

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 #123 LP

[www.livingspringsinstitute.org](http://www.livingspringsinstitute.org)

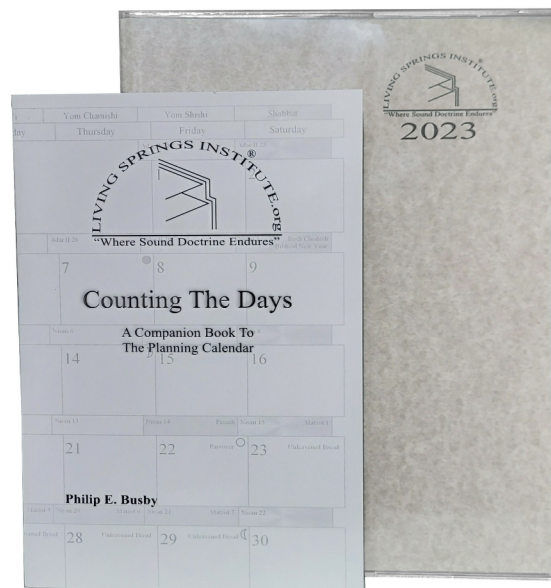
November & December 2022

## Step Into the Springs!

For the fifteenth year, Living Springs Institute has published its daily planning calendar that gives you the Biblical calendar alongside the calendar most of us use every day. Since early 2018 the companion book, titled *Counting The Days*, has also been available. If you're a regular mail subscriber to this publication and have not already received a calendar, you should have received one with this issue of *Shaqah*. We'd also like to send calendars to all of our e-mail subscribers, but we don't necessarily have your current physical mailing address. Your 2023 calendar is waiting for you, so be sure to contact us and put in your order today!

As much as we have always felt the planning calendar is a great Biblical education product, even if you don't use the calendar, the calendar's companion book, *Counting The Days*, is still a book you're going to want to read. With a full example calendar in the back, this book is a great way to learn about the Biblical/Jewish calendar all by itself. *Counting The Days* is an overall teaching about the calendar and feasts God gave in the Law, but more specifically, it teaches

the how and why God set up a calendar that contains distinct events, all of which prophesy about God's plan for our existence. It covers what each event prophesies about, why there is a Biblical and Jewish calendar, and much more! Of course, many of you



P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539

(970) 593-9468

have already received a copy of the book, but if you do not have one you will want to receive a copy when you order your 2023 calendar. If you already have a 2023 calendar, it should have come with a pink card inside that you can simply fill in with your name and address, and for only the price of a stamp you can order your copy of *Counting The Days*!

Now, by no means is Living Springs a ministry backed by a lot of money, so it is only by the continuing grace of God we are able to not only offer the 2023 daily planning calendar once again, but it and a copy of *Counting The Days* are both FREE! To order your free copy(s) of the 2023 calendar and/or *Counting The Days*, you can simply write, e-mail, or visit us online. For online orders, just go to [www.livingspringsinstitute.org](http://www.livingspringsinstitute.org), click on the "Resource Shop" button, order the 2023 calendar and/or *Counting The Days*, and type your mailing information into the lines provided on that form. To order more copies than the form allows, please use the comment box. If you are using e-mail, send your request to: [resources@shaqah.com](mailto:resources@shaqah.com). If you're using regular mail, write to us at: Living Springs Institute, P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539. Just tell us you would like the 2023 calendar and/or *Counting The Days*. Be sure to give us

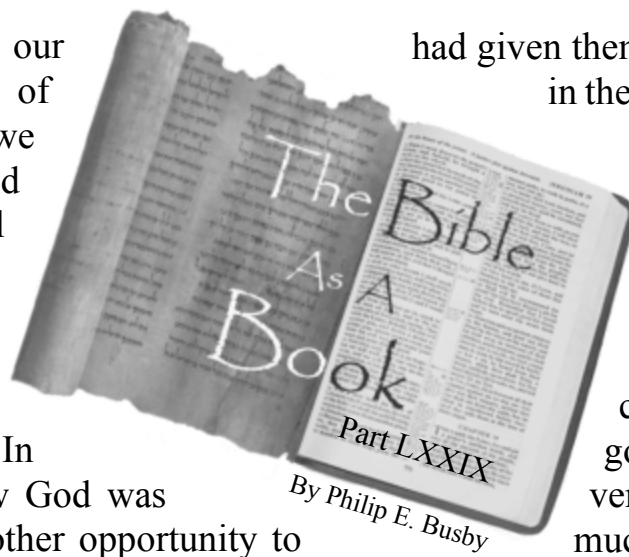
your physical mailing address, and your order will be on its way as soon as we can process it!

For those of you who may never have ordered anything from Living Springs, know that ordering will not put you on any mailing list! Living Springs is happy to send people only what they request. Thus, we want to remind everyone that we also offer other teaching products, and all for free! If you would like a free subscription to this publication (*Shaqah*), don't forget to make that request when you write. We also produce a PDF version of the calendar, along with many other materials in PDF, which you can download from our website at anytime.

In closing, I just want to say thank you, and please remember to share Living Springs Institute with others so they too may learn and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! We have struggled once again to get this calendar together and with getting it out to all of you. However, with God's help we will get the work done in due course. May God bless each of you, and as always, we pray you will be blessed by this issue of *Shaqah*!

As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, last time we talked about how God continued to give Israel judges even in times there was no invasions or other oppression Israel might need saved from. In that, we discussed how God was really giving Israel another opportunity to see just how much they did not need a king especially considering he would take their hard earned belongings in taxation. This system of judges was still a better system than having a king in things like the taxation issue for the people but even more so in the fact God was choosing who the judges would be. It was like a calling into the ministry in many ways. Unlike the ways men choose leaders God was not limited in who He picked. This gave God the opportunity to lead the nation through a man who would listen to His voice. Sadly we know Israel did not take this opportunity, and as we ended last time talking about, it did not take long after the death of a judge for the nation to turn to wrong things. In particular they often turned to false religions followed by the people around them, and that's what we see in the verse we ended last segment with. That verse was Judges chapter 10 verse 6 and we are ready to begin verse 7 this time.

As we see in verse 6 the nation had taken on not just one false god or a set of gods but they had taken on several gods and religious practices which the Canaanite people followed. Thus, we are told in verse 7 that God was very angry with the nation. He



had given them several decades of peace in their land, and through judges He had even given them the human leadership they desired. However, we humans want human leadership because it's something we feel we can control. In so many ways government and religion are very tied together, and as much as some people of the world have attempted to strip away religion from government it's not usually successful. This is because we want human leadership and a religious system made by man and from the Tower of Babel both these concepts sprang. They were designed in an attempt to satisfy the desires man has for The One True God. This is why it meant/means so much in the Word of God that we read these things such as we see here. Turning to a false religion for Israel was not just slipping off the path of perfection, it was turning their backs on all God had given them. God knows what man wants and had given Israel the perfect melding of government and religion in the Law. They had a governing system to follow that was established by God Himself and a religious system to follow that worshiped only God. However, God showed us through His chosen nation that our desire is not simply to have a religious system because having a relationship with God doesn't give us enough tactile input. Man does not desire a governing system because he wants true good to reign in the world instead of evil. Man just wants a system he is in control of!

