

Free - Take One



Shaqah

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

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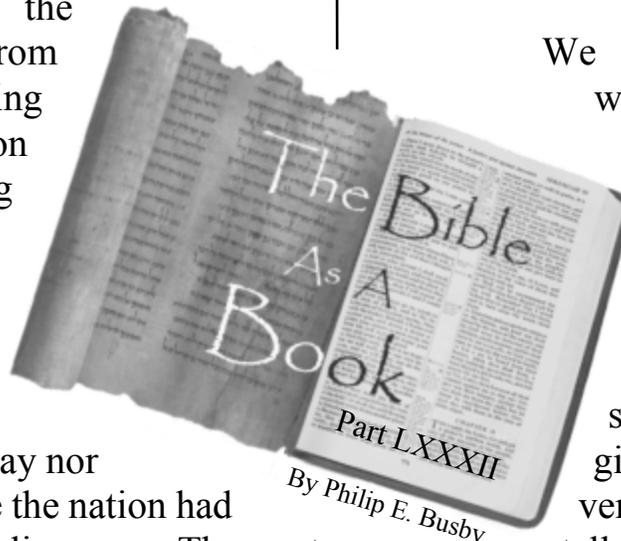
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As we continue our overview of the Book of Judges, last time we talked about how Israel made it to a point where God determined the nation had been given plenty of chances to break the cycle of sinning, being oppressed, calling out to God and God sending a judge to deliver them.

Thus, we looked at the transition Israel made from that cycle to God bringing an enemy upon the nation which was more long term. The next judge would also not come about because God simply sent them a judge to replace the one who had passed away nor would he come because the nation had cried out to God for deliverance. The next judge came because God would give the nation a little help in order to show them He was still available if they'd only turn to Him. This also meant, the next judge would not bring total deliverance from the enemy they now faced. That brought us to the announcement of the birth of Samson and a discussion of the fact he was to be a Nazarite from his mother's womb. We went on to talk about his life and two specific items, which

were the fact he fell in love with a Philistine woman but more importantly he had killed a lion with his bare hands which was a more profound event in Samson's life than we usually give credit to. All that brought us through Judges chapter 14 verse 13 and we are ready to begin verse 14 this time.



We actually ended last time with Samson in the midst of his wedding where he makes a bet with the thirty Philistine men who had been brought to be his wedding party. He bet them that they couldn't solve a riddle he would give them. They agree and verse 14 is where Samson tells the actual riddle. The riddle, of course, is about the lion and the fact Samson had gotten honey out of its dead carcass when he went back to check on it. This was going to be a difficult if not impossible riddle to figure out because only Samson knew he had killed the lion. Sure enough in three days time the men were not able to figure it out and they began to panic. Thus, the men turn to Samson's soon to be wife for the answer. She doesn't know the

P.O. Box 271, Loveland, CO 80539

(970) 593-9468



riddle any more than they do but they threaten her to find the answer for them. They threaten to burn down her father's house and accuse her of bringing them to the wedding just so they could be taken advantage of by Samson. I doubt they really thought that was the case but it was an effective emotional argument, and in their fear of losing the bet they may have convinced themselves it was the case. This sends Samson's soon to be wife begging Samson to tell her the riddle's meaning. She literally accuses him of not loving her because he had not told her, but Samson points out even his family does not know.

This was not a one time thing but something she continues to press Samson about day after day of the wedding feast. Finally the whole thing is too much for Samson and he goes ahead and tells her the riddle. This means he told her about the lion which he had not told a soul about up to that point. She in turn quickly tells the men. It was the seventh day of the feast and time was up. They had to have the answer that day or lose the bet. When they tell Samson the meaning of the riddle they do so in what appears to be a mocking kind of way. Asking what was sweeter than honey and stronger than a lion? They were very proud of themselves that they were able to solve his riddle but the fact they had gotten the answer from his wife to be was not lost on Samson! He is very clear that if they had not used her to do their work in figuring it out they never would have. In spite of this, Samson would pay the bet but he would do it in a way none of the Philistines could have really seen coming. This is where we see the Spirit of The Lord really use Samson's emotions to accomplish God's

work for Samson's anger would drive him to one of the major cities of the Philistines named Askelon. This was not some little town by the standards of the day yet what Samson did would not be lost in the crowd. Samson would kill thirty men of that city and take their belongings to use in order to pay the bet. This would quell Samson's anger and he would return to his father's house. However, from that moment on there was no doubt in the minds of the Philistines, Samson was an enemy and a formidable one at that!

