

Free - Take One



Shaqah

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*“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*

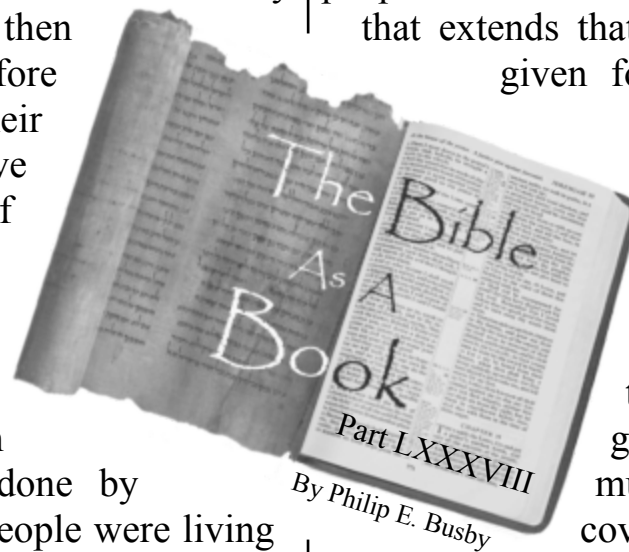
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In our last segment we continued the introduction to the Book of Ruth. In that part we covered the last of the major questions we attempt to cover concerning each book and that's the question of, how much time does the book cover? In discussing that we talked about how there are not ages given for how old people were before they had a certain child and then how old that child was before they gave birth to their child. Due to this we have few facts in the Book of Ruth itself to tell us how much time the book spans and we discussed the other ways we find time, on at least a rough basis. A lot of it is done by understanding the ages people were living based on a normal human life span. That is not to suggest our medical technology hasn't extended human life expectancy beyond what people of post flood Biblical times lived, but we can adjust for such facts in a few different ways. First, there is plenty of historical evidence for how long humans lived on average before medical technology grew to really begin affecting it. Second, there are still a lot of people in the world

today who do not have access to the most advanced medical technology. Third, there are other places in the Bible that give ages of people, such as how long a king lived, and those lives are in line with what we consider normal. In the Book of Ruth we have a story about three generations of people within a family, and the only thing that extends that is the fact names are



given for people in a couple more generations of the family that lived beyond the main story so we can see how Ruth is related to King David. Putting those details together we get a good grasp on how much time the book covers. All that brought us

to the end of our introduction and we are ready to begin the overview of the Book of Ruth in this segment.

As the story of Ruth opens we are shown the family unit this story would be based on. It was a simple structure of a man named Elimelech and his wife named Naomi. They had two sons and their names were Mahlon and Chilion. At the time of the

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Book of Ruth we are in the midst of the time of the Judges and so we are not that far removed from the conquest of Canaan by Israel. Towns that were renamed were still holding onto traditions which die hard among men and this is why we are told this family was a family of Ephrathites. This family lived in Bethlehem which means "House of Bread," but the pre-conquest name of the town was Ephrath which means "fruitful land." This is where Jacob's wife Rachel gave birth to Benjamin and then died. Thus, Ephrath (Bethlehem) is the burial place of Rachel. (Gen. 35:16-20) This made it a special place among the children of Israel and it ended up in the territory of the tribe of Judah after Israel took the land. This is why the full name became Bethlehem-judah. Prophecy states that The Messiah would come out of Bethlehem and the story conveyed in Ruth shows us how that came to be. This beginning family in Ruth was a family in the tribe of Judah and their possession in the promised land was in Bethlehem! Following the genealogy we find this is why later on when Samuel goes to anoint David the next king of Israel, he is sent to Bethlehem. (I Sam. 16:1) That fact leads to the reason so many are very familiar with at least the name of this town in Israel. The Messiah was/is of the lineage of David and due to that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. (Luke 2:1-7)

The main point of the opening words of the Book of Ruth are to explain to us the reason this family of four left the promised land and went to Moab. That, of course, was caused by a famine. From the words of the story it's safe to assume the family settled in Moab, meaning they did not so much come here to escape the famine with the intent to

return to Israel when the famine was over. They truly settled down to live in Moab as their indefinite, if not permanent, home! As much as this fresh start might have seemed a good thing at first, whatever dreams for the future they had were greatly dampened when Elimelech passed away leaving Naomi and their two sons to figure it out on their own.

After the death of their father there was no doubt an urgency felt by these two sons to get married and continue their family line. It was bad enough they had left the larger family group in Bethlehem but now they were in Moab like an island in a sea of humanity. Originally there were four of them but with the death of Elimelech the family had dwindled to three. As much as this made it seem more urgent the sons get married and have children of their own, it was really the intent to stay in Moab which caused them to feel comfortable in taking wives from among the Moabites. This is something the Law of Moses said people of the chosen nation were not to do because it would lessen the genetic markers that had been so carefully cultured by God in order to create a distinct people. By going out from Israel in the first place the family would seem to have been letting go of their being part of the chosen nation, and the fact these sons took wives from among the Moabites emphasizes that assumption. They cared about extending their direct family but they were on track to being one of the lost families of Israel who simply became a part of the larger world's population.

That aside, names of the two son's wives were Orpah and Ruth. Which one

married which son is irrelevant because without either of these couples having children both Mahlon and Chilion passed away. The family of four had now become a family of one! I don't say that to diminish the daughters-in-law, but since they had given birth to no children by their husbands their connection to Naomi was emotional at best. This was especially true since this Israelite family had left Israel because that meant there was no obligation by law for a close male family member to take one or both of these women and raise up children in Mahlon and Chilion's name; keeping the house of Elimelech alive. Among the Moabites there was no such tradition and even if there had been it would have been about keeping Moabite families alive, so they still wouldn't have cared about Elimelech's family. This means everything in the situation was pretty much hopeless. Ten years of being in this land and instead of establishing the family it had all but ended it!

What was Naomi to do? Well, around this same time word was filtering its way into Moab that Israel was pulling out of the famine. God was causing the land to bloom again and there was once again bread to be had. Naomi being all by herself had no reason to stay in a strange land so she packed up her stuff and set out for what had been home, that being Bethlehem. Since Orpah and Ruth were not sure where else to go or what to do, they stuck with the family they had married into and went with Naomi. However, after going a distance into this journey, either Naomi had the revelation or already knew and finally just

had to turn to her daughters-in-law and tell them it was best if they turned back. Naomi could not know with certainty why her daughters-in-law were following her but she started with the obvious. She tells them to return to their mother's house, and in Biblical terminology this was a reference to the fact there remained no obligation to Naomi's family for these two women. Naomi's advise was to return home as if they had never been married and begin looking for new husbands in much the same way they were available to be married to Naomi's sons originally. This was logical advice from the standpoint that among Moab it probably didn't matter much that the two had been married and in so doing had, been with a man. Surely they had as good a chance of getting a new husband as they had before joining Naomi's family.