In taking on the religions of

neighboring people Israel felt they were gaining that control they did not have if they followed God's Law. The same can be said for wanting a king. It was not simply about having a human figurehead to lead them, it was about wanting a king whom they then felt they could control. As we discussed last time, we see this clearly in the split of Israel into Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The whole reason the Northern tribes ended up splitting off is because they did not like the third king in the Davidic dynasty. Thus, they set up for themselves a new king of their choosing. Never forget that where all of this really picked up momentum and the place where the die was cast for all this to take place is right here in the words of Judges. Just how many times have we seen Israel turn from God to a false religion of some sort since the day they left Egypt for the promised land? Yet here we are again and, of course, God was angry with the nation for doing this. It made the nation less of an example for the world of what God wanted them to be and it meant God could not work with them as individuals in the way He wanted to. When we see the words that tell us God was wroth with His people we often take it as anger in the way we feel anger, but we forget God is perfect. His anger is a righteous anger not one that simply boils up because something happened He did/does not like. God is not a child as we are. His anger is due to His love for us. He could make this world a wonderful place but we refuse to listen to Him and allow it. He could have made at least this one nation of people He chose for the His purposes a utopian society, but even they would not listen.

This is why we should not become Anti-Semitic when we read such words. Israel is not doing something that only they

were/are prone to do. They are doing what humans are prone to do and desire to do. God wanted to set up a nation where those who wanted to follow Him could, and through the Law they would know how to even on a very tactile level. Those in Israel who did not want to follow God were welcome to leave the nation and join another nation or just go into the wider world on their own, but they didn't do that. People want it all and so they did not leave Israel to join a nation with a religious system and government they liked. Over and over they attempted to turn Israel into what they wanted it to be. This is what made God upset. He has given us the world and the free will to do as we please in it. However, we don't want to go out and be the world. We want to make the things that are of God enough like the world that we can have both. This is why I am so hard on the religion of Christianity. (Rev. 3:15-16) True believers need to know the truth but you can't teach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of God's ways in most churches today because they have people to satisfy who want the same thing Israel sought. It won't work in the end because ministers who think they know best forget they are to speak the words of God so the lost can hear and know Who God is! They forget what Paul says, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Romans 10:14 And the reason Paul goes on to quote Isaiah 52:7 "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" is because it's a rare thing in this world. Many are called into the work, few do as God bids them to.

# 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. In that segment we covered why the servant is sitting now with Rebekah's family and recounting the entire story of how he came to this point. In this we discussed more specifically why his telling is laid out for us word for word when we already know the story by reading it ourselves. From there we went into the verse by verse account of the servant's story discussing how these details meant something to the family as well as us. In discussing that, we ended more specifically putting ourselves in Rebekah's place and thinking about how through Abraham's words to the servant Rebekah was beginning to see the ways in which God had been preparing her to be a part of the great task He had called Abraham to Canaan to accomplish! All this brought us through Genesis chapter 24 verse 41 and we are ready to begin verse 42 this time.

By the end of verse 41 we have made it through the part of the story the family had no idea about because it was the telling by the servant of how he had been sent by Abraham specifically to this family in Mesopotamia to bring back Isaac's bride. Verse 41 recounts the specific fact that Abraham had made the servant take an oath to go to this family, but if the woman he found would not come with him back to Canaan the servant was free from that oath. As we talked about in covering the event where Abraham has the servant take this oath, we see how much Abraham was putting all things in God's

hands. We can look at it as being a situation where Abraham just knew that God would work it out; thus freeing the servant was not a real concern when it came to how Isaac would get a wife. However, it was not just the idea that Abraham knew God would prepare the way for the woman to come with the servant, it was that Abraham knew God would work it all out in His timing and will! This could mean things like the woman would not come with the servant but then later she would find her way to Canaan after God showed her how important she was to His plan. It could also be something like we see in other stories where the person our thoughts would say was the right person was not and God worked His will to bring forward another person we might not expect.

This certainly happened in the Bible on more than one occasion. In the later story of Joseph being the one who goes to Egypt and saves the family of Israel from famine, we might get caught up in the story of how this all came about. However, one of the greatest points of Joseph's dreams is that he, being almost the youngest son of Jacob would not have been expected to be the one chosen for such a leadership and/or important role! (Gen. 37:1-11) Of course, one of the most prominent examples of such a thing is when Samuel goes to anoint the next king of Israel. God sends Samuel to the house of a man named Jesse and he has 8 sons. One would expect the eldest son would be the man chosen. This was/is the tradition of men and the idea of God picking him seemed right in Samuel's eyes after seeing this son. He was



everything Saul had been when God told Samuel to pick him; tall and strong, a seeming perfect symbol of a king. However, we all know that son was not chosen and neither were any of the others going down the line from oldest to youngest until they were finally down to the son Jesse had not even bothered to call to this meeting. David was the ratty young boy who tended his father's sheep. He was good at it and no one thought anything about him needing to be doing anything except that while Samuel anointed one of his brothers to be the next king. In spite of that, David was the man God wanted! (I Sam. 16:1-13)

Thus, we never know exactly how or when God will work things out. We just need to be responsive to His leading and let Him handle the details no matter how little sense it may make to us. That is what this servant was doing, not just because it's what he thought was right but because Abraham had specifically told him how to go about it including answering the servant's question about what to do if the woman would not return with him. As wonderful as that all is, the real reason for these words to be spoken in the first place is so they could be repeated for the ears of the entire family, and the point of that is for Rebekah's sake more so than for anyone else! The conversation may have originally been between Abraham and his servant, but as we think of Rebekah hearing this recounting of that conversation we need to think about what was going through her mind. She was not an after thought or, as some like to say of those days and culture, simply property to be bartered for. Yes, within the culture of the day her father could have said the servant could take her and she'd have no real choice in the matter. Rebekah might have been very aware that was not

something her father would do to her, and we do in fact specifically see her later being given the final say in leaving with the servant. However, what's important about Rebekah hearing this conversation between Abraham and the servant before either of them had ever met her or knew her name was the fact Rebekah now knew in spite of what her father would or would not do, Abraham had given her a choice!

Especially in this day and age with the way we so often judge harshly the ways in which women were treated in past time and still in many places today, I don't think I can emphasize this point enough! The servant asked Abraham what he was to do if the "woman" would not come with him. (Gen. 24:5) Abraham does not hesitate as if this is a strange question considering the woman's father would culturally have the say in that matter. No, Abraham answers the question just as it had been asked. Again, speaking to Rebekah directly, the servant was freed from his oath to bring her if she did not choose to come! The servant had considered her feelings and Abraham had considered her feelings, and there is another point we want to get in our minds here. God considered Rebekah's feelings! That might seem funny to say in some ways, and different people with different mindsets will take that in different ways. However, it is important we understand God was letting Rebekah know she had a choice and if she really understood what was going on, and I for one believe she did, her question was not so much, do I want to be Isaac's bride as it was, do I want to follow God's leading and purpose for my life? This may be stepping back to where we ended last time but it's just so beautiful to see this and meditate upon it for a little while.

