



# Shaqah

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

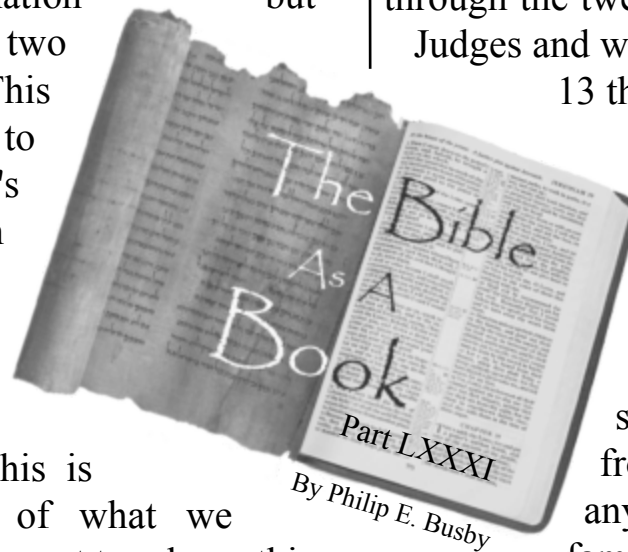
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As we continue our overview of the book of Judges, last time we talked about what happened with the judge named Jephthah after he had won the war with the Ammonites. This covered what was nothing short of a civil war. Not a civil war involving the entire nation but one internal to the two half tribes in Israel. This all came about due to arrogance and it's amazing how man seems to dive deeper and deeper into his own thinking the more trouble he gets himself into. This is the exact opposite of what we should do but we just want to rely on things we feel are in our control. Thus, after talking about Jephthah we covered the next couple of judges God gave Israel, and in doing that we saw how much the judges were beginning to act more and more like kings. This was not what God wanted but as we discussed these were the men willing to be used by God in the ways God could use them. That said, we discussed how such truths are what lead us to finally see a judge

like Samson who was a man much more on the wild side of life than others we had seen. In all this we got a view of not just the progression of Israel in falling away from God's perfect will but an example of how we all fall. Covering all that brought us through the twelfth chapter of the Book of Judges and we are ready to begin chapter 13 this time.



As we finish chapter 12 we see the last judge we were covering, named Abdon, died and was buried in that same obscure place he came from. There is no mention of any son or nephew of his family attempting to become king, and that was a good thing. However, it seems God did not immediately give Israel another judge as we have seen over the last few. This again has to do with God wanting Israel to turn back to being without a human figurehead for a leader so they might serve God directly. What we see as we begin chapter 13 is sadly, Israel did not turn back to the higher road but once again, did evil in the sight of The Lord. It is here

we begin to see the Philistines play a bigger role in being the constant rival of Israel for it was they who God used to oppress Israel this time. After 40 years of oppression under the Philistines we finally see God act once again. However, it is at this time we see the transition from judges who would act more like kings to God using a man who was totally on the other side. It all begins with the introduction of a man and his wife from the tribe of Dan. They lived in a city named Zorah which is about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem right along the border of Judah and Dan.

The man's name was Manoah and we are told he and his wife were unable to have children, but one day an angel comes to the woman and tells her she would have a son. The interesting part of what he tells her is that she is to be careful not to drink wine, or eat any of the unclean things according to God's Law. He also tells her that the son she will have is not to have a razor touch his head. This is to point out he was to allow all hair on his head to grow naturally from birth forward. This was due to the fact this son would be a Nazarite from his mother's womb! This is very interesting in that so few were ever born already having or being what God had called them to be. Jeremiah was told by God that He knew him and called him to be a prophet while he was in his mother's womb. (Jer. 1:4-5) The knowing part is true of us all, and maybe for those in full-time ministry the calling is more than we know. Then there was the last judge, Samuel who was born by another couple who was barren. His parents knew he would be given to God from birth because this was the promise made by his

mother if God would give her a child. (I Sam. 1:9-18) We know God answered that prayer and we see confirmed God was at work in the child's life from the start. Of course, the most obvious example has to be John the Baptist who was not only promised to be born of yet another barren couple but also filled with The Holy Ghost from his mother's womb! (Luke 1:5-24)

The child that would be born of this couple we are discussing was, of course, Samson and getting to the fact he was a Nazarite specifically, is an interesting detail in and of itself. The Nazarite vow was something a person in Israel, male or female, could take and it had a starting point as well as an end. (Num. 6:1-21) There were several stipulations involved, the shorthand of those being, to stay away from all things alcohol and specifically all things that came from the vine because grapes were the main known source of alcohol. (as people of the day understood it) Due to the fact so many who claim to be Christians think so little about consuming alcohol today and many even use it in their ceremony right inside the church, I'll just point out alcohol is a poison. Now, another large part of the vow was to stay away from the dead, meaning you could not even involve yourself in the funeral and burial of a close relative if they were to die during the time of your vow. Of course, the most well known part of the vow was that of not cutting one's hair. The not cutting part was more prominent for a man to do than a woman during the time of the vow but at the end of the vow one shaves their head. That part would be more prominent for a female than a male. The most basic and

simplistic point in all these stipulations is that they take you outside the normal for a time. Staying away from anything that might even come close to being alcoholic or could be used to make alcohol would limit one's activity; specifically because of those things consumed at celebrations. Staying away from the dead has the most obvious consequence should one close to you pass away, but lest we forget in an agrarian society people butchered much of their own meat. A Nazarite could not take part in that. Finally, not cutting one's hair, combined with shaving it at the end, makes for an outward sign you have taken the vow no matter how active or not you might be as an individual.

All these elements symbolize two main things. First, you are separating yourself from the norms of society and second, they all symbolize purity. Don't touch poison, don't touch death, don't alter your natural appearance by cutting your hair. These things also have a relationship to the same base concept as fasting in that one is leaving more time for the things of God by taking away things that would normally guide some of your activities. In the end result a Nazarite could turn down just about anything when it came to requests made for their time and energy because it was known what it meant to simply say, "I'm doing a Nazarite vow." There are many other things that could be said about this vow but without going into a total teaching of it during this overview those are the basics and the word that sums up what a Nazarite was representing is "holiness." Holiness means, separated for

the purposes of God, and this was the entire point of Samson's life. God wanted that to be clear. Thus, this child would be a Nazarite from his mother's womb and throughout his life, not just for a time period. As one covers the story you can be left with many questions as to why Samson's hair was such a big deal where as so many other things were not, but a large part of the answer to those questions are what we talked about last time. God was calling men who would listen to Him in order to do the things needed at the time.

None of these men where Abraham or Moses like. That said, they did serve the purpose of God in their time and place. Whether each of them made it to heaven or not is totally between them and God, but let me point out once again, just because one is used of God does not mean they're automatically going to make it to heaven. The bottom line is, in so many ways Samson may not have been the symbol of all the things a person vowing a Nazarite vow was expected to be but for him it was a lifelong calling nonetheless. This is why the hair thing would be so important. The hair was the part that was the most outward and obvious symbol of this vow, and anyone who knew the Law knew shaving the head of a Nazarite meant they were either at the end of their vow or it had been interrupted by some violation of the vow. For Samson himself to cut his hair would be like saying he no longer wanted to be the Nazarite he was born to be. For someone else to cut his hair would be like putting who he was on hold. All this comes into play toward the end of Samson's life.