Noami furthers this sage advice by doing what she could to get the women to lay aside any guilt they might have for/in doing such a thing. Naomi assures them that they had been good wives to her sons and good daughters-in-law to her. So much so, they were worthy of God's blessing which should have meant more coming from an Israelite woman than if it had been said by just anyone. Naomi furthers that blessing by asking The Lord to grant the two women comfort and peace in the home they would build with whomever they married next. This was covering all the basis for the women to have Naomi's blessing to go and build a new life for themselves without concern for what happened to Naomi. Upon telling them this Naomi kisses Orpah and Ruth and all three

weep no doubt flooded with the emotions of the loss they had all experienced and which the advice of Naomi would feel as if it furthered by losing her out of their lives. In that emotional moment both Orpah and Ruth express that in spite of all Naomi advised them to do, it was best if they stayed with her and go to Israel. Being the older and wiser of the three women Naomi again lays out the logic of why that made no sense for them to do. She points out that coming with her was sentencing themselves to be old maids, so to speak. Thinking in the terms especially one of Israel would think, Naomi frames this by pointing out she was not going to have any more sons that, even if they waited for them to grow up, would be able to take them as wives. Their future as part of Naomi's family was just living with Naomi.

Naomi was prepared to live without a husband for the remainder of her life. She had had a husband and she had given birth to two sons with him. Her life might have turned out to be negative when it came to the continuance of her family but she had lived what she had lived. Orpah and Ruth on the other hand were young. To doom themselves to what would surely be a life without the prospect of ever having a husband again, and thus no children, they were giving up on life before they had even gotten the chance to really have one! I'm sure as Naomi saw it, if these two women had been daughters of Israel there would be some slim hope a relative would follow the Law's guidance and take them as wives. However, Naomi had not been home for some ten odd years. As far as she knew every eligible male in the family had married and would not obey the Law in

raising up children in her husband's name because Orpah and Ruth were not daughters of Israel! Any obligation a male family member might feel to take them could easily be erased by that simple fact. Mahlon and Chilion had married outside of Israel's bloodline, outside the promised land where there was every appearance they had intended to stay. Had they not died, this family would have been lost from among Israel anyway so what's the point in letting the Law obligate you to raise up children in their name? In Naomi's mind there was nothing left for them familywise if they returned with her other than, again, just living with her.

Thus, Naomi takes this all a couple steps further, pointing out not only was she too old to take a new husband, even if she could do it that very night and in so doing she could raise up sons in Elimelech's name, would Orpah and Ruth wait for them to be old enough to take them as wives? She was asking them to consider how many years from even that moment they'd have to wait. She then asks them point-blank if right in that moment they were committing to remaining without a husband until that happened? This was important because even in the hypothetical of Naomi having more sons, if an opportunity came up for Orpah and/or Ruth to remarry would they really pass such opportunities up? If the answer was in any way, anything other than a resounding yes, then there was no real difference between them coming with her versus returning to their maiden families in Moab. Naomi was desperately trying to get the women to understand the hopelessness of coming with her just for the sake of staying with her. To this Naomi adds the

Following the Biblical Stream:

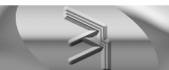
By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment we talked more about the story of how Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob. We talked about how this agreement was something to be taken seriously, and this is true not just of the two men involved but by those of us who read the story as well. This is because far too few people put enough weight in this story when reading the story later on of how the birthright was given. In that light we can understand that while Jacob might not have gone about it correctly it was actually Esau who attempted to steal something from Jacob. From there we moved on to begin the story of Isaac going among the Philistines which is so very similar to the story of the time Abraham had done this. This led us to talk not just about the how and why we know these are two separate events in spite of their similarities, but also how these encounters the forefathers of the chosen nation had with the Philistines should guide how we see what is going on today between Israel and those who call themselves Palestinians. All this brought us to Genesis chapter 26 verse 1, and we will begin in that verse this time.

One last detail of verse 1 I don't believe we covered last time is the location the verse gives us. Yes, we know he went among the Philistines but we are told Isaac specifically goes to the king of the Philistines in Gerar. Gerar is a place not always found so easily on the maps included in a lot of Bibles. However, most such maps show Gaza. I know, we think of Gaza as the

entire strip of land today but that's because Gaza was a main city along the coastline which held great importance to the Philistines of the Bible. Thus, you should be able to locate Gaza and if you come east from Gaza a little ways, and just a bit south, you'll know the general area of the city of Gerar. In spite of the fact the Philistines had come by sea to settle on this coastline in the first place and no doubt kept their seafaring ways alive as the centuries passed, the king of the Philistines, named Abimelech, was in Gerar. One of the reasons this city is not listed on a lot of Bible maps is because it's not considered to be one of the main cities of the Philistines, but I find this very odd. Not only are we told their king was there at this time but we also know a bit about why this was the place both Abraham and Isaac went when there was famine in the land of Canaan.

Gerar was a city and the tip of the spear so to speak when it came to trade routes coming up from Egypt into Canaan. While some don't believe this was one of the major cities of the Philistines, one can easily see why the Philistines wished to control it. It was a means to sell the goods they brought from other places by sea, as well as a place to buy things coming up from Egypt. It was a center of commerce, and while the Philistines may have controlled the city in Abraham and Isaac's day people of all sorts passed through this city on their way to and from Egypt. If we understand this we can see why it was an easy choice for Abraham to go there when famine hit in Canaan as well as



Isaac much later on. We can also understand these stories of both Abraham and Isaac are not them crawling on their hands and knees to the Philistines for help every time things weren't going so well in Canaan. That was not the case at all. If we look at the later story of Joseph we find he interprets a dream that was meant to show the Egyptians that they should store up the abundance they would have over the coming seven years of very good crops, and by doing so they would have the food needed to make it through seven years of famine that would be so far spread it would be the reason Jacob sent Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy grain!

In blessing Egypt, through Joseph, God not only saved Egypt but He saved the lives of the founding members of the tribes of Israel. This incident would also serve to bring the children of Israel into the land of Egypt and end up settling in Goshen which set the stage for the later exodus the children of Israel would make to return to the promised land. As I've touched on in this study and others, Egypt was the rising world power that would have been the second head of the revitalized beast of Revelation instead of Assyria, but Pharaoh resisted God so greatly it was not to be. One of the big differences we would have seen in world history if that had happened is that Egypt would have had direct knowledge of and dealing with The One True God. This would have come mostly by their interactions with the children of Israel. Had Pharaoh let Israel go when God asked, they could have watched what happened to them and with them as God led Israel to the promised land. I'll go a step further and say, if Egypt had had the good sense to remain in favor of God's chosen nation in the way they were at

the time of Joseph, Pharaoh would have escorted the children of Israel back to the promised land in much the same way it happened to bury Jacob upon his death! (Gen. 49:33-50:13)

Now in saying that I've opened quite the conversation because I can just hear those who immediately jumped on the idea that this would have given Egypt credit for taking the promise land instead of it happening by the hand of God. If you are one of those who jumped to that thought then give yourself a big pat on the back because that is a great thought and one which shows knowledge of what actually did happen instead of this hypothetical I'm putting out now! That said, I'll repeat something I said in our last segment and that's the fact it's hard for us to think about the what might have happened when we already know what did, in fact, happen. This is by far not a bad thing from the standpoint we should all know the stories of what did happen. However, if you want to take some further steps in understanding the Bible, taking time to think about the ways God could have moved if we as humans had done what was right in His eyes is greatly helpful. We get so caught in the rut of believing everything that has happened was God's will and we forget we need better words to say that correctly. God has worked through, and when necessary around, us to bring about His will without violating our free will. While that ultimately brings us to have God's will done it by far does not mean it's how God wanted it to come about!