The father of his would have been wife believed Samson hated his daughter after all this and gave her to become the wife of one of the men who had been used as Samson's companions. However, around the time of the wheat harvest Samson takes a young goat and goes back down to see this woman whom he saw as being his wife in spite of how her father saw the matter. Her father would not allow Samson to see her and explains what he thought and how he had given her to another man. To compensate for this the father attempts to convince Samson that her younger sister is even more beautiful and he offers to give her to Samson. Now if there's one thing that can be said was always true of Samson no matter what, it's that he was a man of deep passions. Samson declared that what he was about to do he had more of a right to do than they had to be upset over him doing it. This because of what had been done to him by this Philistine family. What did he do? Samson went out and caught three hundred foxes which is an amazing feat all in of itself. He then tied their tails together to create pairs and tied a piece of burning wood to the tails of each pair. As he does

this he set the pairs of foxes free into the fields of the Philistines' crops. Between being tied together by their tails and having a firebrand they'd instinctively try to get away from, the foxes ran through the fields in erratic patterns setting fire to most all the valuable crops, vines, and fruit trees. This would have been a devastating blow to the Philistines considering they were just at the start of their harvest season. Now, all that year's crops had been reduced to ashes.

The Philistines as a whole wanted to know who had done this and those who knew said Samson had and that he had done it because the father of his should have been wife gave her to another man. This caused the Philistines to deal with that family in much the same way the thirty men had threatened Samson's wife to be if she did not tell them the riddle at the wedding feast. We are told they burned her and her father to death. This continued the cycle of vengeance for vengeance but Samson made it clear after he took vengeance on them for killing this woman and her father he would stop the cycle. From the words used to describe what Samson did we find he carried out a merciless slaughter of the Philistines. That in and of itself went a long way in settling the matter on both sides. The woman Samson saw as being his wife was dead and now the men who had killed her were too. Other than a more general war with the Philistines there was no one left to carry the cycle of vengeance forward. Likely because of the general idea the Philistines would want Samson dead he did not return to his father's house after this but instead went to live at a rock known as Etam.

In spite of the fact Samson said he would stop, the Philistine army did come up into Judah and setup camp in Lehi to go to war. When the men of Judah asked why they had come the Philistines make it clear they had come to arrest Samson. Three thousand men of Judah went up to confront Samson about what he had done and this speaks to how much even they understood by this point Samson was no ordinary man who a few men could go get and turn over to the Philistines. They remind Samson that the Philistines ruled over Israel and basically asked him what he was thinking in doing what he had done to anger them. To this Samson simply points out that he only did to them what had been done to him by them. They explain the obvious which is the fact these three thousand men had come to bind Samson in order to turn him over to the Philistines and Samson agrees he would allow them to as long as they promised not to kill him themselves once they had him bound. This they totally agreed with but made it clear they'd do what they could to truly bind Samson so he could not escape. This was no setup on their part, they would use two strong cords to tie Samson up and deliver him to the waiting Philistines.

As they are bringing Samson into the Philistines' camp the Philistines begin to shout in victory and taunt Samson. God would once again use Samson's passion to punish the Philistines and Samson would break the ropes they had tied his arms with as if they were nothing. He then found a solid jaw bone from a recently deceased donkey and used it as his weapon to kill a thousand of the Philistine army. Samson

would declare what he had done as a warning against any more of the Philistine army making a move against him. He points out that with only a jawbone he had killed a thousand of them. The rhetorical question now was did they want him to do even more damage? Samson would cast the jawbone aside and give the place a name. He would call that place Ramath-lehi meaning, "the hill of the jawbone." Then, in a show of how human Samson was, he stood there dehydrated after doing this fighting. Thus, he calls out to The Lord and acknowledges God had been The One Who gave him the ability to do this great feat. However, he asks if it's God's will he now face ultimate defeat at the hands of these Philistines who did not serve or acknowledge The One True God simply because of thirst?