Getting back to his birth, Samson's mother was told he would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. This passage is just loaded with specific details we could cover and I can't help but point out the word "begin" here. Israel suffered some long-term oppression during the time of the judges, but usually when God sent a judge it was to deliver Israel from it and that's what happened in pretty short order. Even if it took a little while it was still the working of that judge that accomplished the end result. Here the angel makes it clear Israel is headed into a new phase, if you will. No longer is it a time of oppression before God sends a judge to deliver them but a long-term war Israel would face; a war with the same enemy who would constantly be a pain in Israel's side. This we see as we move forward through the stories we are told. By the time of Saul it is still the Philistines Israel is most worried about and it would take until the time of David to see them finally subdued for the most part. Again, this was not because it was God's plan, as in God desiring the nation to face this, it was only God's will in that Israel needed to make a change. It was coming time for Israel to no longer do evil, cry out, and get delivered. God had given them the chance to escape that cycle many times and the nation just never learned. There is also something missing from the wording here which we usually see, and if it hasn't jump out at you let me point it out. There is no mention here that Israel had cried out to God even after 40 years of oppression!

In this we see the nation as a whole going downhill which, as we have discussed, is why there were not such

powerful men of God to call as judges like there had been. Thus, God would put Israel in a more permanent state of threat while at the same time not just leave them on their own. God would show the nation He was still available but they would need to turn their hearts to Him in order to see the full deliverance He could provide. Some would argue this did not work and some would even make the argument this is what drove Israel to ultimately want a king. There are certainly no end to those who argue it's why Israel "needed" a king as they look back in history, but all such things are missing the point completely. God is always attempting to push us in a direction that takes us back to the truth. We either listen or go downhill that much further. Going downhill is what we're best at, especially as a group, so that's where we go more often than not. However, if God didn't push us we'd get there on our own and still blame God for it all; asking where God was during all that time, if we even recognized there was a God anymore at all.

Thus, God would send Samson who through obvious supernatural power provided Israel some deliverance from the Philistines. As a known Nazarite, even an odd Nazarite in that he was one from before birth, the nation would know his power came from God. No matter how much Samson was in violation of such a vow in comparison to the more strict interpretation of what a Nazarite was to be, he knew his power came from God and we see that confirmed at the very end of his life. Samson would begin to deliver Israel but the nation was ultimately at a crossroads. Israel was either going to turn to God for

# 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 finally made it to the end of the servant's retelling of what brought him to Mesopotamia and more specifically to Rebekah and her family. This gave us a good opportunity to talk about how we each should know and respect God and how that is shown in the way we behave, especially in how we react to God and His will. What we saw in the story is that both Rebekah's father and brother agreed she could go with this servant to become Isaac's bride, and we also covered how in spite of the wording that makes some argue Rebekah had no choice, Rebekah had been the one excited about this from the start. Thus, our last segment was all about reading the Bible's stories for what's there and considering not just the culture these events took place in but the details the Bible is giving us which show God and His people not operating strictly by cultural norms. What we covered at the end of last time was the fact the servant once again worshiped God for bringing him this far. All that brought us through Genesis chapter 24 verse 52 and we are ready to begin verse 53 this time.

The primary thing we see in verse 53 is the servant giving gifts to the family in order to celebrate the fact Rebekah would go to be Isaac's bride. In some context this can be looked at as the same thing we see in other places throughout history where a bride is bought and paid for by the groom or

this family. However, these gifts were not given until after the agreement had been made that Rebekah could go. Up to that moment there had been no mention of payment expected or offered in exchange for Rebekah. The only thing the servant gave before this moment was the jewelry he had given to Rebekah herself, and while those gifts can be clearly seen as pertaining to a marriage engagement, if Rebekah's father had not given his blessing those gifts would have been Rebekah's to keep or return as she chose. They came with no strings attached and we know this because the servant hadn't even met Rebekah's family by the time he gave them. In truth, all these gifts were pure celebration for what God had brought together and as often as we see the servant worship God we know he gave them in just that spirit.

Another very important detail in this verse is the fact the servant gave gifts not just to Rebekah's father and brother but also to her mother. Tradition would dictate that the gifts go to the bride and her father or other men of the house and then they would do what they wished with them. In this story we see the servant specifically give gifts to Rebekah's mother as well as the men. I point this out as important because again we live in a day and age that is so hard on the Biblical age for the way women were treated. While, once again, I don't deny this happened in many cases, the point is that's not what pure men of God did. Rebekah was respected in every step of this process. If it's



been too large a point to notice in this story, one should be impressed by the simple fact God Himself did not lead this servant to Rebekah's father, brother, or family in general. God led the servant directly to Rebekah! Directly to the woman God had sent this servant to find in order to create the next generation of the chosen nation. It simply does not matter how bad humanity overall might be on any level or in any way; God directs us to be on a higher road and that's why the women in this family were treated with as much respect and recognition as any of the men.

Now, I know I'd be a bit remiss to not take a little time with the thought that might be on many people's mind as I say all that, and that's the fact in the story of Jacob coming back to this family we see a very different set of events occur. The first point I will make is that Jacob was not coming as this servant was. The servant was sent to get a wife and head back to Canaan. Jacob on the other hand was on the run from his brother. Thus, he came to live with the family of Rebekah's brother and that made everything different. As we look at how Jacob ended up with two wives from this family, one can argue the specific point that Leah was mistreated. However, remember that was not Jacob's fault; it was Laban's doing as her father. Jacob was very upset about the fact he had been tricked and mistreated by Laban when this happened. However, in spite of how upset Jacob might have been he did accept Leah as his wife and cared for her as a wife all her life. He had worked seven years for Laban in order to get Rachel but ended up with Leah. He would work another seven years to actually end up with Rachel, but what this means is that Jacob worked an equal amount of time for

both Leah and Rachel. Of course, it's only human nature that Jacob was in love with Rachel and due to that favored her over Leah, but God greatly used Leah in spite of this. Leah would be used of God to have most of the sons that would become the tribes of the chosen nation, and this all speaks to God caring about the women as much as any man even in the face of a culture that valued women less!

Moving on into verse 54 we see the point that finally there was eating and celebration in general. Lest we forget this entire time the servant had been telling his story everyone had been waiting to eat the meal which had been set before them. The servant was just so focused on his mission it seems he especially could not eat until he knew if he had accomplished it. As I said before, I'm not sure he would have eaten with the family at all had he been told he could not take Rebekah. However, the time had finally come to celebrate and a very interesting thing we see in this verse is that we have mentioned again the other men that were with the servant! We can't say with confidence that these men were sitting there the whole time the servant recounted his story or if they were invited to this meal after the celebration had begun, but in either case we don't see them being mentioned again until now. So why bring up the fact they are here at this point and part of the celebration? The answer is the beautiful way the Bible is always giving us the consistent picture of how God works and wants us to. These men were truly there to help this man of God who in representation symbolized the working of The Holy Ghost. As we discussed before, these men were representations of angels. They were here purely for doing the work of helping feed the camels and other daily tasks

needed so the servant could focus on his work which Abraham had sent him to do. They are mentioned here again as part of the celebration because the servant being given permission to take Rebekah is the representation of the Bride of Christ ready to meet her Groom. This is an important event which all of heaven rejoices over, and we see this laid out for us in Revelation chapter 7.