One of the simplest ways we see and begin to understand this truth is by looking at how Jesus told us to pray! (Matt. 6:9-13)

He said that when we pray we start out by acknowledging our Creator is not evolution, other humans, or any other number of thoughts man has put forth. We are to acknowledge God as God and reverence His name by reverencing His existence and how He remains the true authority over man no matter if man likes it or not. Continuing in that line of thought Jesus tells us to ask that God's will be done, not just in general or in an overall way, but on earth as it is in heaven! To understand why we would pray such a thing is to understand what I just said. God's will, will be done but not necessarily in the way He wants it done. We find the truth in II Peter 3:9 that it's not God's will any perish but that we all come to repentance. Yet, we know there are many who have rejected God and the place we call hell has expanded to make room for all the humans who will end up in this place originally made for Satan and those angels who followed him. (Isa. 5:14-16, Matt. 25:31-46) We need to pray God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven because in heaven God doesn't have to work around man's free will and the wrong man chooses due to it. This is just another obvious point in why God will not simply accept everyone into that place Jesus went to prepare for those who serve Him. (John 14:1-3) There God will be with us and there will be no more of this working around us because the only ones there, will be those who have chosen to willingly yield to God's will and not just for a moment or a few days. They will be people who have a determination (no matter how short or long they have come to and lived that determination in this present world) to live for God no matter the cost!

That's what God is looking for in each of us. People He can commune with who also strive to be what He created us to be. The more we accomplish being what we were created to be, the more we can be people God doesn't have to work around. We can also become more and more the people He can use to accomplish His will through while we are on this earth. This is the base dynamic of why we cannot afford to do what far too many professing Christians do, and that's turn those two things around. Most all Christians get that to walk a path of faith is to serve God but they too often become, or are never really aware that, serving God is not faith. Again, the English language fails us because one can argue striving to become what God wants us to be as individuals is "serving" God. However, for the sake of argument let's try to separate the serving God by being what He wants us to be and the service to God that is doing His work on this earth. The point is, faith is what comes first and that doesn't end some time after we come to Christ. It's a continuous thing we must keep in the forefront of our mind and life. We must be aware faith is not something we get our hands on and put away for safe keeping. It's a living thing that takes care to maintain or we one day just don't have it anymore.

Thinking as so many Christians are taught to think, people believe their service to God is their faith. In attempting to carry out what is said in James 2:17-18 they believe faith without works is dead therefore works must prove we have faith! This is exactly opposite of what is being said in James. You can work for God all you want but if you don't maintain your relationship

with God then your faith is nothing but lip service. This is true no matter how hard you work or believe you are working in and for God's Kingdom. James was saying, faith is such a personal thing it can't be proven or shown to people around us other than the fact our faith (again remembering faith is a relationship with God) will continually change us and grow us into the people God wants us and intended us to be. Thus, the works, or putting it as Jesus put it, the fruit we bear is the outward radiating proof of our faith. That's why James hits this point! Especially in a church environment such as we are so entrenched in today you can look around and see a lot of people serving God in all kinds of ways but arguments as to who is and who is not a Christian has always arisen. This is why church councils of centuries past have attempted to tackle the question, what makes a Christian a Christian? The best and most basic thing these councils have come up with is what Christianity calls the, "Apostles' Creed." In short, it's a list of items or "statements of faith" any of which you disagree with means you're not a Christian.

Some would say the creed was/is more about determining what churches teach true Christianity and what is a cult or the like. However, it doesn't matter if you want to apply it to a group such as a church or individuals within such structures it doesn't really tell us who is and who isn't a Christian. The truth of why that's true I've already said above. It's easy to give all these things lip service. You can confess to believing all the things in the creed without actually believing them in your heart and mind. We lean heavily upon the idea confession is almost the all in all, and it's

not. It has been and always shall be easy for people to masquerade as Christians by confessing all the appropriately agreed upon things Christians believe. Such people can also do a lot of work for The Lord, or at least appear to, and in all cases they can still be devoid of faith. You see, what James was telling us is that one sure sign that people do not have faith, or as he puts it dead faith, is if their life does not show any signs of doing God's work. People with true faith will be compelled to serve God in many ways. The fact that working for God, or seeming to, can feign faith is why some might ask for a Christian to show their faith without their works! It's a way of admitting, anyone can do good works whether they personally serve God or not. Thus, we need proof your faith is real and alive aside from the works you do!

There are endless times among groups of Christians as well as individual to individual relationships where being able to show your faith aside from your works would be really handy but it's not possible because again, faith in God is personal between you and God. So what does James mean when he says he will show you his faith by his works? He means, there are telling markers in what people do and what motivates them which can be seen and/or felt but can not be laid out in a written down list. However, such things are something others of like precious faith pick up on. I don't mean to sound like it's all some mystical thing but let's face it, the only reason people believe in mystical things is because not everything that exists is physical. When you walk in faith you're walking in a certain direction. Other people who are sincerely walking in the same

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LXII

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 continued our rundown of the Roman emperors as we lead our way up to seeing how Rome eventually came to be considered a Christian empire. However, once again, we took the liberty to discuss why this is important to and included in what the Bible tells us. We talked a lot about the string of empires as a whole, going over a brief rundown of how one took power from the other until we finally find ourselves at the Romans who had no great power waiting to bring them down. Instead, Rome was wasting away slowly as the world watched wondering what to do because humanity has been waiting for one great world governing power to solve all our problems for a very long time!

With all those thoughts in our mind we move on in this segment by getting back to our look at where the Roman Empire had gotten itself to by around 268 A.D. As we have covered, the empire was really in three pieces by this point. Gallienus was the emperor of the Roman Empire but a portion of the western had broke off to become the Gallic Empire and the eastern part had become the Palmyrene Empire. Also that year would be the year Gallienus would meet his end. In the year 265 A.D. Gallienus had dealt with the barbarians well enough that he felt he had time to go after the leader of the

Gallic Empire, Postumus. This effort almost succeeded but one of Gallienus' main military commanders, a man named Aureolus, failed to contain Postumus at a key moment. Gallienus would demote Aureolus for the failure; a move Aureolus would, of course, be unhappy about. Gallienus would march off to the Balkans to defend the empire against the Goths and Aureolus would take this opportunity to rebel, attacking and taking over a Roman military installation that was no longer his to command. Aureolus would also attempt to become an ally of Postumus and invite him to invade the Roman Empire with Aureolus' support. Postumus would ignore the offer but Gallienus had already heard of Aureolus' betrayal and broke off his offensive to return and take care of Aureolus.

This would turn into a perfect example of how bad all this infighting would be for the empire as the barbarians Gallienus left off fighting would soon push further into Roman territory and cause longer term damage which was only becoming more common. In the meantime, Gallienus would engage Aureolus and defeat him east of Milan. Aureolus would retreat to the city where Gallienus put him under siege. What Gallienus did not know was that some of his men were not loyal to him and when it was reported at one point that Aureolus' men were leaving the city, Gallienus left his tent without his bodyguard. The opportunity was taken to assassinate him, and the accounts of who all was involved in this are



contradictory. However, this would be the end of Gallienus and a man by the name of Claudius Gothicus became the new emperor. What is also not totally clear is if Claudius was chosen by the military or if Gallienus appointed him as such on his death bed. In any case, the only fact that matters is that the military accepted him and followed him. To finish Aureolus' story, he surrendered to Claudius and while Claudius was debating Aureolus' fate, the Praetorian Guard killed him for his rebellion and that settled that.