In answer, God would perform a miracle in that moment that was as amazing or more so than God bringing water from a rock to provide water for Israel in the wilderness. (Ex. 17:1-7) God would cause water to begin to come out of the jawbone Samson had just used to kill a thousand men! Samson would drink of this water God had provided and it would revive his body and spirit. Further, he would be so impressed by this miracle God had done, Samson would acknowledge it as being greater than allowing him to kill a thousand Philistines with just the jawbone. Thus, Samson would re-name the place and call it En-hakkore which means, "fountain of him who cried" because there Samson had cried to The Lord and He had answered. This name would not be simply something only Samson knew or cared about but would continue to be acknowledged as a place

with that name for as long as any other known place in Israel. It is here then we are told Samson was truly a judge for he is credited with being a judge in Israel for twenty years.

Samson continues to show he is not afraid of the Philistines because some time after this he goes into Gaza which was a well known place close to if not belonging to the Philistines. (Josh. 13:1-3) Samson also shows he has not gotten over his infatuation with Philistine women for he finds there a prostitute and uses her services. Of course, one could argue that Samson did this because he was so madly in love with the woman who should have been his wife something about being with a Philistine woman was appealing to him no matter who she was. In any case, the men of Gaza found out Samson was there and they came together to surround Samson and secure the city gates so he could not escape them. They decided they'd hide and wait until the morning with the intent they could kill him then. It would appear the men did not keep a very good vigil through the night because Samson woke up and left the woman at midnight. Likely knowing the Philistines had something planned against him Samson takes the gates of the city with them still locked up tight and removes them leaving the poles they hinged on connected. This was an amazing feat of strength along with being a great symbol to the Philistines that they were without protection from him should he choose to act. To further the humiliation of the Philistines, Samson would carry the gates up to a hill just outside Hebron where he likely set them up as a monument of sorts. This was highly symbolic in the fact Hebron was a well

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 made it to the point where the servant has gotten permission to take Rebekah but only waits until the crack of dawn before he wants to leave and head back to Abraham. In looking at this we got into discussing how Rebekah was given the final say on if she would go so quickly or not and she was willing. Thus, we discussed how much this shows us the way we all need to be ready for the day God calls us home. We need to be ready like Rebekah was to leave behind all we have and know here in order to spend eternity in God's presence. That sounds like a simple thing to do and want, but I believe more people than realize it are not where they should be in letting go of the things of this world and more specifically the people in it. It is a good thing to care about other people but when God is ready we must be ready in our hearts to say, "I will go." Intermixed with that discussion we talked about the details we are told concerning the servant and Rebekah packing up to leave and how all this was going according to God's will because everyone involved were willing to follow His direction in all things. That brought us through Genesis chapter 24 verse 61 and we are ready to begin verse 62 this time.

Before we leave verse 61 completely I want to point out the verse ends by telling us the servant and Rebekah went on their way to return to Abraham and that is the extent of information we are given about the journey

home. This too has representation to it and shows us a bit of how representation works. We all know it took time for the servant and Rebekah to get from her home in Mesopotamia to Abraham's home in Canaan, but nothing is said about it almost as if it didn't happen. Some would say that's just because nothing of real importance to the story took place during that time and while I'm sure that's true because God gave them a smooth journey home, we need to look at how verse 61 and 62 flow from one to the next. The representation is in how the story is told in spite of physical truths of time and space we know exist. Verse 61 gives us the simple idea there was movement from one place to the next and verse 62 begins by telling us about the movement of Isaac. Because Isaac had made his home in the south country he was not always at the spot where the servant would bring Rebekah back, which one assumes was more to Abraham's main dwelling. However, on this particular occasion Isaac was coming up from the south which brought him closer to where the servant would be bringing Rebekah.