All that said, we don't get out of verse 54 before we see the servant hasn't lost focus on why he came. They all celebrated that evening and the servant with his men spent the night, but at the crack of dawn he was up and asking the family's blessing to depart and head back to Abraham. In a reaction that is not surprising Rebekah's brother and mother want to keep Rebekah with them a few more days. They specifically ask for ten days and this no doubt was in line with traditions for a wedding celebration for their culture. In our world today many people consider a wedding celebration a one day event but as we see more clearly in the story of Jacob being married to Leah, in ancient times the marriage was really about the couple consummating their union more so than it was about words spoken during a ceremony. Thus, it was after the marriage had begun that the celebration started and it would last for several days. In the case of Rebekah, Isaac was not coming to Mesopotamia and there would be no big celebration in their house to commemorate their daughter getting married before she rode off with her new husband. It was very reasonable to want to keep Rebekah for a more traditional time period even if this was not to happen and just about anyone can see

how getting to spend those last days with her was more important to them than ever.

The next verse tells us the servant's response to this and in what should also come as no surprise, he points out that God had given him great success in finding Rebekah quickly and he wanted to keep moving at the pace God had set. He specifically asks them not to hinder that pace, and hindering the pace is what we are talking about because the agreement Rebekah could go had already been made. The idea of how fast the servant would take her and go was obvious to the servant and should be to us as we read the story, but this was likely a little unexpected for the family. It was all happening so suddenly anyone might wonder why it had to be done with such haste. That being true, there was one person who had seemed to be in tune with all this far more than anyone else with the exception of the servant and that was Rebekah. For that, and so many reasons that relate to us seeing Rebekah's wishes were honored in this situation, the way to settle this matter was to ask her opinion and let that be the deciding factor. Thus, we are told they called Rebekah to ask if she was willing to go with this man and that is to say, at this man's pace, meaning you will leave immediately. In words that are so few Rebekah once again brings tears to my eyes as she simply says, "...I will go." Genesis 24:58

Why does that make me cry? If you've been staying in tune with what all this represents you should at least know why, if not be crying yourself, at her words. In representation, Rebekah was/is the Bride of

Christ and she's being asked if she was ready to go and be Isaac's bride who was/is the representation of Christ. Now put yourself in Rebekah's place. Rebekah, you just met this man who wants to take you so far away from all you have known; will you leave everything, and more importantly every person you've known and loved all your life, to go with this man and be the bride of his master's son? This is what God is asking of us. There can be a lot of debate as to if it's important or not and how much its been wrongfully used by men for their own selfish gain, but when we speak of church history we speak of the "Apostolic Age." People can give some pretty flowery descriptions about what that term speaks to and there is no shortage of religious organizations which argue they are the true church that connects back to the Apostolic Age. However, the term in its simplicity is speaking to the fact there was a time following Jesus' ascension where many people still living and breathing in this world who could say, "I met Jesus face to face." This is more often than not spoken of because it means power and authority. If you can say, we as a group represent the people who descend spiritually if not physically from those who could say they walked with Christ, it seems as if you hold more authority when talking about "Christian" things.

This is why it's been traditionally a point of argument the Catholics have made as well as many Protestant organizations. However, if we put aside all the arguments about how men always desire power when making this point, what a subject it is to speak of! To be able to have been one who actually experienced meeting Jesus in the flesh. Can words describe that? To say, I was there when Jesus fed thousands of people

with just one boy's lunch. (Matt. 14:13-21) To say, I was the blind man who Jesus touched and healed; the lame person Jesus made to walk; the dumb that Jesus made able to speak. How amazing would that be to have been one of the men to whom Jesus said, "...Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." Mark 1:17 To have lived in the time and place to meet and walk with God in the Flesh was a privilege I think few today can grasp the magnitude of. That's why, Jesus speaks to that very point. The reason the Apostle Thomas is given the name "Doubting Thomas" is because he shows us the reaction most would have had after Jesus rose from the dead; most who had not seen Jesus for themselves at least. When the other apostles tell him they had seen The Lord, Thomas said he would not believe unless he could physically examine Jesus for himself. Thomas wanted to feel the nail prints that he felt would be in the hands of The Man they had watched die on the cross. He wanted the same for the wound in Jesus' side from the soldier's spear.

Exactly why one would believe such wounds remained on a man who had died but been able to raise from the dead, is hard to say. In any case, when Thomas finally gets his chance to see Jesus, Jesus stands before Thomas and tells him to do exactly what he said he wanted to do. Jesus challenged him to feel for himself the nail prints that God in fact had left in Jesus' hands so it would be clear this was The Man Who had died on that cross. The same was true for the scar left by the spear in Jesus' side. Jesus told Thomas to handle Him and know Jesus was in fact real. Not some impostor, not a ghost but real in all the ways we know how to define real! To his credit, in



# What About God's Chosen People?

## Part LV

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 doing this we are hoping to see how the Roman leadership was causing Rome's decline, especially when it came to how they handled the people they considered barbarians that lived in the North. Thus, we discussed the transfer of power between several emperors as the era of the Five Good Emperors gave way to the Year of Five Emperors. As we discussed, this included a civil war at one point to see who would take power out of three main players who all were declared emperor during the same time by at least some of the military and/or people. Once this war settled down we see the beginning of what was to be the Severan Dynasty. However, that dynasty was severely interrupted by another man who would hold power due to all the turmoil this time period was for Rome. Finally we see another power struggle which was orchestrated by the sister-in-law to the founder of the Severan Dynasty. She schemed to elevate her grandson to emperor. When her plan ultimately worked, the Severan Dynasty was restored.

The new emperor's name was Elagabalus and his grandmother's name was Julia Maesa. She would continue to play a role as time stepped forward, in no small part because the grandson she had brought to

power was yet another bad character. His reign would begin by putting down people he saw as a threat to his power and this mostly included those who supported his predecessor. He basically forgave the Roman upper class for accepting the previous emperor and the official record was expunged of his predecessor; making it appear there was no gap in the Severan Dynasty. A key general who had supported Elagabalus in securing the throne, a man named Comazon, was rewarded with the leadership of the Praetorian Guard as well as the position of city prefect of Rome. Some historians believed this to be a violation of Roman law, but it mattered not considering Elagabalus had exiled the main official who was considered an expert in the law and whose position existed to point out just such things.

Elagabalus himself was honored by being given religious titles and leadership rights, but overall he was making far too many enemies by showing favoritism to his allies. This, once again, left many people who would/should have been in line for different positions without their expected promotions. Elagabalus was also another emperor who did not hide the fact he was homosexual. History indicates he had several male lovers and one of them is recorded as even becoming his "husband." Several of these men Elagabalus wished to raise to political power, even the position of Caesar. While this did not happen, the man considered his husband did have great political influence as



one might expect. The women who had supported him and helped him gain power were also not totally left out. He saw to it that both his mother and grandmother were given senatorial titles and both even received the rare honor for women to have their image appear on a Roman coin.

