, but if the power of God touched your heart enough that you did, you realized you were accepting a Jewish man as your personal Saviour. In short, Christianity was understood to have a Jewish foundation. That said, if you came out of pagan religion to serve Jesus it left you without a religion. For example, the only Christian “sacrament” (I know, saying that is a bit redundant) is that of water baptism. (Matt. 3, Mark 1:1-11, John 1:19-27)

Water baptism is a simple ceremony which symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We perform it as John the Baptist did as a symbol that we are following Christ by giving our lives to God in a way that is even higher than a marriage vow. Traditionally marriage is, “Till death do us part,” but Baptism represents following Jesus even beyond death to eternal life. This is actually important to pagans in a way we might not appreciate so much today. Many in false religions believe in going on to a “better place.” However, even if you don't see at first how Jesus is the only way to go on to any kind of better place, one is vowing to follow Jesus to the place He said He was going to prepare for us! (John 14:1-4) Stop for a minute and let that idea soak in and it'll mean more to you than you might realize. Getting back to my point about water baptism being the only true sacrament, I say it to point out how simplistic true Christianity is. This is part of its attraction at first glance but especially when you've been raised to follow religious stipulations it can become a detriment. You want something more to “do” and/or “accomplish” in order to be saved. We need something more to feel secure, and in the early church when Jews came along teaching non-Jewish believers they should be circumcised and follow other precepts of the Law it seemed not just logical but a relief!

The Law gave something more than just this internal seeking to hear God's voice and allowing that to change your life into what God intends you to be. People wanted something more tangible and some hand-picked stipulations of the Law of Moses would seem to give that. The problem is that if the Law is followed in all its instructions it's nearly impossible to accomplish with the kind of purity and perfection it seems to call for. If we don't water it down, as so many do, this doesn't bring about the assurance many seek/sought by following the Law, but an exasperation. It's the exact exasperation Abraham felt as he took Isaac up Mount Moriah to sacrifice him according to God's instructions. Abraham had done everything he knew to do to follow God. One of God's greatest promises was that Abraham would have a son and be the father of many nations. However, he and Sarah just kept getting older and it never happened. Out of fear it never would and/or the thought

they needed to do more to accomplish it, Abraham has a son through Sarah's handmaiden. God then tells him that son was not the promised son and would not be! Abraham waits some more wondering not just at how far past child bearing years Sarah was but considering their age one of them might die in the not too distant future.

Finally the time comes and God tells Abraham he'd have the son they'd waited for about a year from when God was speaking these words. (Gen. 17:15-22) Another year? However, Abraham and Sarah did finally have the son God promised and he was growing into a man quite nicely. Then God tells Abraham to take Isaac and sacrifice him. Wait, what? Kill the son I've waited so long to have? On top of that Abraham was wise enough in God to know what Israel was told through a prophet many years later. Taking the life of another person wouldn't save his own soul. (Micah 6:1-9) So what was all this about? Abraham did not know for sure. Whether talking about salvation of one's soul or the overall plan of God to save any of us, this act of killing Isaac seemed counter productive to say the least. However, God said to do it and that Abraham would do because the one thing he understood beyond a shadow of a doubt was that following God's instructions was always the thing to do. So he and Isaac walked that hill and Isaac observes they have all the elements for performing a sacrifice save one thing. Thus, Isaac asks his father where the lamb to sacrifice was!

Now, those of you who have read much of what I write know I can write on this story/question almost endlessly, but what I wish to point out is that in Abraham's answer to Isaac is the exasperation of not knowing details. He said God Himself would provide a lamb and he didn't mean just for that sacrifice. Abraham knew there was nothing he could do to earn his salvation, not even the sacrifice of his own son would do that. All he (as well as we) can do is understand we live by and in God's grace. If we come to God we must believe that He is and that He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11:6) We can find religious practices comforting, as if we're doing something to earn our salvation, and what better way to feel that as a believer in God than to follow the Law He gave? However, that's a trap and why men such as Paul taught so vehemently against it. Understand, Paul was not villainizing the Law he was attempting to maintain the truth in the minds of those who had come out of the darkness of religion and into the light of God. The truth is, we simply cannot earn salvation and even the Law shows us this. It simply does not matter how badly we want to or are taught that we at least have to try. Only God can grant salvation and only Jesus is the door to following Him into that place He has prepared for those who choose a relationship with Him. To quote the prophet Habakkuk which Paul does over and over, “The just shall live by faith!” (Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, Heb. 10:38)