Verse 63 tells us Isaac specifically goes out into the field to meditate in the evening and all this shows us that Isaac was not at his home. In other words, he was not in the place he had prepared as his permanent place of residence. It is in this place he raises his eyes to the horizon and sees the servant returning. The verse explains what he saw as being the fact he saw the camels coming which is a way of saying he saw the caravan of the servant and the servants with him,

along with the added company Rebekah and her handmaidens would have brought to that original group. Verse 64 switches the scene back to Rebekah who is looking in the direction of Isaac and sees him there in the field watching them. I'm sure the words lose something in the translation, but what a poetic way this is put together. It's like a love at first sight story out of a book, but it's a real event which God brought together. Isaac is going about his daily routine and looks up to see the servant's caravan coming. There is no reason to believe he does not know why his father had sent the servant to Mesopotamia. Thus, he knows the servant is either coming with his bride or the servant is returning empty-handed on that account.

Rebekah, being part of the caravan, looks up to see her soon to be husband standing in the field, and keep in mind she has never seen him before. The most she might have had to go on in this moment was some description of Isaac given to her by one or more of the servants. One might wonder if one of the servants pointed Isaac out to her and said that's your new husband but the words give no indication anything of the like took place. Again we have a moment when what is not there is as important as what is there. Somehow, almost as if she knew by The Holy Ghost it was Isaac out in that field and not some other random servant or man, Rebekah "lights" off her camel. I love that word because it maintains the poetry of the story in conveying the gracefulness of Rebekah remaining ladylike in this moment while at the same time excited at what is about to come to pass. The moment she had been waiting for was upon her. She had met this servant and responded as if she had been waiting all her life for that event at the well. She had listened to the servant recount how

and why he had come to her family, and she had made the long journey from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan. She was more than ready for the moment all of that had been leading to; the moment she would see Isaac with her own eyes and meet him face to face for the first time!

The beauty of this scene is all representative of that final joy there will be for all those who have waited on Jesus' return. For almost two thousand years now people have lived for God and never seen Jesus in the flesh or any more tangible form, but Jesus tells us that His return will be to collect His bride. When He returns we who have served Him and waited for him, both those alive and those who have already faced death prior to that moment, will see Jesus for the first time! Now, I know those of you who know this story well and/or who have gotten ahead of me in the verses will quickly point out the next verse does explain that Rebekah had in fact had a conversation with the servant as to who this man was that walked in the field toward them. The past tense makes it pretty clear this happened before she dismounted her camel to take her next steps and that would seem to shatter the picture I just painted concerning the verses leading up to verse 65. However, that's why I said what I said about showing us something about representation. Again, we all know there was a long journey between Mesopotamia and Canaan. Then yes, she did ask who Isaac was in order to know the man she saw was her soon to be husband, but the reason the words don't lead with that fact is because God wanted to paint the picture those first few words paint without those details.

This is not to bend the truth in any way, and that's why verse 65 goes on to tell

us she had asked the servant who confirmed it was Isaac. No, the point is to help us see the truth of how Jesus will return in representation of the story telling in spite of the events that had to happen because that's the nature of how physical things happen among people. You see, when Jesus returns He will do so at a time when God The Father tells Him to. This Jesus made very clear to us. (Matt. 24:36-42) This means the timing is not something Jesus chooses but is something He knows is going to happen. This was true of Isaac. There is no reason to believe he did not know his father had sent the servant to retrieve a wife for him but he had no idea when the servant would be returning. Thus, looking up and finding the moment had arrived he knew all other things aside it was time to take the next steps for this event and he knew what those next steps would be. On the other side of things, Rebekah had been brought to this moment in order to be joined to Isaac, and this is how all true believers will be when the day comes Jesus returns. We don't know when the moment will happen but when it does we too must be ready and it will be an exciting time. We will be brought to Jesus by the guidance of The Holy Ghost and collected by the angels of God who have been sent out to the four corners of the earth. In spite of the wordiness of even explaining the event, it will all happen in the blink of an eye so it's not for those who are not waiting with expectation of the moment! (Matt. 24:29-31, 25:1-13) In asking about the man she sees in the field Rebekah shows us she was waiting and expecting to see Isaac very soon.