God works within the cultural structure we have formed as humans, and sometimes I think women believe God did not really care about them because He allowed that structure to oppress them in times and in ways. However, as we talk about so much in this study it's really all about God allowing humans their free will. What we so often lose sight of is why God allows this and can afford to allow it. In a grand picture kind of way I think we tend to get it. This world is temporal and as such it will come to an end. This, in turn, means all the wrong will come to an end. However, that is very hard to see when the wrong seems and/or is so personal and hard to bear. It really seems difficult when we see other people having an easier time in life than we are. When it comes to male versus female or issues of race and the like, this can feel like you were simply born into a group that has it harder with no choice in life and that seems very unfair indeed! All this being true on so many levels we must keep in mind that the grand picture view is still applicable to our very up close and personal experiences in life. Man has built what is in this world, and in many ways we act like animals in that the strong get their way while the more vulnerable are taken advantage of. As hard as it is to accept right now, God will wipe all that clean one day and we will have an eternity of time where none of that will exist again. In comparison to eternity this life is but a small time to endure, but it's just so hard for us to keep that perspective! (James 4:13-17)

As hard as that perspective is to hold onto and continue believing in, it can be made even harder if we begin to believe

Satan's lie that God does not care. We don't have to throw away the entire thought about how God will make it all better one day to allow this lie to do damage to our thinking. We far too often sink into a mindset that believes because God does not reach in and correct it now He doesn't really care, but that's not the case. We are told something simple by the words of Jesus. (Matt. 10:28-31) Jesus told us we should not worry about those who can kill the body. This is important because the thing most humans fear ultimately is the death of the body. It sounds odd but even those in great depression who, in so many ways, wish to die still fear the end of life as we know it. Thus, we fear but the real point is that we fear it because we are always hoping this life will get better in time. This is why so many would wish to go back and relive their lives. We live in the hope we can fix this life. That is the same line of thought going through the minds of many people who take their own life. People often do so with the hope there is no life or for of a better life on the other side because they feel there is no hope this one will ever be better. However, all this is still about how we feel and what we want in this existence here and now. That is to say, even if we think there is a better place to go on to, our feelings, thinking, and decision making are all based on the experiences we've had, and those only come from the here and now.

In light of this truth, Jesus told us not to be worried about the here and now even to the point the here and now will end for each of us when our physical body perishes. Jesus frames what we should fear in the thought we should fear the one that can destroy both body and soul in hell. Some believe Jesus'





words mean we should fear Satan. The strange thing about that idea is that Satan will also be thrown into the lake of fire so it is not he who kills our soul. So who should we fear? The answer is God, because it will be up to Him alone as to if the here and now is all we get. We need to respect what God wants and that gets super hard if we feel He does not care. It is for that reason Jesus follows these words with the simple illustration that not one but two sparrows are sold for little to nothing. That's how we as humans value life, yet Jesus points out not a single sparrow's life ends that God is not aware of it. God is the One Who set this world in motion and created it all to work in the temporal way it does, yet each individual life means something to Him. Can we say the same of ourselves? I know that's a very large question that could begin a very large conversation, but before we get sidetracked, the point of saying that is that we are quick to judge the actions of others but not so much ourselves. Who among us can honestly deny we care far more for ourselves and a close group of people around us than we do the general individuals in the wider world? When it comes to God it doesn't matter which individual we are talking about. Now, to say we easily hold certain people in our lives above others is not an indictment of us as humans, it's just a fact that our thinking is all based on the here and now which is more times than not only a small portion of the world directly around us. That being true it's just that much more important we understand that's not the case when it comes to God. Across this entire world, God sees, He's aware, and He cares about each one. He knows what He has set in motion and He understands it in untold depths we can't begin to fathom.

Being as small as we are, we might often be left with the question, how can God allow this or that to happen, but be assured that is a good question to ask! I know, that might sound like one of the oddest things I've ever said but it is a good thing. Why? Because what it shows is that we have not lost the understanding, God sees it all! That might seem discouraging beyond belief when we're sitting alone asking such a question but it's not even close to as bad as it is to forget or stop believing God sees all! When we think how can God see and know and still allow, we need to stop and remember those words of Jesus. Such a question might come in a time of great pain but in and of itself it's a comfort. If God does see, and believe me He does know all, then we know it's not out of control. It is all still something that can be fixed! It does not by any means mean God is pleased by what's going on among men. It does not mean we as individuals are happy about what's going on, but it's not out of God's control. No matter who thinks they are powerful and no matter how complex it all is, it's never above God and it's not even close to being beyond His ability to handle it in an instant. This old world of sin, and thus sickness, war, pain, death and the like, will all pass just as God created it to should sin enter our world. Then all both small and great, rich and poor, advantaged and disadvantaged will stand before Him. (Rev. 20:11-15)

Why? Because as Jesus told us, we are far more valuable than not just one or two but many sparrows! None of what has happened in life has happened out of God's sight and God has allowed us all a free will, not just the ones He chooses to. That makes for one mess of a world, but again, it's never out of God's control and the end of each person's evil we



# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part LIII

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 step back to talk about the fact history tells us the Roman Empire was a Christian empire in its latter time. In that we talked about how culture was a big part of how the world felt united under the Greeks and how that was different than the previous empires who did not care so much about culture. We discussed how the Roman Emperor Hadrian wanted to use culture to consolidate the Roman Empire but at the same time he was building walls to defend the empire. While Hadrian was invading the Jewish way of life by pushing Hellenistic culture across the empire he was excluding the very people on the outside of the empire who might have been pliable to such a thing. This was one of our steps forward in seeing how and why the barbarians to the north would come to collapse the empire in later times.

One irony in talking about Hadrian angering the barbarians is that history looks back at Hadrian as one of five "good emperors." In many ways this is a great example of the saying, or truth, history is written by the victors. Another way to see it is to say, history is almost always written from a one-sided viewpoint. I hesitate to even talk about that because so many today believe the correction to this is to look back and attempt to write history from the opposing view, and because it's opposing

history, what gets written is almost always written with even greater bias in the opposite direction. In any case, the point here is that Hadrian was a good emperor as emperors go, but that's looking at it from a Roman perspective. The perspective we've been looking at is that of the barbarians. In short, what was good for the Romans was not for many on the outside of the empire other than the fact Rome was not in a tremendous expansion mode at that time. That fact has a lot to do with why it would be much further into the future before the barbarians and Rome would begin to have major trouble between them. However, all this serves to show a point we must keep in mind. When you look at the side of the barbarians who were angry at Rome, you are talking about a people who had not just been agitated and reacted. Rome's actions which angered the barbarians were deep-seated by the time the barbarians chose to react. In fact, for some of the barbarians it was a deep generations long resentment of the empire!

Now, Hadrian was the third of the emperors who were said to be the group of five in a row of good ones and the fourth in the set was Antoninus Pius. His reign was looked at as peaceful on many levels and for the Romans that was probably true. However, the one thing he did do was push further past Britannia into the area of modern day Scotland in order to expand the Roman frontier beyond where Hadrian had built his wall. After doing so Antoninus would build yet another wall across the island and his wall



would be credited with being the furthest northern barrier of the Roman Empire. His excuse for pushing past Hadrian's wall was that the barbarians were causing trouble and had to be dealt with. Only twenty years had passed since Hadrian had built his wall and here another wall was being built to push back the natives even further. Antoninus' wall would not be as grand as Hadrian's but it still took some twelve years to build. In spite of that the futility of pushing Rome further and further north is shown in the fact Antoninus' wall was only able to be maintained for around eight years before the Roman soldiers stationed along the wall were forced to abandon it completely and fall back to Hadrian's wall.