It was actually just as well since Claudius needed to turn his attention back to the invading Goths. The Goths were a very large army and even included a cavalry. It would be no small task to turn this army back and drive it out of Roman territory. However, Claudius took this challenge on and ended up winning a great victory. So great in fact some claim it to be one of, if not the greatest victories the Roman army ever achieved. Saying that, might make it sound like Rome was making a come back but before anyone thinks that, let's look at the fact from the other side. For this to be such a great victory for Rome it meant the opposing army had to be formidable to say the least! The so called barbarians were not the wild people of the North some think of them as. The Goths showed they could stand toe to toe with the Romans and not just retreat. The fact they even attempted to fight the Romans with such vigor shows the barbarians were becoming more forceful in their thinking about taking land from the Romans and that should have concerned Rome more than anything. In the end, history records a great victory for Rome and specifically Claudius, but in doing so, we are left with no real information about what this victory cost the Roman army.

Just a few short months later the Alemanni crossed the alps and attacked the empire. Claudius would rush out and drive these invaders back, once again being credited with victory. However, the fact such invasions were becoming so constant shows how little most of these barbarian tribes were defeated in a way that gave them pause in returning to invade Rome again and again. All that aside, Claudius felt it was time to deal with the Gallic Empire. He would see success in this as well and take back control of Hispania and the Rhone River valley, but the job of fully collapsing the Gallic Empire would be left to the next emperor. It would be Claudius' dream to reunite the three parts of the Roman Empire and once again put it all under the central control of Rome. Whether this dream was achievable at the time is not known, but Claudius wouldn't live long enough to get the chance. In the latter part of 269 A.D. Claudius marched off in preparation to go to war against the Vandals which were another Germanic people in the North. However, Claudius got sick with the plague which is speculated to have been smallpox, and from it he died not long into the year 270 A.D.

Claudius had seen several victories but his time as emperor was short. Thus, we move on to Claudius' brother, a man named Quintillus, who was thought to have been named the next emperor by Claudius' soldiers and who was actually approved by the Roman senate. This, of course, made sense on many levels but the days of dynasty were all but gone in the empire as each time an emperor died whoever was the great military commander at the time seemed to be put on the throne. The bulk of the Roman army did not agree with this and instead named one of Claudius' commanders

emperor; a man named Aurelian. Aurelian would defeat the troops loyal to Quintillus and from there it's not clear if Quintillus was killed in battle, executed, or committed suicide. In any case, after Quintillus' death Aurelian's position as emperor was confirmed by the senate, and Aurelian would date the beginning of his reign as commencing upon the death of Claudius, not Quintillus.

No matter who was emperor the barbarians were not going away. In 271 A.D. the Juthungi invaded Roman territories once again and were making their way to Rome itself. Aurelian, who was at that time engaged in more fighting with the Vandals, moved to intercept the Juthungi but they had already sacked several villages/towns along the way and were now in what today we call northern Italy. This put barbarians once again right in the heart of the empire. Aurelian would move to intercept them, likely thinking the only reason they dare invade was because a large portion of the Roman army was at the border with the emperor. Thus, Aurelian sent the Juthungi a message demanding their surrender. The Juthungi were not set back by the fact the army was on its way to intercept them. They sent a message back to the emperor telling him if he wanted to challenge them they'd show him how a free people could fight! This was a daring thing to say to the Roman emperor, and if anyone had doubts as to if these invading barbarian tribes stood in fear of Rome, that can be considered answered by this point. It really was a telling message that the barbarians were not going to go away. Aurelian would march his near exhausted army to engage the Juthungi, but

little did he know they were waiting for him. The Juthungi would ambush the Romans in a wooded area and the Romans were defeated.

News of this humiliating lose would quickly make its way to Rome and for good reason this set off a panic in the city. The Juthungi would continue their pillaging ways as they moved ever closer to Rome itself and now there was no Roman force of any size left to stand in their way from doing so! Fortunately for Rome, Aurelian did not give up. Somehow he rallied the men he had left and pursued the barbarians finally catching up to them along the eastern coast of Italy and far closer to Rome than they had been. This was a battle the Roman's could not afford to lose. The Juthungi were obviously defiant, and if the Romans couldn't hold them here, the city of Rome was in big trouble! At this point in time even if the Juthungi did nothing but pillage the capital with no intent of occupying it or trying to shatter the empire, Rome was facing so many threats from so many places it's hard to imagine the empire surviving an attack on its capital at this point. The very fact the empire was split into three pieces at the time means there was not as much outlying help as there once was should the army closest to Rome be unable to defend the capital. Instead, there were two other pieces of what had been the empire looking for opportunity to take advantage of any harm Rome might suffer. This was on top of the free for all that might have began for the other barbarian tribes to flood in.

One very likely scenario is that the other two "empires" would simply shore up

their defenses against the barbarians once they saw Rome being sacked by barbarians and as they attempted to protect their own borders the barbarians would be free to pillage, plunder, and settle on any part of what was left of the Roman Empire. In the end this would have left the other two empires split apart from each other with barbarians firmly in control of what territory separated them. This would make for far more border area to defend. With as much as especially the Gallic Empire had been forced to mount a defense of their own against the barbarians in times past, it's doubtful that empire would have remained capable of beating back the barbarians once Rome fell. The simple bottom line is that the battle Aurelian was about to engage in was not just another battle with a barbarian tribe. It very well may have been a fight for the life of the last major empire's very existence!

As it so happened the Roman army was able to hold its ground against the Juthungi just long enough for things to break their way. The Juthungi line had been established at a position that put their backs directly at the river. When the Romans were able to push hard enough to necessitate the Juthungi retreat a bit and regroup, they were unable to do so. This gave the Romans the upper hand, and as they continued to push many of the barbarians were literally pushed back into the river where they drowned. History does not tell us the Juthungi being against the river was caused by some brilliant move on the emperor's part. It would appear it was more about the Juthungi not being aware enough of their surroundings to give thought to the fact they were not in a good position to retreat if necessary. Maybe this happened because the Juthungi were somewhat over confident

after so soundly defeating the Romans before or maybe it was just a really bad happenstance. In any case, this bad position led to their defeat. As bad as this was for the Juthungi as a tribe it would not be the end of them. Enough escaped (this as well as another battle they'd fight with the Romans before getting out of Rome's territory) and/or there were still enough men of the tribe who did not come on this excursion into Roman territory that the tribe lived on to be a thorn in Rome's side later on.

The important part of all this to our study here is the fact the Romans finally started seeing the barbarian threat as not just a border problem. Long lost were the days the Romans thought about pushing their frontier further out. Now came the day Rome had to think about doing more to protect its capital from attack and not by just anyone, by the very people they once thought were just untamed people to the north who would quake at the sight of the great Roman army! In light of this, Aurelian would set out to have a new system of walls built around Rome which would later bear his name. Also Aurelian would continue to take the fight to the barbarians which was somewhat surprising from the standpoint his army had been fighting almost non-stop for some time. In spite of that he would push the Goths back across the Danube river and kill their leader. This was a major victory that would take the Goths a couple decades to recover from. However, as great as that was, Aurelian decided the province of Dacia which lay on the north side of the Danube river was not worth the cost of protecting. He would withdraw from Dacia, and this meant giving up what had been a major foothold for Rome on that north side of the river. The Province of Dacia would be "re-established" on the

south side of the river and certain people who had lived in the former Dacia would be relocated to this, as well as other neighboring provinces. This move shows a clear sign that Rome was in a state of decline.