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

who speak English should know, there is seemingly no end to the English translations one can find of the Bible. Almost all these translations have their core excuse for existing in the idea English does and has drifted enough to warrant a more “modern translation.” The excuse is that something such as The King James Version is too difficult to read for those of us who speak a very different English today than the Kings' English of yesteryear.

Most of this is foolishness, but even in the midst of this foolishness most key elements of God's Word somehow remain intact! Does that mean we shouldn't care what translation we read? Absolutely not! People still pull some very bad ideas out of their minds and use these corrupt translations to support them. What we've actually seen in English is a recognition of what I was just talking about. Not all translations were even done with the “good” intent of making the Bible more understandable. Many were done with the intent to make it line up with church doctrine. Making it easier to understand is often code for, it'll be easier because it will simply confirm what we've ordained as right “Christian” thinking. This process has taken small steps at a time so as to hide this intent, but it's clearly there. One of the greatest evidences is that if you know the Bible well you will see that many modern translations don't even say what you know It says. Verses that were problematic have been adjusted or flat out changed to leave out the “problem” or say what is more in line with church doctrine. No writing can withstand this kind of total rewrite, so be aware that's not what I'm talking about when it comes to God's Word being resilient. What I'm talking about is the fact we did the damage and made the choices that caused God to confound our language yet God was not diminished in the slightest. If a translation of the Hebrew Bible is done with the true intent to do one's best to translate the words from Hebrew to another language, no matter how weak that language is (such as English), the truth can still be found in the translation.

God designed His Word to stand the test of time and withstand the beating His oracles would take while in the hands of men. (Rom. 3:2) Verses such as the two that started this conversation are examples of that fact. These verses also give us a glimpse into how God dealt with the diversity of human thinking. The list goes on and on, but this one is another major point. While to some the Bible can seem rather redundant, that “redundancy” will often serve to ensure people of all different thought patterns will get the point and pick up on the details needed to see what God was doing. It's as if the Bible is living and breathing; able to reach out and touch many different minds formed by endless diversity in personality and countless variation in experiences. This is all the more reason we call the Bible, God's Living Word! It's vital and it's life. It's what we need even when we don't understand what we need or why we need it. I have often told people who are doubtful to simply sit down and read the Bible for themselves doing all they can to clear out preconceived notions they have about Christianity and what the Bible says. Just read It! Those who have taken up the challenge with sincerity in their heart have so often come back with a far different attitude than the one they began with. In some cases people don't even see clearly all the changes it's made in them, but others will notice it. God's Word is this

amazing thing that when we really start to get It, we find It is one of the greatest evidences we tangibly have which tells us God is real!

Now, most of that was not even where I originally was headed in pointing out the comparison between verses 29 and 30. However, this too is evidence and insight into how God works. I've found myself frustrated at times thinking about how long it's taken me to get through teaching certain portions of Scripture, but I have to keep reminding myself that no matter what I think or want to accomplish in each writing, what is more important is that God be allowed to do what He wishes each time. I can say with assurance that while some will believe I got totally sidetracked in saying all I just did, almost losing all sight of the verses we are studying here, what I have written is and/or will be very meaningful, even necessary, for some others. In ways, maybe most will never understand what I've written here, but in spite of that, it will help you see the correct Biblical perspective on some issue you wouldn't have otherwise. I don't say that to defend what I've written because following God's will never needs a defense. I say this to help others see and rest assured that we should always follow God and not men; even over what is in our own mind. Let God be true and every man a liar! (Rom. 3:4)