Some say the whole push forward was political in that Antoninus needed a military victory of some kind which he could trumpet about back in Rome and Britannia was a great place to gain it. When we look at how short a time the new territory was held before it was abandoned this may very well be true. The problem with holding the ground does not appear to have as much to do with push back from the barbarians as much as it had to do with the uselessness of attempting to hold ground that had no real value to the empire at the time. It took a lot of effort to continue supply lines out to the wall across territory that was not going to be developed into Roman kind of places. So while this might have been looked at back home as a military, and thus a political, victory for the emperor, its only lasting effect was to irritate those to the north just that much more. Antoninus' death would come about in 161 A.D. so we are still a long way from the fall of Rome, but as I said, in this we can see just how long and deep rooted the feelings of those in the North had become soured toward Rome.

The last of the five good emperors was a man named Marcus Aurelius Antoninus who took power in 161 A.D. While Antoninus' reign was marked by some of the most peaceful times in the empire, Marcus' reign would be plagued by war. It would not only be the barbarians in Britannia Rome would have trouble with, but the Germanic tribes to the north of and in what is considered mainland Europe today began to cause trouble like never before. These barbarians began raiding places along the Roman border in Gaul and coming across the Danube River. While not the first time room had been made for more northern people to actually settle within the empire, this was a time of great acquiescence by Rome in allowing such a thing. However, after some pretty significant incursions into Roman territory Marcus did and was able to eventually push the barbarians back, just not back to where they came from. Thus, during this time the empire would see many of these barbarians settle in territories which before this time clearly belonged to Rome, including parts of Italy itself! There was such an influx of barbarians that two new "frontier provinces" had to be created to contain them all. These were in the area of what is today the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary.

Marcus also had to deal with a very telling event, which was the rebellion of the barbarians in Ravenna. This is a city in the upper part of Italy along the eastern coastline. Ravenna would be even more important in later times, and in many ways that might have some to do with the fact barbarians had come to live there in fairly great numbers. In Marcus' time these barbarians would rebel and attack the city, meaning the Romans of the city and its administration. This had to be shocking to

the people of Rome. A barbaric group of people had not only come to live in the heart of the empire they had the moxie to rise up in rebellion! Marcus would use the force that was necessary to put this rebellion down, and after that he expelled not just the barbarians that had been more recently allowed to live there, he would expel all the barbarians including those who had come there in earlier times. This move could not have done Rome any favors because once again we see Romans drawing a distinction between themselves and the barbarians. Even those who came and lived for some time inside the empire could not feel they had become Roman. They were all looked at the same, and there should be little doubt acts like these lingered in the minds of the northern people in a lasting way.

One more notable fact for this study we need to look at before leaving off talking about Marcus is the way Christians were being treated. To be clear, Marcus is not looked at as the instigator nor the direct persecutor of Christians in the empire. In fact, history records some very positive thinking toward Christians on the part of Marcus. In spite of this, there was an increase of persecution seen during his reign. One of the main reasons Marcus is not blamed for this is that persecution of Christians had turned from being something directed by Rome to more of a local issue. In other words, it was not the emperor or the senate that was slated with the “Christian problem” as much as it had become something local officials dealt with as necessary. Now, the uptick of Christians being persecuted is not altogether separated from the barbarian problem. If we go past the

cold facts we can glean from the history books and stop to think about the way humans react emotionally it is not difficult to see the connection. There were these barbarians from the North who were becoming an increasingly troublesome thing. It was like an invasion not so much of people but of culture. As we have covered, the whole reason these people were referred to as barbarians has directly to do with the idea they were not Roman. That truth is something we have been following, or at least I hope we've all been able to see, in the course of what we have discussed.

The barbarians would never truly be Roman in the eyes of true Romans. On the other side of things there were these Christians. They, of course, did not necessarily come from a different bloodline of people because many of them were nothing less than friends and family of more proper Roman citizens who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The problem was, in spite of the fact these Christians were Roman, like the barbarians they represented a very different culture! We have times we use terms like “culture war,” but on many occasions culture is as much the root cause of any war that is fought on the battlefield as any other factor. I believe there can be little doubt that Romans who held to being Roman felt they were being attacked from both the outside and inside. Barbarians were attacking their way of life by moving into Roman territories and Christians were attacking their way of life by converting Romans to this new religion. While Rome itself saw clearly the threat the barbarians were becoming more and more to the empire, it would be the local leaders who

would more readily see and feel the effects of Christians. While barbarians were a people of war on many levels, Christianity, which was still very purely Christian in those times, was peaceful almost to the point of seeming to be passivism. However, it made no difference. Roman culture was threatened by both, and it's easy to see how this fact caused Romans to persecute the Christians that much more.

While on that thought let's also look at the bigger picture, especially considering this study is suppose to be a study about the Jews not the Romans. By this time the Jews had already fought all three major wars they had with Rome and in the process had not just lost the temple, the entire idea of allowing Jews to be Jewish within the empire was in question. Jews by this time were easy prey for those who wished to persecute them. Synagogues were closed and made illegal in some areas, and most of the major Jewish institutions were fighting for their very survival more so than doing the work the institute was intended to do. What I hope we can appreciate about what Christianity was at this time is that it was not the religion we have discussed in recent segments. This means, on more levels than many of us can appreciate today, Christianity, and thus Christians, seemed very Jewish! I can't emphasize enough how true it is that we today have little comprehension of what this looked like. Not only are we inundated by what we know as Christianity today, even many who attempt to recognize, for lack of a better term, the Jewishness or Jewish roots of Christianity end up simply melding the religion of Judaism with the religion of Christianity. We just can't seem to get our minds around what the Torah is describing when it comes to what God wanted Jews to

look like. Worse yet, we can't really get a grasp on what it simply meant for Jesus to be a Jew and His apostles were Jews along with most all His initial disciples. We see even as Paul goes out into the wider non-Jewish world he still makes his first attempt at delivering the message of the Gospel in many places by going into the Synagogues, on the Sabbath day!

The point I'm attempting to make here is the simple way in which more than ever before Romans had come to see Jews as a troublesome people during the course of the first one and a quarter centuries A.D. As Romans who did not accept the message of the Gospel looked at the growing number of non-Jewish neighbors, friends and relatives taking on Christianity, it probably looked to them as if the Jews were making inroads into their culture by converting Romans into Jews. You might point out that Christians were persecuted by the Jewish establishment but that was not long-lived in the visible ways your average Roman would see. It also did not matter much because to Romans this looked more like infighting more than persecution by one religious group of another. We should also be mindful of the fact, Jews went after Christians specifically because they saw them as a distortion of the Jewish religion. From that standpoint the persecution had to seem almost an admission that Christians were, in fact, Jewish. Now, another argument you might point as to why Christians might not have seemed so connected to Jews is the fact Christians did not long for the temple ritual in Jerusalem, but try to appreciate how long by this point the temple had been gone. The temple was not just destroyed in the last of the three major Jewish-Roman wars; it had been laying in ruin since 70 A.D. By the time we

get to Marcus' rule of the empire the temple had been gone for almost a century, and especially with the shorter life spans of those days compared to today, this means there was not really anyone alive, whether Jew or non-Jew, who had seen the temple. With all the destruction of Jewish institutions and attempts to remove even the Jewish heritage and nature of Judea itself, what people of those days saw as Jewish was the day by day Jews that still lived among them.