Now verse 65 also contains a couple more details we should not miss. When

Rebekah asks the servant who the man in the field is he tells her he's his "master." Of course Isaac is his master by virtue of being Abraham's son, but this mission the servant had been sent on, while it had to do with Isaac and his future, it was clearly something the servant had been ordered to do by Abraham directly. When we look back at the story of the servant telling all this to Rebekah's family, he always speaks of Abraham as his master and only references Isaac as his master's son. It is always to Abraham the servant gives the credit for him being there and to Abraham he wants to return. The point of Isaac coming up from the south is also to show us that the servant was headed to Abraham not Isaac directly. If Isaac had been headed back to his home dwelling instead of coming up into this place to meditate there is every reason to believe the servant would have taken Rebekah directly to Abraham. In truth, tradition would even seem to dictate that she be taken to Abraham so he could present Rebekah to Isaac.

Instead, Isaac sees the caravan coming before they get to Abraham and Rebekah asks who the man she's seeing in the field is. Without hesitation the servant no longer calls Isaac "my master's son" but simply calls Isaac his master. In all this we see how much the representation Jesus used in calling Himself The Son and telling us He yields to His Father in all things is right in line with the representation shown to us in the Torah. This is yet another time we can feel assured Jesus was not something new but the true fulfillment of what the Torah told us from the start. When I said it was as if Rebekah knew by The Holy Ghost that the man she saw in

the field up ahead of them was her soon to be husband, this is also part of the confirmation. Jesus talked about asking The Father to send The Holy Ghost to us and this is in line with Abraham being the one who sent the servant to retrieve Rebekah. Rebekah is Isaac's bride and the church is the bride of Christ. The Holy Ghost works to prepare us to meet Jesus and through Jesus we know The Father as well. This is what Rebekah was experiencing. The servant had shown her who Isaac was and it would be to Isaac Rebekah would go. It would be through her union with Isaac she would come to know his father Abraham.

The second quick point we want to note before moving out of verse 65 is the fact Rebekah puts on her veil once she knows she's coming directly to her husband. We are told specifically she covers herself with it. This could mean just the face or it could be a larger cloth that literally covers her like a wrap. In either case Rebekah would be covered from head to toe as was the tradition of the time and culture. This is something we pay homage to in our wedding traditions today but to most Western cultures the veil is a light see through cloth where as in days gone by and in many other cultures around the world a veil is clearly a cloth that hides things by specifically not being see through. This is to represent that the bride is only for the man who has the right to remove the veil and look upon her which is a lost concept in our time meaning there is something somewhat appropriate about the veils we use now being see through.

Verse 66 is where we see the furtherance of the point about the servant calling Isaac his master when speaking to Rebekah, for in that verse we see the servant

giving his report to Isaac as if Isaac himself was the one who had sent the servant in the first place. This shows us a full picture of God The Father, God The Son, and God The Holy Ghost working together as one. In this moment it did not matter that Abraham had sent the servant to Mesopotamia. He would give his report to Isaac as if they were one and the same person. Also considering the servant was successful in his mission his report concerned Isaac more directly. All these sorts of things again show us clearly God did not wait until the time of Jesus' first coming to this earth to begin explaining His nature to us. It is distinctly seen in the Torah many times as It tells the story of God leading Abraham to build the chosen nation!

Verse 67 tells us Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent and this would be both figurative and literal. The literal part would be the fact people who were more nomadic did not build houses like most of us today think of; at least not large structures of any kind. However, especially when it came to a family of wealth which Abraham was, they did not live in just one "tent." In a way they created a situation much like having different rooms in a house does today. There would be different tents or small structures to serve different purposes. We should also not forget that we were just told Rebekah already had female servants of her own and the same would have been true of Sarah. What we see in the story of Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham in order to give birth to the son Sarah felt she would never be able to have is that people often looked at their servants as an extension of themselves. This would have been solidly true of a direct handmaiden any woman might have but was easily true of any other female servants one might have as well; especially when it came