Perhaps this truth had something to do with the fact in 272 A.D. Aurelian would begin his campaign to bring the Palmyrene Empire back under his control. In some ways this was Aurelian going after, low hanging fruit, as the expression goes. He certainly was not going to expand the empire in the direction of the barbarians and he had already tried and failed to take down the Gallic Empire entirely. In truth, I'm not sure Aurelian had any designs on expanding the empire but Aurelian would go after that part of the empire that had not become separated by pure rebellion to begin with. You'll recall that the original king of the eastern territory of the Roman Empire, a man named Odaenathus, was relatively happy ruling his portion of territory and remaining loyal to the empire. This was the kind of leaders Rome needed and which the world needed in order to see any further success on the one world governing system by this point in history.

This was a compromise and exactly how the United States of America was/is formed. The U.S. is not meant to be one large country but a union of independent states with their own governments. This was a hotly debated way to form a nation and the "experiment," as it is often referred to, is ongoing. The idea of how this worked was far more obvious to those who lived prior to the American Civil War, and all other issues and arguments aside, this is why it was so easy for the states in the southern portion of the nation to succeed and form what came to be called the Confederate States of America.

If you read the records of this time in U.S. history you will find the bottom line of the legal side of this war was that the Confederate states thought it their right to leave the Union if they so chose while the position of the U.S. government was that the states did not have that right. In spite of what else was decided during the civil war, the position of the federal government was strengthened in the end and more so than many people living in the nation ever appreciated. In spite of all the details, opinions, and debates on that issue, the United States was built off the model of what Rome was in some ways attempting to create by having provinces within the empire. The idea that smaller governments would be responsible for smaller chunks of territory within the Roman Empire but at the same time be extensions of, and loyal to, the imperial government in Rome was part of what made the empire a functioning republic.

Different versions of this is what is currently being attempted in different parts of the world as we speak. Those living in Europe mostly live under a fairly new governing system that on its face has a lot of similarities. The European Union consists of a union of many individual governments that before its formation had been totally independent nations. Notably, Britain was one such nation who eventually chose to break away from the union to become totally independent once again. In that case there were long and arduous negotiations about how exactly Britain could leave the union and how matters such as trade deals would/could/should be handled. All in all it was a grand mess and to say it wasn't easy for Britain to untie the knot that had been tied with the union is an understatement. So are such unions a good thing or a bad thing? That

can only be answered on a case by case basis of who gains what out of such deals and who loses what. That fact is why, in spite of being very democratic, the union model does not really give us a way to form a one world government. If anyone doubts that, then you should take a look at the United Nations and if that doesn't convince you, take a better look! I've said it before and I'll say it again, man will never be able to form a one world governing system on his own and it doesn't matter if the intentions are good or bad, dreams of utopia or dictatorship, it just isn't going to happen.

This is why a study of the Roman Empire, which is more extensive than the way we have covered any of the proceeding empires, is important. This last great empire in the line of man's attempts to form a one world government brought us to, what for lack of a better term I'll call the "compromise" we live in today. After the barbarians brought what was left of the Roman Empire crashing down they looked around and realized what it represented was something they themselves actually admired. From there on, Europe has never stopped dreaming about rebuilding such an empire and the effects of those efforts have reached out across the world in ways many of us are not really aware of because to us, it's just the crazy world in which we live today! However, the ramifications of it brought about what we call World War I as well as the extension of that conflict which we call World War II. Neither of these large scale conflicts settle much of anything other than the guns one day went silent and the world tried to pick up the pieces to move on. Why? Because human life isn't about governments,

it's about individuals being able to live their lives. Government can facilitate that to the degree we need protection from one another while pursuing our dreams but it can't be the provider of those dreams for everyone. The fact so many believe it is a vehicle to make all our dreams come true in one form or another is why man will never stop pursuing a united world. It's our attempt to run this world without a need for God, and we have shown we can do nothing but fail miserably time and again!

Getting back to our direct study of Rome, I say Aurelian picked a somewhat easy target by going after the Palmyrene Empire because while it's true said empire had no desire to rejoin the Roman Empire, the original leader of the territory that made up the core of that empire was doing nothing more than defending the eastern side of the Roman Empire, and a very good job he had done of it! It was after his death that his wife Zenobia took charge and pulled away from Rome at a time Rome was too occupied with other things to do anything about it. The Palmyrene Empire may have been a loss of territory for the Roman Empire but it also served as a buffer between it and the troubles those in the further east had and were still threatening to cause Rome. While that was still true at the time of Aurelian, he had won enough battles with the barbarians and forfeited enough territory to them, he could now afford an attempt to bring the Palmyrene Empire back under Roman control.

Added to that, The Palmyrene Empire under Queen Zenobia encompassed the area known as Syria as well as the promised land

which due to Roman propaganda against the Jews received the label "Palestine." By its end it also included the portions of Arabia and Egypt that Rome had once possessed and pushed its way in the north westward putting a lot of Asia Minor under its control. This, in contrast to the Gallic Empire on the western side of Rome, was not only significant territory, it was significant territory! That is to say, the land mass it controlled in respect to size was both large and very important portions of the world. This is the reason God chose what had been Canaan as the place to give His chosen nation. Trade routes, both by water and land come to, and even more so than they already have, could have come to cross this area of land. Add to what we commonly see as being the original promised land, portions of Asia Minor and Egypt, and the truth of this goes off the charts! While on that thought, if you look at what God actually promised the borders of the promised land to be, one can imagine it looking very much like a map of the Palmyrene Empire. (Gen. 15:18-21) One can argue the description doesn't include so much of what we think of as Egypt and maybe not quite as much of what we see as Asia Minor, but one can certainly see how the chosen nation would have had such areas under their influence had they one day possessed all of what God promised to give them.

In truth, most all the world would have been under the influence of Israel if for no other reason than they would have firmly controlled the major cross roads of the world both figuratively as well as literally. All one has to do is look at the power the modern nation of Israel exerts on the world at the size it currently is, and you should begin to get the picture. The influence is why so

much of the world both loves, as well as hates, the modern nation of Israel, and before you conclude that without help from places like Europe and the United States Israel would be powerless and meaningless, do some research on how many industries enjoy breakthroughs and gains of all sorts by collaboration with Israel. This in no small part includes weapons and life saving pharmaceuticals which would not exist in our modern world if it were not for Israel. Make no mistake about it, the support Europe and the U.S. give Israel is not charity. The benefits gained by being on Israel's side is significant, not to mention in so many ways irreplaceable, even for these nations which so greatly seem to dwarf Israel in size of land mass and population. This is why even nations like Russia and China can't totally walk away from Israel or be totally on the side of those nations who would like to destroy it. If such a thing isn't God's design, then I don't know what is!