These Jews they may have despised or cared less about, but in either case the truth remained they were a different people of different blood. On the other hand, Christians were made up of both Jews and non-Jews, and while the Jewish religion taught vehemently against Christianity there could be no mistaking the fact both Jews and Christians worshiped the same God! Add to that the fact what we call The New Testament today was not even a thought as in adding it to what was considered Scripture and you can see how both Jews and Christians held the same set of writings as sacred. Beyond that I doubt too many people saw much distinction between Jews and Christians. In truth, they likely seemed to most people to be nothing more than two branches of the same tree. In the end, we can look at it and say there were three groups that concerned the Romans, those being Jews, Christians, and the barbarians. However, on many levels the idea of persecuting Christians went hand in hand with putting down all things Jewish in those days and in a big way I say all that to say this, the barbarians who were already filtering into the empire were watching all this and would be touched by the Gospel message themselves. The idea Hellenistic thinking would one day be the thinking of all the world was unraveling fast!

To get to the next emperor and the events of his life I should mention that there was another man who served as emperor alongside Marcus and his name was Lucius Aurelius Verus. This came about because if you go into the convoluted stories of where these men came from and why they took the throne you find there was a lot of marriages and adaptations that affected it all. During this time of what history calls The Five Good Emperors, none of them came to the throne by being the traditional emperor's firstborn son. That is not to say there was no blood relationship between any of these men but just to point out they were appointed for all intents and purposes. They were in line to the throne mostly because they were adopted by the previous emperor and thus looked at as his son and heir apparent. Some historians have made the argument that such an arrangement was a far better way to choose the next emperor than the traditional idea a firstborn son being used, and there are many arguments to be made as to why such a system is better. Not the least of such arguments is the fact a man who shows a propensity for good leadership can be chosen over simply appointing a son who maybe doesn't even care to be ruler or has visions of grandeur about himself because he was born to be king! In the end, it's hard to say if it's coincidence that this time of five emperors turned out so well for Rome or in truth it is the better way. However, the next emperor does make a good argument for the latter because he was the blood born son and not a good emperor.

Getting back to the co-rulership of Marcus and Lucius, the simplicity of it is that both these men were in line to be emperor by the end of Antoninus' life. The case being thus, they both took the throne. However, it

seems clear Marcus was always the stronger of the two or at least the one whose actions survived the writing of history to make it seem that way. In any case Lucius took the throne along with Marcus in 161 A.D., and while Marcus would not die until 180 Lucius died near the first of 169. This not only marked the first time Rome had multiple emperors it seems to have set a tone for this to take place as it would happen many times going forward. In fact, Marcus would wait less than a decade before he would appoint his son, a man named Commodus, to rule alongside him in 176 A.D. In truth, it may have only taken Marcus this long to make this move because Commodus was so young. Even at the time he was appointed Commodus was only 15 years old, making him the youngest emperor to have served in the position up to that time.

Youth aside, Marcus would die in 180 A.D. and leave Commodus as sole ruler of the Roman empire. While Commodus had toured parts of the empire and battle grounds thereof while alongside his father and very young indeed, none of this seemed to prepare him to be emperor. It would seem not even serving alongside his father as emperor had prepared him. For all the advantages Commodus should have had in taking the reigns of the empire and continuing the good times it had enjoyed under the last five emperors, the problem appears to have been that Commodus simply did not care to be emperor, at least in the day by day administrative ways he needed to be. There can be no doubt when looking at where it all went that he was very arrogant about being emperor but when it came to doing the job of an emperor, which was seeing to the day by

day operations of the empire, over and over he was more interested in passing those things onto someone else. Mostly Commodus passed these responsibilities on to his chamberlain who is a senior official usually slated with the administration of the royal household not the empire itself.

What interested Commodus was sports and physical activities of the like. This even included fighting in the Colosseum as a gladiator. This attitude angered a lot of people in high places as there were plenty of people who would like to have become emperor and hold power. Instead, most of the power was handed off by Commodus to a subordinate whom they felt had no right to be running things. Now, one needs to understand that upon his father's death Commodus inherited most all of his father's advisors. His father had been a good leader and these people were valued by him but now Commodus didn't really care to use them. Thus, all this led to multiple attempts to overthrow Commodus, the first of which was led by his own sister. The two men who were to carry out Commodus' assassination failed to get the job done and were arrested by his bodyguards. This is when the executions would begin as they were put to death and his sister was exiled where she would later be killed. In truth, there was a third man involved in this first attempt who was not known to be involved and he along with a man named Perennis held significant positions within the government; positions which would normally hold a lot of administrative power. These two men had a lot to gain by getting rid of Commodus' chamberlain and so they arranged to have him assassinated.

Once that was accomplished Perennis implicated the other man in yet another conspiracy against Commodus' life. This resulted in that man's execution as well as the execution of many people including several in high positions across the Roman government. Others who were not executed were removed from power and the simple point here is that the empire's leadership was coming apart at the seams. One very noteworthy removal and subsequent execution was the governor of Britain. He is not so important but he was replaced by a man named Pertinex whose importance you'll see later. Meanwhile, Perennis took this opportunity to convince Commodus he should be entrusted with much of the affairs the emperor already did not desire to take on, and due to this Perennis gained great power. However, in a further irony than giving great power to one of the two men who had killed his first chamberlain, Commodus would find a new chamberlain he trusted and that man was the very man who had actually carried out the assassination of the first chamberlain! Needless to say Roman affairs were a mess, but Perennis, for all his faults, was said to have been a good administrator who did not take particular advantage of his position and did his job well.

Unfortunately he was not satisfied with his position and conspired to take over the throne. Before he could accomplish this Perennis was exposed and executed. The new chamberlain, a man named Cleander, then gained great power and he was very corrupt! He is probably best known for selling government offices to the highest bidder. However, he would eventually make the wrong enemies and be blamed for a food shortage in Rome in the spring of 190 A.D. Due to this, just as summer began a mob of

people would show up at a horse race in Rome to protest against Cleander. Cleander would call for a military guard unit he was in charge of to come take care of the mob. However, Pertinax had returned from Britannia and was by that time in charge of the city of Rome. He sent what we might call Rome's police force to stop the military guard. Cleander would flee to Commodus who had taken to staying at his family's estate for shelter against all those who wished to kill him. The mob followed and demanded Cleander be executed. Apparently in no small part due to the encouragement of Commodus' mistress, a woman named Marcia, Commodus gave in and Cleander was beheaded.

At this point Commodus would take more direct charge over Roman affairs. However this mostly served to make matters worse as Commodus began acting far more like a dictator in how he handled things. In truth, Commodus still did not really want to be the man who ran things day by day and so the empire would end up being administrated by a group consisting of the head man of Commodus' bodyguards, his mistress Marcia, and, of course, Commodus' newest chamberlain. However, the real problem was that Commodus himself had become a megalomaniac. He believed his powers were god-like and he himself not just a god as so many emperors were believed to be, he began to think of himself as the very source of Roman greatness! Commodus gave himself a name or title that connected him to the likes of Hercules and Jupiter. In early 192 A.D. Commodus would declare himself the new Romulus and rename the city of Rome, Colonia Lucia Annia Commodiana. Basically proclaiming the city as being founded by him. He would go so far as to



rename all twelve months of the year after the twelve names that now made up his proclaimed name. He named the military after himself, the senate, and even the people were no longer Romans they were Commodianus! In Commodus' mind his power did not come from his father or family line or even so much the Roman gods for that matter. His power came from his own uniqueness as an individual. Further he believed Rome's power no longer came from its history but from he himself. It was as if the man had totally lost his mind!