Getting back to our verse by verse, Laban had motivation to go and meet this man his sister spoke of. Motivation from what she had said; motivation by what the man had given her; and motivation from the excitement his sister held over this meeting. Yes, it was her excitement as much as anything that likely peaked the family's interest. To qualify that statement, there is a small but as always important fact given in verse 29. Not only did Rebekah run to tell her mother's house all she had just experienced, we are told Laban ran back to the servant who still stood by the well! As you think about that, keep in mind Rebekah had not met Isaac nor did she know who he was. These families within a family had no firsthand knowledge of each other. Thus, Rebekah is not excited because she had just met the man of her dreams, yet there is a sense in all this that, that would be the correct way to describe her actions in this moment. This we see carried forward later in the story as she is more than willing to go with the servant to a land she had no knowledge of to marry a man she had never even seen before. This is no doubt a great deal of why Laban runs to see this man. Who was this man who had so excited his sister? This is the question that makes me leap to think about the answer! Leap as John leapt in his mother's womb at the voice of Mary the woman who carried in her womb The Messiah! I've touched on it a few times but you don't really get it unless you get it.

Long before Jesus came to this earth and defined the nature of God as being that of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the Torah explains what we describe as The Godhead. If you know the Bible you know there are countless examples of God showing us the truth in metaphor. The reality is, God has to do this because as we talked about, we humans are taking ourselves down not growing through God's guidance. This is true as a race but individuals can grow if they choose. Ironically that's a very large part of why God confounded our language! We don't do very well wrapping our head around the truth. Most of it simply

seems to be outside our comprehension. That said, I believe a lot of it is not so much out of our comprehension, it's that we don't know how to express it and that hurts us a lot. There is a method for learning that says if you can't take something you've learned and explain it to someone else in clear and simple terms, you haven't learned the subject well enough. While I totally reject the idea just everything can be explained in simple terms, I agree the ability to turn around and teach the subject matter to another person does show a grasp of the concepts not just the facts. In any case, the idea behind attempting to explain it to another person is more than just a test like one takes in school. It's not the idea of, if you can do it you pass as opposed to take the course over again. The real idea is that in turning around and explaining it to someone else you solidify the knowledge in our own head. You find the weak areas and ultimately remember better. There is a whole process of cognitive function in your brain that doesn't take place if all you do is memorize facts.

This is part of the reason we find deeper concepts harder to grasp and there are no deeper concepts and truths than when it comes to God's nature, as well as the reason(s) He created us. Our language has become so poor as time has progressed there are simply no words to turn around and explain certain things we've learned. If we can't express what we know it often will not stick in our minds. If relatively lower concepts and truths don't stick, there is no way for us to go even higher or deeper. This might sound a bit foolish, but if so, it would be my guess I'm struggling with the problem I'm talking about while attempting to talk about it! There are no words which we all could understand, nor is there the ability to make words to help me say what I'm trying to say. Again, you either get it, at least to some various degree, or you don't. However, what I'm talking about can be seen in the Bible. One of the main reasons people will say the Old Testament is hard or hardest to understand when talking about the Bible overall, has to do with this. The further we go back in time the more concepts were obvious through, how shall I say it, none specific metaphor. In the beginning with Adam and Eve there was really no reason for God to explain His nature. We were made in His image and Adam understood that. (Gen. 1:27) We see that best in what he understood when God brings Eve to him and Adam declares she is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

We take this in the simplest way and think about how he knew God had taken a part of him in order to create her. However, what Adam was really saying is, I'm not alone as a human! He had a basic understanding of how God was the only Being exactly like God. In other words, God is, in that way, alone. So too God shows us in Genesis how He intended and did create only one human. It's all right there in the story. Adam would be made in God's image as a singular being. This was unlike anything else God made in this entire creation of living things. God brings all the animals to Adam to see what he would name them and that process emphasized how alone Adam was, for there was not found among the animals even a "helpmate." God determined that while he had made Adam to be a singular being it wasn't good for him to be alone. Thus, God made Adam not just a helpmate but an equal living being.

Adam recognizes this in pointing out she was the same as he was. You see there was bone and flesh that constitutes the animals, but because they did not have the mind or spirit that Adam had they were not the same; Eve was. As much as God created Adam to commune with him, and Adam understood God consisted of the same three parts as himself, God was not bone and flesh in the same way Adam was, and so too God was not the same - Eve was!