The truth just this land mass is meaningful to the world is seen in one of the major factors as to why Aurelian just had to regain control of the Palmyrene Empire in the end. First off, the map of the Palmyrene Empire looked far less like the whole of land promised by God to Israel just before 270 A.D. Aurelian might not have been so ready to push for the expansion of the Roman Empire into new territory but before Aurelian became emperor Zenobia was ready to expand the Palmyrene Empire. She felt the Tanukhids, who were a confederate of Arab tribes, needed to be dealt with and that took her army south. In the end they would push so far south they would end up killing the Roman governor and taking the portion of land in the upper part of what we call Saudi Arabia today which had been held

by Rome. Her troops would also move across the Sinai Peninsula, taking it, and even march on to take Egypt from Rome. In 271 A.D. her generals began a push into Asia Minor further expanding the Palmyrene Empire. This was also putting major centers of Christianity under Palmyrene rule, such as Galatia. Palmyrene troops would attempt to take the whole of Asia Minor but found the resistance of the Roman troops and people there were too strong. Nonetheless, this expansion was quite the accomplishment, mostly made possible by Rome's attention being more focused on the barbarians. However, as if this expansion into Rome's territory wasn't enough, Zenobia cut off Rome's shipments of grain and in a matter of weeks, bread supplies were running low!

Nothing motivates a ruler faster than food shortages when they rule over people with weapons of their own because nothing brings a populous to its feet against governments faster than the failure to keep food supplies flowing. This isn't as easy to do in modern times, but in ancient times the people rising up was a threat you wanted to avoid. When Aurelian felt his men were strong enough he would bring the force of the Roman Empire to Palmyrene. Asia Minor would prove to be the easiest to take as all but two major cities would simply surrender to Aurelian. The two cities who held out were Byzantium and Tyana. Aurelian had made a habit of completely destroying any city that resisted him until he took Tyana. The story is that Aurelian had a vision where a Greek philosopher from Tyana who lived during the first century visited him and told him to be merciful if he

wished to rule. Aurelian followed this vision and spared Tyana which in turn caused many other cities to simply surrender to him because they believed he would show them the same mercy. Within six months Aurelian had made it to the capital city Palmyra. Zenobia had already retreated more than once attempting to stay ahead of Aurelian, but now she would flee to the Persians in the hopes she would find help from those her husband had so soundly driven back.

The city of Palmyra would surrender and in time Zenobia and her sons were captured. Aurelian would take Zenobia and her sons back to march the streets of Rome in his honor. Since the grain shipments had also been restored the soldiers handed out free bread as part of the celebration and Aurelian would be hailed as a hero by the people. There would be some trouble once again from the Persians but Rome would handle that with ease, along with a rebellion in Egypt which saw the portion of Alexandria which contained the famous library burned with fire. How much of the library was lost at this time is impossible to know. In 273 A.D. Aurelian would also be forced to return to Palmyra due to a more local rebellion by that city. After putting down this one last gasp of life of what had been the Palmyrene Empire, Aurelian was hailed as Parthicus Maximus and Restitutor Orientis which means, "Restorer of the East"!

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. 8

direction are people you can feel connected with. However, it's not just others of like precious faith who will take note of true faith. People who have not yet accepted faith in God will also see it. For those who do not want to walk in faith it can bring about anger toward you or any number of negative emotions towards you of a lesser or greater caliber. For others, seeing your faith is what will cause them to say, that person has something real. They have something I would like to have! This is why we should be ready in season and out of season to give an account of our faith to those who ask. (II Tim. 2:15, 4:1-4)

That brings us back to the fact our faith must come first and our works are second. Working for God can be done by anyone to a certain degree but only living faith can bring about the right motivations for people to work for God. Only faith can bring people to do the correct works for them to do because only through faith can you receive instructions from God to do it. Only faith can change you and continually mold you into the person God wants you to be. These are not things you can be taught and that's why if we get to working for God in some form and forget our faith, in the end we will be part of those whom Jesus said would stand before Him one day and say Lord, Lord, did we not do mighty works in your name? And He will say, depart from Me you workers of iniquity. (Matt. 7:21-23) That brings us back to the point I was making about how what we call heaven will only contain people who have yielded their will to God and not just anyone who is a "good person." Hopefully saying that brings us back to the point about how we can stop

to think what might have been different if people we read about in the Bible had yielded to God instead of resisting Him. Our case in point is the idea Pharaoh could have escorted the children of Israel to the promised land and there would have been no concern that Pharaoh or Egypt in general were responsible for Israel's existence instead of God!

I could write page after page on that idea, but I'll leave most of that for people to do for themselves. My bigger point in getting into that was the fact God was greatly using His chosen nation, even from the time of the founding members of that nation to effect world events in a positive way. What God has done for us is great but not nearly as great as what He could have done for us if we had listened, yielded, and followed His will at so many individual points, not to mention in a very overall way! I talk a lot about the Tower of Babel because it's such a pivotal moment in our history. God did what he did in confounding our language not to stop us from having what could have been a far more peaceful world where everyone got along and eased the burden for everyone by pulling together. God stopped us because we were so very close to accomplishing that in a group form by sacrificing the individual. If God wanted us to all be some cookie cutter people, He could have programmed us that way from the start but He clearly did not! God wants so much more than we are willing to give! He wants a world where individual people can make their choices but we still don't go out fighting each other all the time. You can make the argument God took that ability away from us by confounding our language, but only in certain ways would you be right!

The correct question to ask is, why did He take that away from us? It's because when we attempt to accomplish utopia we do it by using force even God is unwilling to exert on us as humans. We may not understand all the ways and hows this works but the simple truth is, we would erase a major if not the major point(s) in creating this world as our home and setting us free in it! God could not let us build a utopia for all mankind if it was not a utopia for all mankind. Again, we're talking about that on the surface versus the reality thing. On the surface, what man was creating at the Tower of Babel could have, and maybe already did, look like utopia for all mankind but that doesn't mean it was. The very fact God acted as He did shows us it certainly was not. The strong often consumes the weak to accomplish their goals but that's not even the entirety of the problem. We can say, if we all pull together then happy we'll be, but if we are all told we must pull in a certain direction, that only makes some happy no matter what it accomplishes. Those who are not happy will rebel and become a drag on our system. If we're going to create a utopia then what are we to do with such dissenters? The obvious answer is that they must be eliminated. This can be done through two means. First, we can literally eliminate them. Yes, I'm talking about killing, but the second way is cleaner. Second, we can program them!

This second option is what was being deployed in a major way at the tower. They said, come let us figure out how we can all live together while we're still a small enough group we can still all agree on one way. (Gen. 11:4) Of course, those aren't the

words if you quote Genesis but it's what they mean. From there the concept was to raise all the children to be indoctrinated in, "the right way." Again, if this is what God wanted for us He could have easily created us preprogrammed in such a way. Also as I have mentioned, at the tower their "right way" was a way that did not include God. However, even if it had been a way that attempted to include God it wouldn't have been righteous. That statement might have raised some eyebrows but it's true. Do I have to say it again? If God had wanted such a thing, let's all say it together, He could have preprogrammed us Himself! God stopped us at the Tower of Babel because we don't know how to enforce perfect justice while still maintaining freedom. When we look at all the governing systems man has tried over the ages, we see even the ones with the best intent of administering justice while allowing freedom don't work long-term. We are just not capable of it on our own and there are too many people who don't believe in "our way" of going about it, and the system will always be corrupted by some factor of their involvement in the system, and we don't have the right to just stamp them out.