As crazy as the man was, through all his reign the one thing Commodus had on his side oddly enough was the people. In spite of all the corruption and upheaval in the government, in spite of the fact Commodus had done things like intentionally devalued Roman money, he never failed to impress the people. He bought their love and favor by putting on spectacular shows where he himself would wrestle with both men and beasts. It was as if a gladiator himself had somehow become emperor and Commodus would end up proclaiming exactly that. In December of that same year Commodus announced that on New Year's Day he would inaugurate the coming year of 193 A.D. by being both the ruler of the Roman empire as well as its gladiator. In what one can only imagine was a way of solidifying his sole position as the greatest in the empire, this would be proceeded by a mass execution of many members of the upper class. His mistress Marcia would find the list of those who were to be executed and to her surprise her name was on it! Further, the names of Commodus' head of his bodyguards, as well as his chamberlain were on it. Thus, the three

conspired to assassinate Commodus themselves. To do this, on New Year's Eve Marcia poisoned his food. Amazing as it may seem, Commodus vomited the poison and survived. So in a desperate move to put an end to the reign of a mad man and spare their own lives they called in Commodus' wrestling partner who strangled the emperor in his bath!

The new year would not begin with Commodus slaying animals and people in the Roman Colosseum but with the senate declaring Commodus a public enemy. They also restored the official name of the city of Rome as well as all the Roman institutions Commodus had renamed. During his life Commodus had commissioned many statues of himself; some of them going so far as to portray him as if he was Hercules or the like. The senate had all these statues torn down and Commodus' body would not be burned in a great ceremony as was traditional to signify the emperor had joined the gods. Instead it would simply be placed in the Mausoleum of Hadrian. Commodus' death would bring an end to the Nerva-Antoine Dynasty but it would in no way bring peace to the empire. Marcia along with her two male counterparts would name Pertinax the new emperor of Rome, and all these events would begin what became known to history as The Year of The Five Emperors.

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.***

can already see. Death comes for us all but we should not fear that. We should fear what God will do with us once that happens. That's the question we want to be asking and the answer isn't always easy to see when we get discouraged. However, in the end we must hold on and remember God's always right there and He cares. The evil will all one day end, and in spite of that fact it is not God's will any of us perish. (II Pe. 3:9) God will judge the evil of men but not having to let any of us go due to that evil is what He is working on throughout it all. If we strive not to be part of that evil which will cause us to be one of those who must perish, it does not mean we won't be affected by those who have not made that choice as well as the many mistakes we all make continually. However, choosing not to be part of the evil means trusting God's ways instead of the destructive ways we see humanity create. This trust and desire is what leads us to a relationship with God (faith) which puts us on a path to a place where we will never again have to be affected by evil or any of those negative things we live with now.

Getting back to our study, all that is why it's so beautiful in my mind that we see Abraham respecting Rebekah's will in this situation. It was God's will Abraham leave Mesopotamia and go to Canaan. It was God's will for Isaac to be born so late in Abraham and Sarah's life. It was all done so God could build through Abraham a chosen nation, and now it was God's will Rebekah come to be the mother who would move that will forward. After all the sacrifices that had been made up to this point what would happen if she said no? It's like what Abraham had to be thinking and certainly most of us would have been thinking when God asked Abraham to

take Isaac to Moriah and sacrifice him there! Why would God ask such a thing, and what a quandary it put the entire plan in. If Abraham said no, he'd be standing in disobedience to God so how could the plan go forward in that case? Yet, if he said yes and went through with it, how could the chosen nation be brought through Abraham with Isaac gone? It makes no sense and it's why most of us brush off the questions with the idea God knew Abraham would do what He asked and He wouldn't let Abraham kill Isaac in the end. That might get some people past it while others look to miracles such as the idea God could have given Abraham a son at what was by then an even older age. However, we just don't know. All we know is God has it all under control. The only question for us is, do we want to be a part of what God is doing by following His way and will for our lives or do we want to be left standing on the outside?

This is the question Rebekah was being asked, and having covered all that, we now come to the part of the servant's story which gets closer to the part Rebekah already knew firsthand. However, there was still a few more details she didn't know which would confirm all the more how much God had brought her specifically to this moment. In verse 42 we see the servant specify that on this very same day he is telling this story he came to the well where they know he met Rebekah for the first time. As we have discussed, the servant was aware of how fast God was moving this all along and it was important they get a sense of that as well. Thus, this verse begins the servant recounting his prayer which he prayed by that well having finally made it to Mesopotamia and not having much of a clue as to where to start. His opening thought is

simply the idea that if God had prospered his way, in other words if God was in how he had made it here to the spot he had come to, the servant wanted God to show him the next step. In this, we see what we just talked about. The servant knew God's eyes were upon him, the only question now was had the servant done what God wanted him to do, and very importantly the servant opens his prayer by seeking God for that answer. This is such a simple lesson in how to walk with God. We know where we've gone and what we've done. At times we know we have not done well and at others we don't know. Still other times we believe with all our heart we have done what God wants, and many feel in that case God now owes us some prosperity in return. However, the right attitude is to always seek God in humility.

Again, how beautiful this moment is when the servant doesn't take on an ounce of the wrong attitude. His concern is if God will prosper the effort he has put in thus far, and this the servant does having no reason to believe he had not done everything up to this point exactly as he should have. These small things are the way we show we really respect God as God. We stay humble before him. In our mind, we may have been forcefully turned in a wrong direction, but even if it doesn't feel that way we should be ever mindful we may have taken a wrong turn all on our own. In either case and any case, we stand open and willing to take the steps God has for us now. This is part of that temporal life we live. Here this moment, gone the next. Each second, each choice, each step, once taken are taken and can't be taken back. We have come to where we are whether that's because we did wrong or in believing we did everything just right. One way or the

other we need to look to God for how to take the next step, and that's what this servant was doing. In the case of the servant he does what we see him recount in verse 43 which was to ask God to reveal the right woman to him, and we discussed this when we covered this in the story of it happening. Thus, again as much as we are hearing the servant tell this story, think about Rebekah hearing it!

Rebekah knew what she was doing at that moment. Maybe it was something like a discussion with her mother about how it was time to go get the daily water from the well. Maybe she was simply going about what to her was a routine and it was about that time. No matter what she was doing beforehand she was about to gather up that pitcher and head for the well, but this day that simple trip would change her life! In verse 44 the servant tells them exactly how he had asked of God that the woman he asked for a drink from would agree and offer to water his camels as well. Rebekah knew that's exactly what she had done, but until this moment she did not know that the servant had been so specific in his prayers to God that she do it. To her this was just her nature, loving, kind, helpful. No matter whose daughter she was she was not above giving camels water and her care for others left her with not a moments hesitation in doing it for a stranger who hadn't even asked her to. How little she could have known at the time that her actions were an answer to prayer! Makes one stop to consider how many times you may have done something so little and seemingly insignificant yet in some way you've been a part of God's greater plan. Here, Rebekah is getting to hear how her actions were exactly that in connection with her becoming an even more forefront part of God's will than

she could ever have known was coming. Maybe we get to know, maybe we don't; it doesn't matter. What matters is that we be the people God wants us to be in all things whatsoever we do, we should do them heartily as unto the Lord! (Col. 3)