Speaking of Roman money, Elagabalus either through poor administration or on purpose devaluated the Roman coins; furthering the drop in their silver purity. Such things might seem small insignificant details for our study, but these small details show us more and more how Rome was on the decline long before it began to totally fall apart. One very interesting point is that, since the time of Emperor Severus, the worship of the sun was on the rise in the empire. Of course, this is another small detail because the Romans had many gods in their pantheon. However, Elagabalus insisted that a sun god which came from Syria be elevated to the top position in the Roman pantheon. The main object for this god was a black stone, possibly a meteorite of some sort, which supposedly gave access to the sun god. The name of Elagabalus is basically the same name as this god, so in some ways the emperor was raising himself to the top god among the Romans. This might not have been too big a deal in a society that in many ways already recognized their leaders as gods, but Elagabalus was rather obnoxious about his worship of this god. In particular he forced senators to watch him dance around this stone. He would also put on a big celebration at the summer solstice when he would have the stone placed upon a fancy chariot and paraded through the city. This celebration was popular with the people because it included food distribution, but this point is another hint in how low Rome was

going. Why would the people of such a great empire have any worries about food?

The most significant part of all this to our study is the fact Elagabalus began transferring the most important relics which the Romans held sacred to the temple he had built for this sun god. Again, who cares right? However, in a way never really done before Elagabalus was shaking up the Roman traditions of worship. If he had done this in small steps it might not have been such a big deal but as if he really was the god of all things, he made these changes at will and expected them to be accepted. He was fast doing away with the standard Roman religious thought and replacing it with a very ancient Egyptian and Babylonian form of worship that held the sun as god overall. The idea of moving the relics to his sun god's temple was a way of accumulating the worship of all other gods under this sun god. In the most important point of all, this included religions completely outside the Roman pantheon! If you haven't guess by now, Elagabalus also ordered the rights of both Jews and Christians to be moved to this sun god's temple, and this does not just speak to something bad for Jews and Christians. No, it has much more far reaching consequences than that. What Elagabalus' basic idea was attempting to accomplish was the creation of a universal religion!

If anyone has lost sight a bit about why Roman history to such a great extent is important to one's understanding of how God's chosen nation suffered and still survived, let me refresh your memory of why we started going down these emperors. As I have said at the beginning of many segments now, this is all leading to showing us how Rome became a "Christian" empire in its

latter days. This we are looking at because it has a great deal to do with why barbarians would eventually take hold of the empire and end up creating what was suppose to be a great universal Christian empire the world would simply come to know as Europe. As anyone who knows a little about history can see, Europe played no small part in how the world evolved into what we know today, which is a far more global community than the world has ever known since the days man spoke one universal language and began to build a tower and city to reach heaven! (Gen. 11:1-9)

As you will see, when Lord willing we make it that far, history credits Constantine with making Rome a Christian empire. This carries a lot of weight when it comes to how Catholicism came into existence, and it's important to remember that Catholicism's main goal in the beginning was to make Christianity the universal religion. The shorthand of it all is to say they attempted to accomplish this by bringing elements of many different religions into what would be called the Christian religion. This was largely done by overlaying pagan ceremonies with Christian themes. What I wish to point out here is that Constantine was not the noble Christian emperor some believe him to be. In truth he was attempting nothing short of what had been attempted many times before with mostly limited success and longevity. At the time we are studying right now, Elagabalus was attempting to create a universal religion by bringing all the Roman pantheon under the umbrella of the specific deity he worshiped as the top god. Elagabalus, unlike Constantine, didn't seem to care who liked it

and who did not. He simply was doing it because it's what he wanted.

Constantine, on the other hand, did what he did not just on the basis of what he wanted but on what he needed. At the time of Elagabalus the Jews and Christians were considered minor outlying religious beliefs within the Roman empire. Forcing their religious practices under the roof of his sun god simply added to the universalism Elagabalus was attempting to create using his sun god as the main deity. By the time of Constantine the Christian religion was followed by a much greater number of people across the empire. In spite of persecution of the individuals accepting and living the Christian life, the numbers of such people just continued to grow! The message The Messiah had come to bring and which Jews through the Law God had given them, had been proclaiming in the world for centuries, was gaining ground like never before. This is to point out that by the time of Constantine it was obvious you couldn't just force Christianity under the roof of some pagan religious practice. Constantine was also not going to give up his pagan religion(s) and neither were many others throughout the empire and the world. The solution to this was to solidify Christianity, not as a loose knit network of believers in The One True God, but as a religion!

This is not to say there were not people already pushing for Christianity to solidify into a religion because we clearly see the writers of the New Testament warning about such moves and corruption before the apostolic age was even over. Since some who claimed to be Christians wanted this

there were already a growing group of people who were Christians in title only. This many people chose to do because it was becoming so popular to be a Christian it was almost what we would call, "fashionable." This gave Constantine an advantage for using Christianity as a religion, but the idea of using one main religion to be the big tent under which all the religions of the world could "coexist" was by far not Constantine's brain child. Using Christianity was politically advantageous for Constantine to pick as his big tent religion because true Christians understood it was not a religion. Oddly enough the fact Christianity did not have a defense against non-Christians making it into a religion would be many people's argument for why Christianity needed to be a religion. They would argue that as a religion Christians would have had an authority center from which to reject this outside move, and that might very well be true. However, that's not the point!

God did not set the truth up to be a religion. As we have covered many times, even Jews were not saved by the Law no matter how strictly or correctly they followed It. The ceremony and practices of the Law were representations of the truth, not the truth itself. What caused people early on to call true believers, "Christians" was seeing people living the truth whether Jews or non-Jews. To describe these people of faith people related it back to where it appeared to begin which was with the coming of Jesus whom Christians believed was The Messiah the Jews had been looking for. Due to this belief Jesus' title took on the more Greek form and He was called "The Christ," which means "Anointed One." People who followed His example in living in faith were not The Christ but they were Christ like.

Thus, people came to call or describe them as "Christians." If we understand that we should be able to see, neither the people who were being call Christians nor the people who called them that, thought of themselves as a religion. They were simply people of faith just as the Law was intended to help create. If we really get this point, we should be able to clearly see the Law did accomplish Its mission in creating people of faith in the fact the Law is what proclaimed Jesus as not just another man, god, etc. The Law is the reason we could recognize the man Jesus as The Messiah!