Man went through a lot between that moment of Adam meeting Eve and the time of Abraham. We fell to sin. Very early on the first murder took place. We continued a decline into sin to the point God wiped us out with a flood and we would have been gone if not for Noah finding grace in God's eyes. (Gen. 6:8) After that we determined to build a universal human power base that could control all men as one instead of as individuals which we were created to be. Due to this God confounded our language. More time passed and man became many nations across the earth, and after all those times and events, man could no longer see many things which Adam understood most clearly. The truth was still able to be found if we sought God, and Abraham shows us that in understanding God would one day provide Himself as the true sacrifice. (Gen. 22:8) However, understanding such concepts would only become harder as man fell further and further. Thus, God begins to illustrate truths to us. Those truths would exist not just in the Law itself once it was given to Moses, but God began to illustrate many truths in establishing the chosen nation in the first place!

I have pointed out the importance that women such as Sarah, Rebekah, and others had to be used to get things correct so much some are getting tired of hearing about it. However, this is part of what I'm talking about over here. No matter how far behind in history the time was that it physically and observably took place on the earth that there was two distinct camps of people, one that served God and one that did not, the truth still remained. There always will be those who choose to serve God and those who choose not to. I emphasize the word "choose" there because it's no accident when any human doesn't serve God, it's a choice; one we pray people will turn around from, but a choice nonetheless. Once Israel was formed it would not be, nor was it meant to be, the only people who served God, but it represented in this earth that men could choose to be part of God's people or just a part of the world at large. Large looming illustrations exist in the Hebrew Bible. They are so large it's like the old saying about not being able to see the forest for the trees. However, long before the Law, God used Abraham, Isaac, and the servant Laban ran to see at the well, to illustrate to us the truth Adam knew so clearly about the nature of God. In these three men is the same illustration Jesus put in another yet similar way. The chosen nation was "created" through Abraham who was the father, Isaac who was his son, and this unrelated by blood yet vital servant who was sent to prepare the bride for the son. God's Word does not error, it confirms Itself. It, at times, can be hard to understand, but it's worth the time it takes to understand!

Until next time, Shalom!

The Bible As A Book continued from pg. 2

as one might have for their home town, in those days towns were often a group of people very connected by blood at some level. This almost always brings with it an added sense of affection for the people, and that is the kind of affection Gideon is portraying here.

Gideon then uses The Lord as his witness in saying that if these kings had left the people of that place alive he would not execute these kings just because they were the leaders of the people who oppressed Israel. However, asking them specifically about Tabor did more than get their opinion on the people they had killed there. The fact these kings remembered and had firsthand knowledge of that particular campaign meant it was not just their armies which had went out and committed atrocities. The kings were directly involved, and that meant they could have stopped any unwarranted actions by their men. That fact made them more responsible for the atrocities than the soldiers who likely did most of the hands-on killing! Thus, Gideon tells his oldest son, named Jether, to execute the two kings. This would do two things. First, it would serve as a point of honor for Jether to exact judgment on these men and second, the judgment would be performed by one holding the same relationship to those of Tabor as Gideon himself. The problem was that this young man was so young he was afraid to even draw his sword.

Jether might have been by his father's side during most of this battle(s), but whether he had done any of the killing the battle involved or not is another question. Even if he had, it's one thing to kill another man in direct battle when it's him or you, it's another to execute a man who is standing helpless before you. This is why in more modern times we see the use of "firing squads." The idea is that you put one man who is to be executed in front of a whole squad of men. Then all the men of the squad fire their guns all at once when the order is given. By doing this no one person can be said to have made the kill shot. At the same time if any man of the squad turned out to be too reserved to fire at all or chose to intentionally miss, one of the other men still performed the execution. We see the point in this second fact when looking at Gideon's son being too afraid. When the two kings see this they mock Jether by telling him to show himself to be a real man and come forward to kill them. Gideon could have simply ordered one of his other officers to do the deed, but Gideon himself steps up and executes the two kings. After this he even strips the ornaments from their camels which had designated the animals as ones that kings rode upon. This might have been more symbolic than anything, but it's not surprising Gideon takes this specific step beyond the simple recovery of spoils common to war.