Now verse 45 is where Rebekah gets the confirmation she was in action to do what the servant was praying for, as he was praying for it. We have no idea how far it was from her house to the well, but any longer distance only makes it more amazing that as the servant says, it was while he was still praying these words that Rebekah showed up at the well. Now that's God! How aware was Rebekah of the man and his camels by the well as she came? It's hard to say, but one can imagine it was a fairly common sight to see people, especially those with animals stop at the well. Then, he speaks to her and asks if he could have a drink of her water. From there Rebekah can follow along in her own mind as the servant recounts the rest of this part because she lived it just as the servant describes it in verse 46. Without hesitation Rebekah let down her pitcher of water and gave him drink. While she was in the act she offered to water his camels too. How insignificant this act of kindness must have seemed to Rebekah as she took these actions, but how her life was about to change! Small things like this are why so many Bible stories make me think of other Bible stories. This moment certainly makes me think all the more about the Samaritan woman who came to her town's well which was/is in the land the servant had come to take Rebekah back to. The specific well the woman came to would be named for one of the sons Rebekah and Isaac would have together. (John 4:1-30)

What was so important about Jacob's well on that day and for that Samaritan woman was that Jesus had come to that well! When Jesus asked the woman for a drink she did not spring into action as Rebekah had done but instead points out one of those prejudices we talked about above. She asked Jesus how He being a Jew would even want water a Samaritan woman drew. You see, she was one of those individuals who felt disadvantaged. She was in a group of people who were disadvantaged just because of the blood they were born into. In spite of that her life was about to change in ways she could not have imagined. Why? Because God sees and God knows! Jesus' answer to her was that if she knew who she was talking to she would have asked for a drink from Him because He could give her living water in spite of how the world around her looked at her. In truth, this was Jesus leading her to ask the right question, and so she asks how Jesus could get water when He had nothing to draw it out of the deep well with? That might have seemed an appropriate question but the even better question He led her to ask was where He was going to get this living water He spoke of? In a wonderful moment she goes on to ask yet another great question, for she asked Jesus if He was greater than their forefather Jacob who had established the well and watered his cattle from it? Now that was the right questions because it gave Jesus the opportunity to point out the water Jacob had dug the well to obtain and which she now was capable of getting was temporal water that would need to be drunk again and again. However, the water Jesus could give would never cease to give life!

At that the woman asks Jesus for such water. From there Jesus shows her how much He already knows who she is and she thinks

He is a prophet. Thus, she goes on to talk about the promises of God given to the people of this land and she shows she's not sure if it leaves out people like her or not. Jesus goes on to make it clear that she as well as many others are mistaken about what it is God truly desires to do for this world. To this she simply points out she understands they all wait for The Messiah Who is to come and Who will set it all straight. It is then, Jesus tells her she is talking with The Messiah right at that very moment! Jesus' disciples, who were supposed to be men who followed Jesus because they already knew He was The Messiah, would come and be amazed Jesus bothered to speak to a Samaritan woman, and there's the confirmation that she was born into an under privileged group. However, the point is, Jesus did speak with her and without hesitation because that's God! The woman understanding this brings us to the detail I love the most in this story which is another thing this far off in years Samaritan woman was like Rebekah, and that was in her excitement over the words she had received at the well. She literally leaves the water pot she had brought to the well to go and tell the men of the city they needed to come see a man Who truly knew her! They needed to come meet this man she had found for He was what all of Israel sought! She wasn't going to miss out or question Jesus using all the high religious thinking which led the religious leaders of Israel to murder The Messiah. No, this "disadvantaged" woman immediately ran to invite others to come find what she had found!

That point fits nicely with where we are in the servant's recounting of his story

because in verse 47 he tells how his question to Rebekah was to ask whose daughter she was? Upon asking this Rebekah confirms God had led him to the exact house he had been sent to and she being the first person he met was the exact girl he had been sent to bring home! Upon learning this the servant would place the earrings and bracelets on Rebekah which he had brought to give as the first gifts to the new bride. As we know, not from the recounting of the tale here but in the reading of the story originally, once this happened Rebekah, like the future Samaritan woman, ran back to her mother's house to tell all that were there how she had met a man who held her future in his hands. The servant, not being God as Jesus was/is, of course, fell to his knees and began worshipping God that he had been led to the very woman he was to bring back with him. In telling this you can almost feel the servant's excitement at what had happened but lest we forget, he is sitting here telling this story, not as a man who recounts a great deed he had done in the past, but as a man asking for permission to take Rebekah back to Canaan in order to accomplish that great deed. So it is at this point we turn to think about what her mother, father, and the rest of the family must have been thinking at hearing all this. What an amazing set of events had brought this man into their lives so suddenly. Now they were faced with the same question Rebekah was faced with; be a part of what God was already doing or walk away. By now surely it was clear to all involved this could only be of God!

Until next time, Shalom!

So as the heat of God's anger burned toward Israel this time we are told He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites. This is not the first time we've heard of the Philistines, but in this situation they become a large factor and this would continue right up into the times of the kings. If we go back to the time of Abraham we see these people should have come to be allies with Israel but instead they become a people God was able to use to oppress Israel. (Gen. 21:22-32) I know I'm having trouble sticking to the overview these days, but one important note I want to put in here is that this gave God a chance to speak to both Israel as well as the Philistines. This is the beauty of God and His perfection! He can use a people to turn Israel's eyes back to Him and then in freeing Israel send a message to the Philistine people about how they too needed to turn to Him. This process we will see repeated over and over because God so loved the world, not just His chosen nation, and that was true before our timeline view of when God gave His Only Begotten Son! (John 3:16)

As we see this oppression come we see Israel gets divided from East to West at this time. These enemies oppressed a large part of Israel for eighteen years. The Philistines were by regional positioning going to be more the oppressors of those in the South of Israel while those on the east of Jordan were oppressed more so by the Ammonites. However, we are told the Ammonites passed over Jordan and also fought against the core tribes in the mid section of the nation. This truly felt like being attacked from all sides! These circumstances caused Israel to once again call upon God and admit they had not just forsaken God, as in they forgot about His Law and ways, but they had specifically

taken on the Baal religious system. To this God asks them if it were not true He had delivered them out of the hands of a long list of people, beginning with the Egyptians and going through most all of those whom Israel displaced to possess the land and those whom they now faced directly. God was attempting to get them to understand a simple basic fact, God is always able and He had proven it time and time again. God is also full of mercy and grace in that He had delivered them time and time again when they cried out to Him. Thus, the real question was, why did they continually turn from Him?

God tells the nation they had played this game too many times and the only way they were going to learn anything was for Him to refuse to deliver them once again. God tells them they should call out to the false gods they had worshiped to see if they could deliver Israel. As we discussed, what God was really pointing out to them was that if they felt their man-made, man controlled system worked so well they should rely upon it now. Man may want the systems he builds, but over and over Israel saw that such systems do not work for a person or nation when other men of greed come to inflict their will upon you. Israel pleaded with God to save them and finally went and did what they should have done to begin with if they really were repentant of their sins. Israel began to destroy and get rid of the false gods they had set up to worship. They also turned back to serving the Law. Of course, this service to the Law would be nothing more than a religious system if God was not honoring it. That is to point out the Law is not some magical force that moves mountains; only God can do that! However, as Israel does this we are told God was grieved for the fact His

nation was living in such a miserable state. If that doesn't show us how much God never leaves us nor forsakes us I don't know what does. (Deut. 31:6, Heb. 13:5)

Then there came a day when the Ammonites came together in that area of Israel to the east of the Jordan, which is the region of Gilead. The men of Gilead would gather at a place called Mizpah, which is a word that means “watchtower.” This was likely not a specific place so much as a way of telling us they gathered on higher ground to view the enemy. Mizpah is believed to be along the ridge that runs north to south through the promised land on the west side of Jordan. However, we don't know if this Mizpah is the same, especially since it is the armies of Gilead that are gathered here. In this place they show how little they really understood about God being their King because in spite of not using the word, they began searching for what was essentially a king among themselves. They wanted to know who would take the lead in this fight and whoever it was they were committed to follow. It is here we read the story of a man of Gilead who had a relationship with a harlot who conceived a son by him. Apparently this man took this son into his house, but the man's other sons, which were born through his wife, did not want him to inherit along with them because he was the son of a harlot.