The bottom line is, true Christianity was not and cannot be a religion; even a religion that helps people become Christians! The Law did not pass away with The Messiah, The Messiah affirmed the Law was true and the Law affirmed Jesus was The Messiah. Thus, there is already a religion, if you will, which teaches people how to be Christians! Now there's a thought I wish more people could really dig in and grasp. As it relates to what we are talking about right now concerning history, Constantine could not take over the religion of the Law because it was protected by a nation of people God had set up to hold the Law. (There's another point which should turn on light bulbs in one's head) Since people of faith had come to be called Christians the term began to take on a life of its own. People could simply choose to call themselves Christians. There was no central authority to stop this, but these are the people the writers of the New Testament were warning true believers should not be accepted into their groups. (I Tim. 6:3-5, II Tim. 3:1-15) Now, Constantine wanted to take it all the way to an official religion and that's what he did. This move might have gone a long way in helping true Christians of

the day see a great decrease in persecution, but the base loss this corruption brought about is something that would lead to the persecution of true believers in later times and in ways many do not appreciate. In short, the damage to the individual's ability to find and follow the truth of God's Word has only gotten worse as time has progressed. This means when Jesus said His return would be marked by seeing that time be like unto the days of Noah, He was not just saying it would come to the same result as what was seen before the flood but that it would come about for the same exact reasons! (Matt. 24:36-41)

This is such an important point I simply can't make it enough. The story in Genesis is short but so very vital we understand. After the fall and especially after what happened between Cain and Abel, there ended up being two distinct groups; those who sought to maintain a relationship with The God Who had created us and those who rejected that relationship. Simply put, there were those who accepted faith and those who rejected it. As time went on people from the faith side started intermarrying those from the anti-faith side. The lines between the two camps became more and more unclear until there was simply a wash of humanity not defined by faith and anti-faith but a minority of people of faith intermingled with a growing majority of anti-faith individuals. Some of the faith individuals served God with their whole hearts and grew to be great individuals of faith; individuals whose faith stood out among the crowd. Such individuals are described in Genesis as "giants." They were not necessarily giants in any physical sense of the word but great individuals of faith whom the world could not help but take note of. (Gen. 6:1-4)

Slowly but surely these giants became less and less until not only were there no longer these giants among men, the idea of faith even being a real thing was becoming lost altogether! Humanity would have come to an end right then and there but Noah found grace in the eyes of The Lord. (Gen. 6:8) Noah was saved by grace due to his faith and that was not something he came up with on his own, it was a gift God had been and still was offering every man, woman, and child who has ever lived. That grace caused God to give Noah a physical plan to escape the coming destruction God would send because the world could no longer survive with the rising level of sin it was suffering from. While the plan was not just intended to save Noah or just his family, only eight souls were willing to board the ark in the end. Those eight people would be the reason humanity would continue to exist on the other side of a world that had been wiped out by the flood. This destruction was so great God's grace made a promise to us. God determined He would not continue to totally destroy His creation for man's sake. After all, while it's true man is the only creature that has a living soul, God respects all the life He created in this world. (Matt. 10:29) God's grace to us and the rest of creation was that He wouldn't do such a thing ever again. This in its simplicity means God was obligated to always do one of two things when man came to the same kind of critical state he came to at the time of the flood. God could bring the world to a complete end or He could intervene in some way that would turn man's downward spiral around or at least slow it from coming to that critical state.

After the flood we see God took the second option over and over again. In each case the action He took became less, for lack

of a better English term, hands off. When man was spiraling down quickly after the flood by attempting to create a thing that would corrupt all men from having faith ever again, God confounded man's language. (Gen. 11:1-9) What was the "thing" man attempted to create that could do this? A universal religion! If all of humanity believed in a religion that did not include faith, faith would die out very quickly. No matter how much man wanted religion, this would have brought the world back to the same circumstances which brought about the flood and in a very short time period. By confounding man's language God allowed human history to continue forward with minimal "interference" from God while still leaving the door open wide for anyone who wanted to, to find and follow faith. Man would go out from that original large group it had formed and form many smaller groups across the world. As much as every single group would take the ideas of the tower with them, no universal religion would ever be able to be formed again!

This, of course, would not stop people in almost every group from trying. Every group of any size across the world formed their own little Tower of Babel. This is not to say they each literally built a tower, though it was/is not far from that, it is simply to say every group across the world formed their own version of the base concept started at the tower. In other words, they started their own religion. No doubt a small minority of these religions believed in serving The God Who created us all. Man was not far enough removed from the flood that for a very long time the truth of the flood having happened was clear to everyone. The story of what God

did to man at the Tower of Babel was too recent a historical event to be forgotten as well. Thus, many people believed in The One True God. Those who were at the actual tower believed as well but it didn't stop them from building the city and tower now did it? The same would be true in every group across the world! A few religions would claim to be about faith and a majority of them would be about anti-faith. The problem with religion is, it's no way to hold onto true faith. Religion is religion and faith is a substance; something real, something tangible to an individual which has nothing to do with relics and ceremonies carried out by a group. Real faith, no matter how few there are or are not who have it across the world or in any given group, is held by the individual.

Any group's action with the point of furthering true faith is simply the actions carried out by those who get together because they wish to fellowship with others of like precious faith. (II Pet. 1:1-11) The real problem was/is that when man came up with the idea of religion he was attempting to create a universal religion which those who had true faith would not want to become a part of. This is why they needed to quickly move to create this new universal religion before a group post-flood could form consisting of individuals of faith and cause separation among men between faith and anti-faith individuals like it had been before the flood. Because the truth of God was in the hearts of everyone this move to create universal religion could not go totally off in its own direction. The seeds of faith were strong and not everyone wanted something to drown out faith. Those who did had to come up with something that resembled what

individuals who chose faith ended up with while still being what they wanted in creating anti-faith. The concept of not just false religion but religion as an overall construct was brilliant on their part and it's why it concerned God so greatly. When God confounded man's language He was telling us man's plan was going to work if left unchecked, but working just meant taking us down to a "days of Noah" state and fast!

This point is why a universal religion has continued to be the dream of the anti-faith side ever since. However, the problem that got/gets in the way of that dream, post the Tower of Babel, is not so much the handful or many who might be individuals of faith but culture! The idea you're anti-faith and I'm anti-faith is just fine, but who's to say whether your idea of how to solidify anti-faith is better than mine or someone else's? This is the blockade God put in the way of religion accomplishing its goal entirely by confounding our language. The problem is, we don't all have to give up our "unique" (I put unique in quotes there because most religions are not as unique as people think!) religion which drives our culture in order to lose sight of the fact true faith exists. As people got more and more stuck on religion it didn't matter so much if the religion claimed to worship The One True God or some totally made-up by man false god or group of false gods. Religion kills true faith. It can look a lot like we expect groups of individuals who have faith might look, on the surface anyway, but ultimately the dependence on getting together, which is the corner stone of religion, gets in the way of continuing to get together with God Himself! When this happens we slide right into depending on religion and don't even realize we've forgotten to maintain our faith.

In spite of the fact man was not all together in one big group and thus one big religion, it was getting harder and harder for individuals in the world to stay out of the entangling tentacles of religion no matter what it claimed to be based on. So what would God do next? God would become a lot more hands on in calling a specific man to leave his home and go into a strange land where he did not share their cultures at all. By doing this, this man would understand what it was to be separated for the purposes of God like never before, and by the way, that "separated for the purposes of God" is the definition of holiness. This man God would use to start a specific group of people that would grow to become a nation. The man, of course, was Abraham and through he and his wife Sarah God would bring their son Isaac to be the next generation of God's plan to accomplish this. Isaac would have two sons but only one would be useful for God's purposes, so Jacob would take the plan to the third generation. At that point the branching out could begin and Jacob ended up with four wives (two actual and two unofficial due to these two women being the two wives' handmaidens) through whom he would have twelve sons.