The next event is one I refer to from time to time because Gideon puts a truth so well that many who study the Bible don't keep in mind while attempting to understand the history and God's intent for the chosen nation. Of course, I'm talking about the fact God never intended Israel to have a king. For all the stories people grow up hearing about great men such as King David, Solomon, and others, it was God's intent the nation not need a king in human form. They had the Law given by God and they were to let that be their guide. However, the real point most miss about all this is, if that's what Israel had

done they would have shown the world that unlike we believe even today, there is no need for any government when people follow what should be simple decency within society. As one of the founding fathers of the United States, James Madison put it, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary." Maybe even that's overstating what is needed, but it gets the point across. As we are covering the time of the judges here only after which Israel would end up with a king, we should see Israel is still living under God's intended system. No matter how badly they were handling themselves at this point there was still hope they could be all God wanted them to be! However, what we see happened next is that the men of Israel were ready to make Gideon their king, and not just for his life but they wanted him to begin a dynasty where his sons would rule in the way tradition normally goes. To this Gideon replies, "...I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you." Judges 8:23

In other words, Gideon was saying God was the only rightful King of Israel. This is so important because it has implications all throughout the Bible. In so many ways it has more importance to the words of the New Testament than it does to the Hebrew Bible. To say Jesus was born The King of Israel is a very, by the Law, way of saying Jesus was/is God! This is a fact even the religious leaders of Jesus' day did not get. In spite of the fact Jesus was born being seen as the son of Joseph who was of the house and bloodline of David, saying Jesus was The Son of David was not just a way to say He had rights to the throne of Israel; rights that might be nothing more than equal to others who were of the house. There were plenty of men of the house of David, and there's no indication Joseph was thought of as the highest in line to the throne of them. No, Jesus being the Son of David was far more of a way to say He was the rightful King of Israel, which again means He was/is God! (Mark 12:35-37)

Getting back to Gideon, he does make one request of the men. He asks that every man give him the earrings they had gotten from the men they had killed. Many of the men killed were of the Ishmaelite tradition and wore earrings. This the men of Israel proclaimed they would do gladly, so they spread a garment on the ground and each man put the earrings he had gotten in what became quite a pile of gold. In total this weighed 1,700 shekels which would be somewhere in the neighborhood of 43 U.S. pounds. All of this was on top of the Jewelry and fine clothing the kings of Midian had, as well as the ornamentation Gideon had taken off their camels. However, this request of Gideon's would seem to be connected to the request the men had made for him to be their king. Gideon had no intention of being a king, but he was now looked upon as a man who knew the will of God and/or at least had contact with God. One has to believe that Gideon recognizing Israel's lack of guidance intended to make himself available as one the people could come to for help and direction; a counselor if you will. For this cause Gideon would use the gold and fine raiment to make for himself a special outfit to wear which would make him easy to recognize, and speak to this "high" position. The use of the word "ephod" in the verse as a way to describe what he made is due to the more priestly nature of the garment than it was king like.

Unfortunately this did not turn out well. Whether Gideon understood it in his lifetime or not, the people of Israel came to view Gideon as a priestly figure. In a Biblical example of how you can't say something is good just because it claims to be of God, it did not matter that Gideon didn't claim to be the priest of some false god, nor did he seem to proclaim himself a priest of God, or at all. However, that didn't stop the people. Instead of going to the temple in Shiloh as they should have to consult the priests God had set up through the Law, many came to Gideon's home in Ophrah to hear what he had to say instead. This became a problem not just for Gideon but Israel long after. Gideon was looked at in that "Assure" sense of being more than man but less than a god, which is never good but something people long have thought of great leaders, even to this day! While Gideon was attempting to help, this created a pseudo-religion and became a blemish on not just Gideon but his family as well. It was a sad legacy to leave behind after showing himself to be such a great man used of God.