The son's name was Japhthah, and after being cast out of his father's house he went to a place called Tob. This was a place outside of Israel's territory to the north of Gilead. We are told that in this place Japhthah gathered vain men to himself. This would be mostly men who through various circumstances had

no other place to go and/or no place/group to be a part of. They may even be men who simply liked the more freestyle life, or who were running from something in their past. Some men may have joined Japhthah's band because they felt it was accomplishing things they agreed with, but the reasons varied from person to person. In short, we see Japhthah ending up creating a roaming military force that was not connected to or affiliated with any particular family, nation, or people. Whether they did things like attempting to fight for those who could not fight for themselves or things on the far opposite of the honor scale we can't say. However, when the time came that Ammon made war directly against Israel, there were those who believed Japhthah was the man qualified to lead Israel in its defense efforts. This likely had to do with the fact Japhthah and his band were familiar with both the territory the battle(s) would be fought in as well as the tactics of the Ammonites whom he had probably raided on several occasions.

Thus, they go and find Japhthah to ask him to come lead them, but in a very reasonable response Japhthah asks them why, after being the ones who kicked him out in the first place, they would ask him to come now that they were in trouble? The men of Gilead don't try to deny what they did to Japhthah but simply point out the past is the past, now they are asking for him to come lead them and be their ruler. In a moment of disbelief he challenges their assertion that if he comes at this time to lead them and God gives him the victory, he would be made their ruler in the end. To this the men of Gilead call upon God to be their witness that they were making this agreement with



Japhthah, and with that assurance he returns with them. When they make it back to Mizpah all the people do make him their leader but Japhthah is still skeptical that there is any end reward in taking on this task. In a show once again that Japhthah believes in The One True God, we are told he lays all this issue and what he would do in this fight before God in order to receive God's guidance as well as leave what was not in his control in God's hands.

Japhthah would make his opening move in this fight against Ammon by sending them a message asking them why they had come up to fight against him. In putting it just the way he did, Japhthah was going about this in the exact way a king of a particular land would. Ammon's answer to him would be the idea that Israel had taken land that belonged to them when Israel came up out of Egypt. Ammon wanted it back and demanded it be returned without a fight. Japhthah's response to that was to recount the tale of how Israel did not take their land but came up from Egypt originally attempting to make contact with those nations which came from people related to their father Abraham. This would be the people of Moab and Ammon who were from the two sons of Abraham's nephew Lot and also the children of Jacob's brother Esau who were the Edomites. The messages Israel sent were simple requests to pass peacefully through their lands as a way to get to the promised land, but they were denied those requests so they skirted around the lands owned by these groups. Even when Israel made it to the border between Moab and the Amorites they requested the Amorites simply let them pass through their land in order to get to the west side of Jordan. This was a basic request to pass through the land of Gilead which Ammon was now disputing

over and claiming had been theirs.

The Amorite king also refused to let Israel through, but since they were Canaanites and not related to Abraham, Israel went to war with them. Japhthah makes it clear the land the Ammonites now want to claim was originally given to Israel by God and the Ammonites had no claim to it. He tells them they should be happy with the land they believe their god had provided for them and not attempt to take Israel's land because The One True God had given Israel its land! He then goes on to remind them of how Moab was not able to curse Israel and send them away and so both they and the Ammonites had lived next to Israel for a very long time by this point. He then challenges them with the idea that if they believed the land should be theirs, why had they waited so long to recover it and make this claim? Japhthah tells them it is they who have done wrong unto him not the other way around and God would be the judge if they disagreed with that. Ammon didn't allow any of his arguments to change their minds in the matter and remained determined to obtain the land of Gilead. When Japhthah knew this he did not wait until Ammon attacked but headed across the space between them to put Ammon down.

However, Japhthah was not wise in one thing he did. He promised The Lord that if God would give him the victory over Ammon, whatever first came forth from the door of his house when he returned home, he would sacrifice to God. Only Japhthah can say what he was thinking when he made this promise, but one can only guess he did so as a way of him saying he would give God anything if God would give him success in this fight. God did give Japhthah the victory and in a very great way. He would put down

Ammon and devastate their cities to such a degree Ammon would lose the power to come up against Israel again. Japhthah had given God the credit for giving Israel this land and God had shown His power in defeating those who did not believe only God is God! So Japhthah returns home and his only child, a daughter, is so happy he has returned she comes out to meet him dancing and playing her instrument. When Japhthah sees her his gladness turns to total bitterness and he tears his cloths in the tradition of mourning. This had to be a great surprise to his daughter as he tells her she has brought him low. That was the exact opposite of what she expected, but he tells her about the promise he made to God.

In an absolutely amazing show of how much she valued a promise to God and her father keeping his word, she insisted that he sacrifice her just as he promised he would if God gave him the victory over Ammon. Here this man had been cast out of his father's house just because he was the result of his father's sin. He goes out and makes a life for himself and in spite of the disadvantages he has faced he believes in The God of Israel. However, he showed in his promise to God just how little he really understood what God wants because God had forbid Israel from sacrificing their children. This is a perfect example of how we as humans can put ourselves in a very bad situation. Instead of promising God he would give God whatever He wanted no matter how precious it was to him, Japhthah makes a blind promise to give an unknown sacrifice. If he intended to perform the sacrifice himself this was a violation of God's Law in that sacrifices were to be taken to the tabernacle. If he did intend to take his sacrifice to the tabernacle it was

foolish to promise something unknown since only certain animals for specific reason were allowed to be sacrificed at the tabernacle. Now he was faced with an even worse problem. By promising what he did his unknown sacrifice turned out to be a person, and that's something God would never want!

Yet in the end he had made a promise and the Law also instructs that one fulfill all the vows one makes unto The Lord. (Num. 30:2) His daughter and he at least seem to understand the importance of following through as his daughter believes in God to the point she is willing to give her life in order for her father to fulfill his promise to God! She only asks one thing of her father. Before she gave her life she wished to go out for two months and lament the fact she was never married and never had a child. We can take this idea many different ways but in its simplest form, what she's doing was lamenting the fact she was dying at a young age. Dying before she had a chance to live a full life as we might say today. This her father would allow her to do, and when the two months were passed she showed herself to be the honorable daughter she seemed to be from the start. She returned to her father and allowed him to sacrifice her just as he had promised. This fulfilled a vow made to God but it was a very grievous event that should stand as a lesson to us all. For this reason it became a tradition in Israel that the daughters in Israel went to mourn Japhthah's daughter for four days every year. Let us all go before God and seek what He most wants us to yield to Him, and not make blind promises that come of our own thoughts.

Let's stay in God's Word!