These twelve would create the basis of twelve tribes that together would create one nation of people whom God chose to bring about for the sake of literally giving His oracles to. (Rom. 3:1-4) These oracles of God would be a single thing which would show forth in this world on two levels. The first would be the fact the oracles would be written down, thus putting them in a physical form anyone could access. The second level would be that these written words would be an instruction manual for how to represent the truths of faith through ceremony and

lifestyle. This could be accused of being a religion, but that fact is exactly why the enactment of the ceremony parts of these instructions were in large part only to be carried out by the chosen nation. The representation of faith contained in the Law could be seen by reading the words and constructing the representation in an individual's mind or they could actually be witnessed through the lives of this chosen nation. The nation part would end up demonstrating a whole list of things which show us all how to both serve God as well as how not to serve God. They would show us ourselves and our tendencies as humans who all came from the same basic religious roots. That would leave most all of the pure representation contained in the Law to the one who reads the words for themselves. All this is why what we call the Bible consists not just of the Torah (the Law) but history and prophecy books which show us what a group of people would do even when given a religious like structure by God Himself. It's so simple it's incredible, but odd how few people get this very in your face truth out of what the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is showing us!

The very fact God could not give a chosen nation of people a religious like structure which was specifically designed to show forth what it is to have faith without even that structure getting in their way of having individual faith, should speak volumes to us all! To be clear about how bad we are as humans, it's not really the Law Itself that got in the way of individuals having faith but what the people entrusted with the Law did as a group once they had the Law! Now there's a subject for an entire book which basically is what true teachers of

God's Word should be attempting to piece together for people to see. In any case, one of the most basic things we should see in what the chosen nation did with the Law is actually shown in another fact I cover a lot, and that's the truth Israel was not originally given a king. However, God knew they'd one day demand a king and why? Because other nations had kings, and there it is! We may not realize it but we as humans continue to want what the people at the Tower of Babel wanted and that's to be very universal about how we do things like government and religion which are not as far removed from each other as even Bible believing people think. That fact is shown in the truth Israel's leadership was designed in the Law to work in tandem with the religious structure. That was not just because God wanted the Law, as in the religious structure, to rule the land or the fact God was to be their King. It had to do with the fact it's how things work according to the system man designed at the Tower. What Elagabalus wanted to accomplish was nothing new by far and what we see fought it in the end was not just that Jews and Christians were unwilling to yield to it. It was primarily fought just as God intended it to when He confounded our language. Various people had various opinions that differed from the emperor's and would not allow him to make a universal religion any more than Rome could be a one world government!

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.***



the end Thomas did not need all that. Jesus stood before him and seeing Jesus with his own eyes was enough – Thomas believed! That's when Jesus addresses the issue that had been faced by all those who came before Jesus' walk on this earth and would be true for all of us who have lived since Jesus ascended to The Father. Jesus said, "...Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." John 20:29

Noah labored for some 120 years to build an ark of safety because he believed God, yet he had not walked with God in the flesh. Abraham walked a hill one day with his son Isaac, willing to sacrifice his only son to God, yet he had not walked with Jesus in the flesh. Person after person would live and die on this earth being people of faith; some significant, some not so significant as man views things, and none got to walk with Jesus in the way people of Jesus' day did. Since Jesus returned to The Father countless millions have believed He came, died on a cross, and rose the third day. They follow Him never having gotten to walk with Jesus in the flesh. When Jesus says those who have not seen are blessed when they still have the mind to believe, He was speaking not to how blind faith is but to how real God is! That's what makes me cry to read the simple words of Rebekah when she was asked if she would go with this servant she had only met the day before. If she would leave those she loved in order to be the wife of a man she had never met, without hesitation or sorrow or any multitude of words, we know how real God was to her!

We live in this world facing many worries, trials and tribulations. Not just

because we are believers but because a world filled with sin is a world filled with strife, sickness and too many negative things to list, yet how much we fear leaving it for the life God has prepared for us is amazing. It's comforting when someone we love leaves this world to believe they have gone on to a better place but that's because we no longer see them for ourselves. The better place idea is a generic comfort for those of us who don't really know for sure and that's why we need to ask ourselves, what about when it comes to us? Keep in mind, it's not just about what you are gaining but what you are leaving behind. I've often found it funny how many people have big funerals because "it's what they (the person who has died) would have wanted," but the reality is, their time on this earth is done. Funerals aren't for the person who can no longer see or hear or touch this world. Funerals are for those who are left behind. It's the last thing those who still walk this earth can do when it comes to the person we have lost. Because that's true, some will grieve that they had so little time with the person. Some will grieve because they spent so much of their time with the person that life without them is hard to conceive. Some grieve because the person was their pillar, rock, etc. but no matter the reason, our grief is based on the fact we remain. We will have to keep walking this life and do it without that person from now on. These are the things we think about when we lose someone, but again, what if we're the one leaving this world? In the middle of the night when it's quiet or at a time we are all alone, how do we really feel about being the one whose time has come?

For many who are without God this question is covered with any number of things that bring comfort. They can be

things such as the idea you feel it will be better than this life or that there will be nothing at all on the, “other side.” Many people fill the answer in using religious beliefs that teach them something they find helpful and comforting. It's the reason many people choose one belief system over another. In one of the saddest truths of all, it's why so many people want to claim to be a Christian. It feels nice to say, I'm going on to be with The Lord! However, when it really comes down to it do we have the faith that makes God not just a crutch but real? In truth, He's knowable in so many ways that transcends what we call real. He's reachable in ways that break through all barriers this life and world can put between us and another individual. God is real, not just an idea or concept or comfort. Do we get that and understand how much it means we should be seeking Him in the here and now? That's why we need to ask ourselves how we would respond to death. It can tell us a lot about where we are and where we need to go. When we really think about it do we fear death, do we long after things of this life and world, or can we easily say, “I will go”? God was so real to Rebekah that when she met the servant at the well it excited her as to what God had just ignited in her life. That excitement didn't just come because the moment was so exhilarating but because it's what she had lived her life hoping for. Now, when the moment came to forsake all and join God's plan in Canaan, she was ready. Without hesitation she stood with the faces of those most dear to her looking back at her and said, “I will go.”

We don't know how her family must have felt at that moment. In many ways this

was a lot like losing her to death but this is another perspective on the fact God included in His Word the word for word account of the servant telling the family what had brought him into their lives. Each one involved had the chance to understand what Rebekah seemed to understand by just meeting this man. They each knew Rebekah was not being forced into this or sold to some stranger. This family clearly loved each other but they knew Rebekah was going on in her life to serve God's will in much the same way Abraham had left to do so many years before. Thus, verse 59 gives no indication they fought the issue in any way. No matter their grief or disappointment, they sent Rebekah away with their blessings.