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LVI

From Living Springs' Questions and Answers

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

In our last segment we continued our rundown of the Roman emperors as we led our way up to seeing how Rome eventually came to be considered a Christian empire. In doing this, last time we talked about the emperor Elagabalus and how he had become obsessed with a particular sun god that was not in the regular Roman pantheon. In truth, he was so obsessed with it he not only made this god the top god of the Roman pantheon, he wanted all other religions to worship this god as well. What we ended up discussing in more depth was that Elagabalus was actually attempting to create a universal religion in Rome with this sun god as the main god of all things. In doing this he attempted to bring the Jews and Christians under his new religious umbrella and that led us to discuss how much this is something man has been wanting since the Tower of Babel. It also plays a significant part in understanding where we are headed in all this, which is to see how Constantine eventually tries this same idea. The difference in that situation was that Constantine saw Christianity as a religion and wanted to use it as his basis for an attempt at a universal religion. These are all things the Word of God warned the world would happen and while the Bible prophesies of these things, we live in a day where much of that prophecy is becoming historical facts we can look at.

Elagabalus, of course, did not

accomplish his attempt at a universal religion and that's not because just the Jews and/or Christians would be unhappy with this arrangement. Elagabalus had angered the public and lost popular support through both his religious ideas as well as the feeling he was not really a Roman or didn't act as one. When his grandmother (Julia Maesa), who had arranged for him to gain power, saw this she realized Elagabalus needed to be replaced. She also determined that his mother, who had encouraged Elagabalus in his religious practices should be out as well. To do this Maesa turned to her other daughter who had a fourteen year old son named Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander, better known for our purposes as just Alexander. Maesa persuaded Elagabalus to raise his cousin to the position of Caesar and declare Alexander his heir. This held more weight considering Elagabalus had another man as his lover and was not likely to have a son by any woman other than the priestess virgin he had married which law said no one was to marry in the first place. In any case, Elagabalus yielded to his grandmother in this matter. The problem was, Alexander grew in popularity very quickly, especially with the Praetorian Guard, and we all know what trouble that meant in the past. The guard had gotten very use to deciding a lot of things for the emperor's position and Elagabalus was not unaware of what a threat this was to him. As it became obvious Alexander was favored over him in who knows how many ways and by whom, Elagabalus wanted Alexander out of the picture so he tried to get the senate to



strip Alexander of his title but they refused!

After this diplomatic failure Elagabalus attempted to have Alexander assassinated on several occasions. However, none of them succeeded, so finally Elagabalus started a rumor that Alexander was ill and near death. He wanted to see how the Praetorian Guard would respond. Needless to say, it was not good and in the end a riot broke out. The Praetorian Guard ordered Elagabalus and Alexander to come to their camp. This made perfect sense considering a riot was a threat to the emperor's life and they were the military unit slated with the responsibility of protecting the emperor. Elagabalus, along with his mother, complied and went. So did Alexander, but the situation showed itself immediately as the guard cheered and hailed Alexander's arrival with great enthusiasm but were practically silent for Elagabalus. Greatly angered by this Elagabalus made the foolish choice of ordering the summary execution of anyone involved in this act of insubordination. This of course was not going to happen, and instead members of the guard attacked the emperor and his mother. Elagabalus almost got away by hiding in a chest somehow but he was discovered and killed. His mother, there by his side as this happened, held his body tight and would be killed quickly thereafter.

This was in March of 222 A.D. and Elagabalus was only eighteen years old when he was assassinated. In yet another act of barbarism which again shows us how much Rome was not headed to greatness, both he and his mother's body would be beheaded. Their bodies were stripped naked and drug around the city of Rome. Ultimately his mother's body was cast aside in some unknown place as if it was nothing more than garbage. In much the same manner

Elagabalus' body was cast into the Tiber river. Once again, "clean up" would take place to reverse what could be reversed of yet another emperor's damage to the empire. Elagabalus' male lover would be executed and so would many of those who had supported Elagabalus. Others who had supported him would be deposed. His religious edicts would be reversed and the black stone of his god was sent back to Syria. Women were once again barred from attending senate meetings, and in spite of being of the Severan family the practice of attempting to erase the record of Elagabalus' reign was employed. One particular large statue of Elagabalus which had been designed to portray him as Hercules had its face re-carved to look like Alexander who would now take his cousin's place on the throne of Rome.