Thus, God stopped our effort at the tower but that in no way means He left us or forsook us as mankind! That's why I started talking about Egypt being the first sparks of life for resurrecting the beast, which man originally gave life to at the Tower of Babel, and God wounded in a way that should have killed it for good. Long, long before God established the chosen nation as a nation the way we think of nations, He put the seeds of His nation in the belly of the beast. If man

had yielded to God's will in even the smallest ways it would not have killed the beast but it would have stopped it from becoming just another repeating head grown on the same beast that was the Tower of Babel. We see much this same thing was offered to those who become that second head of the tower's beast which we know in history as the Assyrian Empire. We see it even more clearly in what was the third head of that beast which was the Babylonian Empire. God has always been and will always be there offering His help, but what we see in the case of Egypt is that Pharaoh resisted God so greatly God had to devastate Egypt in order to bring the chosen nation out from among them. This was totally Pharaoh's choice to harden his heart as he saw each thing God did to show him he had no chance of winning this fight.

If instead Pharaoh had let Israel go, Egypt would not have been so devastated as to never again rise to be a world power like we see in Assyria, Babylon, etc. If they had been so good to Israel as to escort them to the promised land, they might have been a blessed nation beyond their wildest dreams and God would have worked it all in a way that showed forth His power to the world that those who bless God's chosen nation will be blessed! (Gen. 12:2-3) Again, the pages I could write on such a subject and the ways it could have shaped our world so differently. In truth, that could be said of so many times men had the ability to listen to God but instead turned away or refused. This we see best in looking at the history of the chosen nation itself. We see it right from the start when after all the mighty things God had done to bring them out of Egypt they often turned on Moses asking him if he

had brought the nation out into the wilderness to die. They claimed they were better off sitting around the flesh pots of Egypt. They did this even during the short trip they took from Goshen to the place God wanted them to enter the promised land.

That point I bring up a lot as another what if thing to think about. We say we study our Bible but do we think of how much shorter and how much less time Israel would have been in the wilderness if they had gone into the promised land when God first brought them to its threshold? Instead they doubted God to the point they would not go up, and for that they would spend forty more years in the wilderness which was completely unnecessary. We look at this as punishment but it really was just truth and consequences. Just as God wanted to use Egypt to show His power to the world and did in the negative way instead of the positive way, so too that first generation of Israel that left Egypt chose the negative way instead of the positive way. Instead of God showing forth His might in devastating Egypt and then just a short while later those who had been slaves wiped the population of southern Canaan off the map, we see Israel wandering the wilderness for four decades as if they have no real aim. Yes, God eventually brought Israel into the land with a mighty show of power, but in what ways had the impact on the world changed? We will never know for sure because as I started down this path by saying, we only know what did happen but what we should be able to understand without question is that if we were to pray and allow the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven, this world would be a very different place!

That is a major point in the Bible but it's not one said in any direct way. Just as Jesus did not come proclaiming Himself to be The Messiah but simply fulfilled the prophecies of what The Messiah was suppose to do, giving the chosen nation and the world a chance at all He offered, the Bible shows all these points we should be able to see and imagine what a better thing it would have been to humble ourselves before God. This is why Jesus told us to pray the way He did, and a great example of seeing God working His will, even in a situation where men who should have been praying such a thing did something wrong instead, is in something mentioned early on in this discussion and that's the story of Joseph being in Egypt. Why was he even there in the first place when he was one of the sons of Jacob who lived in Canaan? It's because Joseph was a man who looked to God for his guidance and as God began to move upon and through Joseph, the results of his faith angered his brothers. They should have seen him as an example of the kind of relationship they'd all like to have with the God of their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Instead they were jealous of Joseph and sought to eliminate him. The end result was that he was sold into slavery and taken to Egypt where he was bought to be a household slave. This might have seemed like doom and gloom but since Joseph never lost his faith, it was only a stepping stone to him ending up second in command over the most powerful nation in the world at that time.

He was also in the place to save the nation of Egypt and only The Lord knows how many other people through his

interpreting of a dream that was prophecy about a coming time of abundance and great famine. Even in that story we can see how the Pharaoh at the time listened to Joseph and put him in charge of making sure what needed to be done got done. However, if Pharaoh had decided the dream and its interpretation was nonsense, Egypt wouldn't have had to wait until the later time when God was telling Pharaoh to let His people go to be devastated. How would Israel have survived in such a scenario? Hard to say, but we should have no doubt God had a plan! God always has a plan to save those who serve Him and even if that plan does not include prolonging our physical lives here, we know to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil. 1:21) This because for those who desire to be the people God created us to be, this life is not all there is. God doesn't have to save us in this life at every turn, and we are blessed that is true because God has a plan to save us from this life and it's that reward our faith is the substance and evidence of! (Heb. 11:1) This we see in the lives of Abraham and Isaac going to Gerar. Both Abraham and Isaac lived in this southern area of Canaan where God wanted to bring Israel not long after they left Egypt. Both were led by their faith to go among a people they did not fully trust to a trading port like Gerar where they could find food to purchase from merchants coming from other places. In the end both men show us an example of how much faith has to be applied in every circumstance step by step if we're going to get things right!

Until next time, Shalom!

admission that she grieved over the fact God had allowed her path to come to where they were, not for herself, but because she loved Orpah and Ruth so much! In no way was Naomi trying to talk them out of following her on the basis she actually didn't care for these two women and hoped she'd be rid of them. In no way was she saying she'd be embarrassed to bring back to her home Moabite women and explain to her family they had been her son's wives. She really was advising them out of a heart filled with love and compassion for these two women to have the very best lives they could find!

Again, the three women found themselves at a point of overwhelming emotional grief and together they would weep once more. As this weeping subsided Orpah kissed Naomi goodbye one last time and turned to go back home. As this happened, Ruth stood her ground apparently without saying a word. Naomi's speech had not moved her to the same place it had Orpah. Ruth was ready to move forward, not backward! Naomi looks at Ruth and points out Orpah had returned to their people and their gods. This was not a slight in anyway against doing such a thing. Naomi was saying, your sister-in-law has made a wise choice and is returning to comfort and a life with a future. She implores Ruth to follow Orpah's example and do the same. Finally, we arrive at the moment where someone other than Naomi in this situation speaks and what comes out of Ruth's mouth is beautiful beyond words themselves! Ruth begins by asking Naomi not to keep attempting to get her to leave Naomi's side. Nor should Naomi try any

further to point out the logic of Ruth returning to her people and why? Because Ruth didn't care about the unknowns that lay ahead of them. She tells Naomi wherever she ended up going, Ruth wanted to go. No matter where Naomi ended up living, that's where Ruth wanted to live. Ruth had married one of Naomi's sons. He had died but as far as Ruth was concerned that did not nullify her connection to Naomi or the family she had married into.

I'll point out that at this moment we don't know how much Ruth had learned about God's Law or the chosen nation. Maybe she had some idea about it, being of a neighboring people to the chosen nation. Maybe her husband and/or the family in general had shared information about what it meant to be part of God's chosen nation, but considering they had left Israel the better guess is that Ruth simply knew what she knew and whether that knowledge was small or great Ruth had made her own personal determination that she wanted to be there rather than in Moab. It's tempting to say all of what Ruth declares is based on her love for Naomi and maybe in the end that's right, but it's hard not to see a spark of real hope in Ruth's words that she had some inkling about how special it would be to be among, much less part of, God's chosen nation. Thus, just as Naomi had mentioned in what she said to Ruth about how Ruth had people and those people had gods of their own, Ruth counters that Naomi's people would be her people and the God Naomi believed in would be her God! Almost in response to Naomi's challenge that if she had a husband right then and could hope to raise up a son to be Ruth's husband would she wait, Ruth says her

determination was that wherever Naomi died, that's where Ruth would die.