They also sent her nurse with her, and calling this woman a nurse is just a way of saying she was Rebekah's handmaid that had been appointed by the family. I doubt it was often that such a woman did not become the girl's handmaid but a handmaid in a family that allowed women to choose for themselves would be someone the woman chose not just whoever was appointed to them in their youth. Speaking of youth, that's the other thing indicated by calling this woman her nurse. This woman was probably far older than Rebekah. She certainly would have been if she had cared for Rebekah from a very young age. Since Rebekah was going to join a family with no shortage of resources she would have many women to choose from should she want a handmaid she picked for herself, but mentioning this nurse makes it clear Rebekah was not thrown out of the house at all. If anything, she took with her a servant

who might no longer have been her servant should she want a different woman to be her direct handmaid, and that shows the family wanted to see Rebekah cared for and aid in her transition from their family to Abraham's. It was one last thing they could do for Rebekah and they did it.

The other men which came with the servant are also mentioned as part of the group that left for Canaan that day. This to clarify they were still serving their purpose and would help on this journey home just as they had in coming here. The next verse seals the deal as to if they held any ill will toward Rebekah for being willing to go. She is sent away with what was either a traditional blessing for such an occasion or words which were simply their wish for her to prosper in her new life. They bless Rebekah and call her their sister. Today we might add to that, "always have been, always will be" but it's implied. They go on to tell Rebekah to be the mother of thousands of millions. Probably more than they knew this was incredibly appropriate. Rebekah would only have two direct sons but let's keep in mind, it was not just Jacob who would go on to be the father of the chosen nation whom God had promised would account for a population such as they wished for but she was also the mother of Esau. Esau, in spite of being outside God's use in building the chosen nation, was still a son of Abraham and God would bless him. He would be the father of the Edomites and just how large this family/nation group became is hard to say but they were at least a big enough group by the time Israel leaves Egypt, they take up an area that was hard to circumvent when Edom would not allow Israel to pass through their land. (Num. 20:14-21)

Verse 61 shows us another point which relates to the fact the family sent Rebekah's nurse with her, and that's the fact we are told Rebekah rose up to leave, both she and her damsels. Damsels there is plural and this indicates that there were more female servants with Rebekah than just the one nurse. Being who she was as part of the family she was part of, she was blessed to have servants that were hers. In representation both this nurse and these damsels show us how much we are never really alone. Just as the servant had servants with him to help him on accomplishing his task, Rebekah had servants that were already with her, helping her with her daily tasks. When we look at this we should see how much God is showing us that He is with us and around us from start to finish. So many people believe they are all alone and totally without God until that day comes they yield to God and accept faith into their lives. However, there in is the point. When we accept faith into our lives it's because it's something that has always been there. It's been offered and it's always been up to us to grab hold of it and take advantage of it.

This is why we are told we are saved by grace. (Eph. 2:8) God has always been there offering a relationship to us or we wouldn't be able to have one. However, grace is just the offer from one side - God's. God's grace won't mean a whole lot to us as individuals if we don't accept what is being offered and that's why we are saved by grace through faith. Faith is us accepting the offer of a relationship with The God Who created us and has always wanted to walk with us. Further, we are saved by grace through faith that is not of our own making; it is the gift of God. God created us to commune with Him. God cares about every living thing He has

created but only man was created to have a relationship. This is yet another one of those times the English language fails us because we would say, no matter how limited it might be, it's possible to have a relationship with an animal. Especially those animals that we keep as pets are used for that purpose because they respond to us so well. They can follow commands and/or show a personality we enjoy, but all this shows us how much we need a different word to describe what it is to have a relationship with something such as an animal versus a relationship with another person.

That being said, how much more do we need a whole other word to describe the fact we can have a relationship with the God Who created us? It's hard to wrap one's mind around it, and when we don't try we end up thinking of ourselves as equal to God on many levels. This is what causes men to believe we can survive without God. It's a level of ignorance that is hard to describe! We need to think about the fact we are not capable of creating even a living plant, much less animal life. We manipulate elements already in existence to "create" what we want but that's not the same thing as bringing something from nothing. In spite of everyone's curiosity with artificial intelligence, even using machines we are not able to create something able to have a relationship with us on a level that is like human to human. We're just not able to bring something into existence that is even close to that capability but God can, and did. Again, we are not at God's level but we were created with elements, mainly our free will and ability to think (again words fail), that make us able to have a relationship with

God like no other creature can that we are aware of. Only God could create such capabilities!

We are saved by the fact we're willing to have the faith God has offered each of us, but the capability to even do that is a gift from God in and of itself. These surrounding servants of both Abraham's servant and Rebekah all relate to the fact God has put a lot of resources into having us in existence and wanting to be with us, not just in the here and now, but into eternity. As we read the Book of Revelation we see God's servants whom, we call angels, are at work and will be involved in many ways when it comes to gathering the bride of Christ. Jesus made it clear God The Father specifically sent Him to do the work He did and Jesus did that work. Jesus also told us He was going on ahead to prepare a place for us to be with Him for eternity. (John 14:1-4) However, He prayed The Father send us The Holy Ghost to be with us now. (John 14:15-17) The point is, whether you already claim to walk in faith or feel you have no relationship with God at all, God is already at work in your life. We just need to be sure we respond to that work and allow Him to do the work He wants to do in our lives before our time comes to say goodbye to all we have here!

Until next time, Shalom!

total deliverance, breaking this cycle of needing a judge in every generation, or they were going to demand a king. This is what God determined the time had come to settle because even if they went the direction of wanting a king, God would eventually use a king to be their deliverance from the Philistines. This would accomplish what the nation had looked to judges to do and complete the transition from God directly calling judges to a clear view of God being limited by who was king at any given time. The nation could stop blaming God for not giving them a king and finally see the consequences of having one. However, God would still not leave them as we ultimately see Him use a king to symbolize the fact The Messiah would one day be the world's deliverer. Thus, The King of Israel came to deliver us all from the depths of sin!

Getting back to our story, after finding out that she would have a child and the details of who that child would be, the woman goes to tell Manoah the good news. She points out that she did not ask the angel's name and he didn't tell it to her. She never even confirmed he was an angel but this is no surprise as her description is clearly one of a man who was a powerful being of God! After hearing what the angel had told his wife Manoah prays to God for the angel to return and teach them more about exactly how to raise the child. It was clear what it meant for him to be a Nazarite from the standpoint that the Law told what a Nazarite vow was. However, what it was to be a Nazarite from birth was something no one had really ever done before. God

did send the angel back but he came at a time when the wife was out in the field and once again not with her husband. Thus, she ran back to get Manoah and brought him to see the angel. When Manoah gets there he asks for confirmation this was the same angel that had spoken to his wife at the earlier time. The angel confirms he is and Manoah asks his question about how they were to raise this child. To that the angel basically responds that he had given all the information they needed to Manoah's wife during that first visit. That being settled, Manoah asks a very familiar question, for he asks if he can detain the angel long enough to prepare a young goat.