Alexander is considered the youngest emperor up to that time and he would officially take the reigns of the Roman empire the day after his cousin's assassination. All through his life and reign Alexander would lean heavily on his grandmother (until her death) and mother as he had little experience with administration much less the leadership of an empire. He also had no practical experience in matters of war. However, in time the army came to really appreciate his moderate nature in handling things; a nature fast becoming not normally seen in an emperor! It certainly was not the nature of Elagabalus so just the change was very much welcomed. Maesa had believed Alexander would make a better administrator than his cousin and she was correct if in no other way than he listened to his mother and grandmother's advice. His mother is credited with helping him greatly improve the moral fabric of the empire and he was smart enough to appoint experienced and wise men to

positions of authority. Some dispute this fact, but it's recorded that he heightened the power of the senate which was a rare move for an emperor to be sure. He also diminished the extravagant ways of the palace. The ways in which he was a little on the elaborate side of things was in the fact he took on projects that would enhance the empire. He restored the famous baths of Nero which are sometimes referred to by Alexander's name in honor of that act. He also built some new structures to enhance the imperial residence, parts of which still stand today.

He also seemed to understand the monetary situation of the empire. He first decreased the silver purity of Rome's main coin the denarius, but in a couple of steps not long after he eventually got the purity up to higher than it had been before he started. He wisely decreased taxes which he could afford to do since he didn't spend money on foolish living like his predecessor. Along with that he established loan officers who could lend money at a low interest rate. This encouraged business growth and financial stability for more people in the empire. He also encouraged literature, art, and science during his reign. When it came to religion, the standard Roman pantheon and practices had been restored, but Alexander also kept an open mind. In a show of just how much Christianity had become one of the major recognized "religions" in the empire by this time he even desired a temple be built to Jesus Christ. Not surprisingly he was resisted by the pagan priests. There can be no doubt they felt they had lost far too many people to Christianity already. About the last thing they wanted to see was for it to be encouraged on the same level as their pagan religion by building a temple.

Some say this historical information may be incorrect but in truth it goes right along with what we see happening at the time. In this study we have spent a lot of time talking about the conversion of being a believer in Christ to the full blown religion that was formed. At this time Alexander likely did not understand that a temple to Jesus was not something true Christians would want to have because that was not the point of being a believer. However, I'm sure it made perfect sense to him and he believed it would be an inclusive thing to do. Even if the account is inaccurate, a more reliable account is that he built a synagogue in Rome which is an amazing acceptance the Jews were not accustomed to seeing. He also gifted the synagogue a Torah scroll that came to be known as the Severus Scroll. What is said to be very special about this scroll is its connection to the second temple because it's said to be a scroll taken by emperor Titus when Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. If true, this would be a scroll the Jews probably thought they'd never see again, so it was an amazing gesture on Alexander's part. This was truly going the extra mile to make the Jews feel welcome in the empire and that in and of itself was something the Jews, as well as many others in the empire, thought they'd never see the likes of again!

Alexander also improved the rights soldiers enjoyed on a legal level and that was a very good thing because for all the good Alexander appeared to have done there was a storm cloud on the horizon he did not see coming. As amazing as it may seem, in so many ways this is where it begins in earnest; that final unraveling of the great Roman Empire. As we have been leading up to, the



corruption and bad management that we see as internal to the empire was just the weakening of a once strong entity that would by this time be too weak to face what lay ahead. Rome's menace to the east had been quiet for a time but that was not going to last forever. You see, there was another government entity history declares an "empire" called the "Sasanian Empire" or "Eranshahr" which means, "Land/Empire of the Iranians." Eranshahr would be the last great kingdom of the Iranians before the Muslim conquests came about in the seventh and eighth centuries. In any case they had become a strong enough force to be a real threat to the Romans at this time and in 231 A.D. under the leadership of the king who founded Eranshahr, a man named Ardashir I, they would begin to attack the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The problem was, Alexander might have been a good administrator, and that giving much credit to his mother, but he was no military leader.