Ruth was prepared to make a lifelong commitment to joining the nation of Israel and serving The One True God, not just until Naomi died, but to her own death as well! If you're tempted to think Ruth didn't understand something about the afterlife and possibly about what God had promised to people of faith, think again. Ruth says where Naomi is buried, that's where Ruth would be buried. Why is this profound? Well, first it's because it reaches out and shows us clearly that in spite of the fact so much in the Bible and the Law Itself refers to things in the masculine, women of this day did not believe they were excluded in any way shape or form. What Ruth was referring to is the typical statement we see in many places in the Bible where we are told a person was, "gathered unto their fathers." In these studies I've talked more than once about the way this term is literal because tombs were used for multiple generations and that meant when the body deteriorated enough to be nothing but dry bones, the bones would be gathered into a hollow in the tomb or a stone box. Such a receptacle would not just be used for a single body but it was typical for the bones of past generations of the family to have already been put in them. This was not true just of the males in a family but of females as well.

Now before someone of archaeological knowledge attempts to point out the flaw in what I just said based on the idea not as many female bones are found in

such tombs/boxes as there are males, let me point out it does not matter how arrogant people handled their dead, it only matters how people acting in love handled it. Abraham was well aware of the fact Sarah was the wife God wanted him to have and that she was the true matriarch of the family they were beginning there in Canaan, but simple love and respect for his wife which God wants us to have had more to do with why he took the actions he took. Abraham brokered a deal to purchase the first land possession his family would own in the promised land so that he would have a place to bury his wife. (Gen. 23) The cave on that land Abraham purchased would also be the place Isaac and Ishmael would bury Abraham when he died. (Gen. 25:7-10) Here too the bodies of Isaac and Rebekah would be placed upon their deaths. This cave was the place Jacob, upon his death bed, reminds his children he buried Leah (who was his first wife) and there they were to bury him. (Gen. 49:28-33)

It meant something to the righteous forefathers of the chosen nation that not just they but their wives be gathered to the generations past of their family. This is what Ruth was referring to. She does it as matter of fact as any man might say it. She may have only been Naomi's daughter-in-law by a son who was now passed on but as far as Ruth was concerned she was a member of Naomi's family as much as Naomi was. However, Ruth doesn't stop there. Ruth declares an oath on her own life that she would remain with Naomi, firm in the conviction that only death could take Naomi away from her! We are told when

Naomi heard all this it was clear there was no point in arguing with Ruth. Ruth's conviction was strong and nothing Naomi had or could say would change Ruth's mind. It simply didn't matter what Naomi thought was right or the most beneficial thing for her daughters-in-law, Ruth had made up her mind as to what she would do and that was final. Thus, together Ruth and Naomi would travel back to the promised land and specifically to Bethlehem from whence the original family of four came.

Next we are told when Naomi and Ruth arrived it caught the attention of the town. Nowadays no one but the most immediate of family and friends would notice two women, one of whom they recognize, returning to town all by themselves. This especially when it was known the woman native to the place had moved away several years prior with her family. However, this was not our modern time of hustle and bustle where people don't find the time to even know their neighbors much less care about them. The return of Naomi did not just attract the people's attention because they knew she had moved away but how odd was it that she comes back without any of the men she left with! Instead of her husband or either of her sons, the person standing next to Naomi was another woman whom they had never met. Who this woman was and why she was traveling, if not completely moving with Naomi, had to be a mystery. It was such a mystery all the way around the people of her home town questioned if this woman was really Naomi. This was not a serious question but we all know how we question the things we see with our eyes when they don't line up with what we would expect to

see or not see as the case may be.

Naomi confirms it's her but she's not the same woman she was when she left Bethlehem and this was true in the most negative of lights. The name Naomi means "pleasant" or "delightful." Naomi felt this was no longer fitting so she tells the people to begin calling her Mara which means "bitter." This was not a reference, as we might take it in English, to say Naomi had grown bitter. No, Naomi was saying life had been very bitter to her which all things considered needs no explanation. There's no evidence that anyone went forward from that time calling Naomi Mara but Naomi was not joking. She felt her life had taken such a negative turn it was only fitting she be called by a name that recognized that. One will also note that Naomi says God is The One Who has caused this to be true. This should not be surprising for a couple reasons. First, it had become tradition among men to invoke the actions of a god when describing both positive and negative things which happened in life, especially those things people felt/feel were/are out of their control. Because this is true, it only stands to reason that this would hold true for the chosen nation but instead of false gods they would speak of The One True God. The second reason is that Naomi really believed God had brought her to the place she had ended up in life. Again, this does not mean Naomi was bitter toward God necessarily. She simply understood no matter the circumstances of her life being negative it was all things God could have turned into something better had He chosen to.

It may not fit within the scope of our

overview, but let me just take a moment to point out this is another aspect of what makes Ruth so amazing! In Romans 2 Paul points out that when it comes to faith in God, members of the chosen nation are no better in God's eyes than anyone else in the world. This included the people Israel had come to despise about the most and that's why in chapter 10 Paul refers to the people of the chosen nation as "Jews," and those not of the chosen nation as "Greeks." This is a way of putting it, the meaning of which is largely lost on today's reader of the Book of Romans. However, it stands as a great example of why as people of faith we should desire to acquaint ourselves with those historical facts that give us both the correct Biblical perspective of what is being said and when it can be found, a historical perspective of the time of the events we are reading. These things greatly deepen our overall understanding of the Word of God! Back to what Paul said, he then poses the question of if there is any advantage to being a member of the chosen nation if what he just covered is true? The answer he gives is a resounding yes! He says they have an advantage in all kinds of ways that all go back to one simple point; they are the holders of God's oracles!

Naomi had whatever feelings toward God she had. We are not totally clear on those feelings but what we can say with confidence is that she had the advantage Paul was speaking about. Naomi was raised as a member of the chosen nation and as such she was taught the Torah. This happened without regard to how much the nation did or did not follow the words of the

Torah. It was a tradition exemplified by Moses before his death that the Law should be read over and over again. Within the Law Itself there is the commandment(s) that the words of the Law be written everywhere in Israel for everyone to read. The Law was given long before the invention of the printing press, meaning there wasn't a way to mass produce copies of the Torah for distribution. With effort the nation could have organized a very large national institute dedicated to gathering and creating (as in training) as many capable people as possible to work as scribes who could produce copies of the Torah. Had the nation obeyed and followed God as they should have, the resources for such a thing could have been obtained. As we see, the nation did not obey and follow God so I doubt this idea ever crossed the mind of anyone in the nation who had half a chance to make it a reality. Thus, the solution given in the Law Itself was to write it everywhere making public copies both easy to find and long lasting, especially if the words were inscribed in stone. Further it eventually became the tradition of the Jews to raise their children in a strict education of the Torah. Naomi might not have had all the advantages that later Jews grew up with but she grew up as a member of the chosen nation. Transversely, Ruth was coming from no such training or advantage and yet her faith is so strong her words are somewhat reminiscent of the nation's father Abraham!

Let's stay in God's Word!