This was much like the request we see Gideon make of the angel that visited him. (Judg. 6:11-18) In this case, the angel tells Manoah he might detain him but the angel would not be eating with them. He goes on to point out that if Manoah's intention was to offer a sacrifice/offering, he would have to offer that to God Himself. This is a very common response from an angel because they are always wanting to turn our attention away from them and unto God. Amazingly Manoah doesn't totally seem to get this point and asks for the angel's name so that they could honor him; likely by naming the child after him. The angel gives him a small rebuke for asking this and tells him it's a secret which is to say, it's not for us to know! Very much like Gideon Manoah brings the young goat and a meat offering which he offers on top of a stone there in the field. As Manoah and his wife look on they receive their confirmation this was no ordinary man of God they were talking to. As the flames

from the sacrifice rose into the sky the angel would join and add to them disappearing into the heavens. Again, this is a similar way to the way the angel departed from Gideon. Upon seeing this Manoah and his wife fall on their faces to worship God. They would never again see this angel which confirms they did not need constant help from him in raising this special child. However, in that moment Manoah was afraid that he and his wife would die because they had seen "God." His wife makes the logical point which is the fact if it was God's intent to kill them He would not have received the offering from them and certainly not told them about the task that lay before them!

The woman would in fact have the child the angel had told them of and they would call his name Samson. For us today, it's not really possible to know what this name might have meant at the time and thus, why they named him this because from that time on, Samson would define his name. We are told Samson grew and was blessed by The Lord and Samson was a man of deep passion and emotion in general which God would use to accomplish a work through Samson. This is seen not by him taking up some position of power among the nation but through the stirring of The Lord as Samson simply lived his life there in his home town so close to the enemy who by that time basically ruled over Israel. One day Samson goes to the town of Timnath (Timnah) which was south of home and likely even more in the grips of the Philistines. There he sees a woman he becomes infatuated with. The problem was,

she was a Philistine woman but that did not bother Samson. He returns home and requests that his parents arrange for her to become his wife. His parents were amazed at this request. Of all people, Samson, whose birth was foretold of God, wanted a wife from among Israel's enemy. They attempt to reason with him by pointing out he had all the women among his tribe and even Israel as a whole to choose from. Surely he could find himself drawn to one of them to be his wife. In a way this story feels like the classic situation where at least his parents feel he was just enamored with the first woman he was attracted to and it was their job to get him to give it some time in order to find the right woman for him!

In spite of this advice Samson insists this Philistine woman is who he wants, and as amazed as I'm sure his parents continued to be what they did not know was that God was using Samson's passions as a way to give Samson an opportunity to hurt the Philistines. This is another one of those moments where it's hard for me to stay on the overview because this story is such a great example of how God works with who we are! He wants to make us into what we can be and that's not to be something other than we were born. It is the way God created us that gives us all a unique personally and perspective on life. We can use those traits and strengths to serve The Lord and learn all He can do with us or we can go our own way, but God is not a God who wants to turn us into some kind of clone. It is the world so many people worship that wants to do that and it's astonishing to me how few people can see

that!

Now, for all the similarities we see between the story of how Samson was called and Gideon, we see Samson was very different. Gideon was timid in his approach and wanted God to confirm more than once He really wanted Gideon to do what God had told him to do. Samson lived more by the seat of his pants, to use an expression, and didn't seem to worry at all that God had called him to be a judge in Israel. For his parents this moment must have seemed as if maybe Samson was about to become unusable for God's purposes. He wanted a woman to be his wife who came from the very people Samson was literally born to fight. I will say, far more often than not this observation would be correct, but Samson's story shows us the reason we all need to seek God and pray without ceasing God's will be done on this earth as it is in heaven. (I Thess. 5:17, Matt. 6:9-13) We need to realize God's will does not always make sense to us, especially in the moment, but whatever God's will is, that should be our desire to see come about and be used in any way God can use us.

Again, Samson had a very nonchalant attitude that doesn't seem to show us he thought that deeply about it. However, God was working in his life and using Samson's passions to accomplish His will. That's what was important in this situation as in all situations we face in life, be they personal or very far reaching. No matter how much of this his parents understood we are told they did go down with Samson to Timnath and while on the way Samson meets up with a lion. During this time we would call the Old Testament days, lions were a

serious threat in the land as at more than one point we see God using them to remind people God had taken this land for Himself. All that said, Samson had no trouble killing this lion literally with nothing but his bare hands. By the nature of the story this would seem to be one of the first times Samson himself was really aware of the fact God had given him great physical strength. As if pondering all this might mean to his life it is specified that he did not tell his father and mother what he had been able to do.

I think we sometimes get focused on the woman part of this story and forget what a thoughtful thing this encounter with the lion must have been for Samson. We are told Samson goes on down to Timnath with his parents and talks with the woman he wanted as his wife. In doing so he found her totally pleasing. The story moves ahead to tell us there came a day Samson went down to take this woman as his actual bride, but on the way he could not help but turn off the road to once again see the body of the lion he had killed. If his original encounter with this lion had been no big deal to Samson, why would he do this? If it was something Samson felt like gloating over he would have told his parents about it when it happened. Instead what we see is Samson wasn't compelled to tell anyone about it. However, now Samson actually takes the time on his way back to Timnath to turn aside just to see this lion's dead body once again. Keep in mind Samson did not know there would be honey, and I'll just point out here that as a Nazarite he wasn't to touch a dead body. Getting honey out of a dead lion would not be kosher honey in any case. Thus, Samson did not turn to see this lion again because he thought there would be

honey to eat. There is also the point that Samson was on his way to get the woman of his dreams. One would think that would have dominated his thoughts, but it didn't keep him from thinking about this lion.

So, we are left with the question, what was so special about seeing this lion's dead body once again? There is no indication it was a morbid fascination on Samson's part. No, the only thing that makes sense is that killing this lion was a profound moment for Samson. In a way it might have seemed like a dream that it had ever happened. He never told anyone about it so it's not like it was one of those stories that got shared and spread around. Samson held it in his own mind and in spite of the arrogance some want to attribute to Samson, I think he needed to see this lion's body for himself to find the assurance he really did have some kind of extra ordinary ability! Upon doing this, Samson finds the honey and takes some for himself. He later meets up with his parents and gives them some of it as well. He did not tell them where it came from, and while we think of this as being because they would not have wanted honey pulled from the rotting body of a dead lion, the bigger reason he didn't tell was because, once again, he didn't want to say anything about where he had been in going off to see the lion.

So he and his parents would go on to Timnath to celebrate Samson's marriage to this woman of the Philistines, and as tradition would dictate this celebration would last for an entire week which is seven days. Samson would host a big feast for

these seven days as this had become the tradition for celebrating with one's friends. We see in this another point of him being a Nazarite which is that it would be odd for him to involve himself in a traditional celebration due to the fact it would most likely include what people thought of as the best of the wine and that would be alcoholic. Nevertheless, Samson hosted this feast and there were brought to him thirty young men to act as his entourage for the celebration. This was truly eating with the enemy and Samson was compelled to make a bet with these men. That bet was that he would tell a riddle and if they could figure it out before the end of the seven days, he would give them thirty sheets and thirty changes of cloths. This of course comes out to be one for each of them which would be a large amount of such items for any one man to produce, especially without great wealth. However, the flip side of the bet was that if they could not figure out the riddle in time, they would have to give him the same. That would be a lot of items for one man to receive and even giving up one each of these would be a lot to give for these young men. In spite of that, the young men show no hesitation in taking up this bet. After all, there were thirty of them. Surely out of all of them someone would figure out Samson's riddle. Little did they know the key to the riddle would be that incredible feat of strength Samson had performed in killing the lion, a feat he had not told another soul about!

Let's stay in God's Word!