The good part of what Gideon had done was that Midian was finally put down in such a decisive way they no longer had strength to return and be a menace to Israel again. Israel had peace for 40 years after this victory, which puts what Gideon accomplished in the same realm as the better kings Israel would later have. Interestingly verse 29 of Judges chapter 8 refers to Gideon once again using the name he was given, which meant Baal should take vengeance on him, if Baal was able, for what Gideon had done in destroying the place of worship to Baal. This is done as we go on to see the remainder of Gideon's life which was long and by earthly standards prosperous. This is a further slap in the face to the men who wanted to kill Gideon for destroying their place of pagan worship. Not only would Jerubbaal (Gideon) go on to live a long life, he would have a gigantic family. Gideon moved away from his father's house to establish his own independent house, and he would have seventy sons by numerous wives just as a king was often known, if not expected, to do. Also like a king it would appear he had wives in houses in more than one place among Israel, for we are told specifically about a wife who lived in Shechem and bore a son. She is actually described as a "concubine," and this is appropriate since concubines were women used almost exclusively for the sake of having more children. They were a wife in the sense they belonged to one man alone, but they were usually of less stature and importance than one described as a wife.

Gideon would eventually pass away, and when he did we see he at least was not placed in a grand tomb which would denote a kingly stature. He would be placed in his father's sepulcher just as he likely would have been had none of the great events of his life taken place. However, we see again that the death of a judge often resulted in Israel turning away from God, and Gideon's death was no exception. Upon his death Israel quickly turned to begin worshiping Baal as much as they ever had, even proclaiming a specific god known as Baal-berith as their god. Baal-berith means, "Baal of the Covenant." In this specific reference the "Baal" part of the word, or title, is not speaking of a place as it is when we talk about names of places such as, "Baal-gad." It's talking about a false god. Baal, when

used as a prefix, can denote either a place or a god. This might sound a little confusing when one considers what I said last time about Baal worship being a general reference to the worship of many gods, so let me see if I can clarify it some. When looking at this subject it's a bit like playing - which came first the chicken or the egg? The word or prefix "Baal" is basically a way to say, "the place of" and "the guardian of." What likely came first is the guardian part because that's how false gods go. One day you worship the sun as a god, the next you worship Ra the sun god. Is Ra the sun or the representation of the sun? Because of how this progression of worshiping a power of nature moves to the worship of a specific god goes, one could say he's both and neither.

It all depends on how the worshiper looks at it. When a graven image is first introduced to people who still worship the actual power of nature, such as the sun, most probably see the image as being the god that represents the power. However, as time passes, the god and the power inevitably become interchangeable or just are the same thing in most people's mind. That said, the truth of the matter is that the graven image is not the actual force of nature. Thus, it can only represent the power, but another way to see it is that the god is the guardian of the gateway to the power. Baal denotes the guardian of the place where the power resides or concentrates or can be contacted. This is how Baal got used as a prefix to name places of worship to specific gods. We humans love our physical places of worship because we long to get back to the Garden of Eden, so whether in our mind alone or in picking a specific physical place our false gods often have "Edens" of their own! From this, one can see how Baal got used as a way to name places and be interpreted as meaning, the place of this god or that one. Because it becomes a usable word of the culture, it then can also be used more generally to say the place of this person, or where there is good wheat or whatever you want. This is why Baal is used in so many names of places we see in the Bible, but it does not take away from the fact it can still be used to speak of the general worship of Baal gods or name a specific god within the pantheon of false gods that represent or are the guardians of natural powers!

After Gideon's death, the nation, once again, forgot The One True God Who had given them the last 40 years of peace after delivering them from the Midianites. Instead they worship Baal-berith, which in a way is to worship the Law of Moses itself as a power because the name means, "Baal of the covenant." How amazing is that? In the end they became so forgetful of the true events even on a human level that in spite of all Gideon's kindness in helping the nation, they did not continue to respect the memory of the great judge who had physically led them to freedom and peace. Gideon's family was given no special treatment or care by the nation any more than any other common family in Israel. This would have been a good thing if the entire nation had remained true to God in that they would not still be looking to Gideon's family as their king or his ephod as a divination. However, since the nation turned to serve Baal, it meant they had lost sight of all God had blessed them with both directly as well as through Gideon.

Let's stay in God's Word!