The invasion would have direct connection to the Land of Israel from the standpoint Ardashir I had taken Mesopotamia and pressed on westward until he had made it as deep as Syria. Lest we forget, what was known as the Roman province of Syria contained the land Biblical students would recognize as Israel's Northern Kingdom. We often think of this land as not so important by New Testament times because Judea contained Jerusalem and was the seat of power for the Jews at the time of The Messiah. The land to the north was considered mostly Samaritan territory and the people looked down on by many who felt they were Jews of pure blood. This study has covered the facts of how this came about so there is no reason to go over it again here but we need to remember this is not just the Jews'

land, this is God's land! No matter how useful or not this northern area was to the chosen nation in these later centuries it was still part of the heart of what God had given Israel. It is the promised land and to emphasize the point it was not just about Jewish administration that was important, Jesus would be born in Bethlehem but He grew up in Nazareth! Much of the Gospels' stories would take place in the area of the Sea of Galilee and if you've never really paid attention to Biblical geography, that body of water is very far north in the promised land. By the time the Jewish-Roman wars came to a close the damage done to Jewish sovereignty was immense and the Roman's had lost all interest in allowing the Jews even some autonomous rule of their land. By then, Rome wanted to wipe from the history books the idea the land ever belonged to the Jews. One of their greatest efforts in doing this was to name the land, Upper and Lower Syria. In doing this they caused many centuries of people to live and die in this world never being aware the promised land was anything more than a Roman province with no specific connection to God's chosen nation!

These kinds of facts are important we keep in mind as we look at history. It is easy to pass over a small fact such as Ardashir I pressing all the way to Syria and not notice it has anything to do with God's Chosen People, but that is a mistake. I will also add here, in spite of the fact Iran was not a Muslim state at this time in history we see God disallowing their grip on the promised land then. This has greater implications when one stops to think about how long Rome held control over this land and it helps us understand Biblical prophecy to see that the seven heads of the beast were seven empires who specifically did this same thing. Starting with the Assyrians, we see God allowing an empire to

have control over at least part of the promised land. This becomes more profound with the Babylonians. The Medes and Persians would take over the Babylonian Empire, and while it's true the Iranians represented a people very related and intermingled in with those we see as Persians, the wash of people by this time we are studying gives the Iranians (Eranshahr) a greater connection to being the people we know as Iranians today than it does those who were the Persians of the Medes and Persians Empire which God allowed to control the promised land. By the time of the Romans we are also far past the shift clearly seen in the Book of Daniel from eastern power to western power. (Dan. 8:1-12) That shift would take place with Alexander the Great's invasion of the east and the formation of the Greek Empire. The Greeks would eventually fall to the Romans we are studying now and all these empires represent great attempts to reestablish what was started at the Tower of Babel.

All this is why God put His chosen nation where He did. As we have covered many times, the position of the land God chose to be His promised land to the chosen nation put Israel in the center of all man's affairs long before man had any clue where it was all headed. Swinging back to where we are in the study, the Jews, as a nation, were not a part of that empire like they had been those represented in Daniel's vision and Revelation. Thus, God would not allow Eranshahr to hold control over the promised land. Alexander was young and inexperienced in war but with God's help he would quickly push Ardashir I back out of "Syria." This brings us to the historical accounts of this war some of which say the Romans faced humiliating defeat after defeat. Other sources say Alexander won great

victories over Ardashir I as he led the charge to take back Roman controlled land. Looking at this from the Biblical perspective we just covered, it is easy to believe Alexander did gain great victories early on in this war but as he pushed Ardashir I back further east, he ran into difficulty. The supporting evidence to say this is in the fact history records Alexander set up his base of operations for this war in Antioch. This, at the very least, would have been right on the border of what Ardashir I had taken if not inside that territory. If Alexander had faced defeat time and time again early on, why did he not fall back closer to his power base in Rome? We have every reason to believe the Roman army quickly pushed Ardashir I out of "Syria," and this would also explain why some doubt Ardashir I actually made it that far west in the first place.

Thus, after accomplishing these early victories Alexander set up his base of operations at Antioch and sent the reports back to Rome which record his early successes. Unfortunately for Alexander the defeat idea is just as true or more so in the end as this war was truly a mixture of both victory and defeat. History records Alexander devised a three part attack of Eranshahr and the part of the army Alexander himself led would go straight east and recapture northern Mesopotamia. At that same time a second Roman force was sent to make its way through the mountains in order to strike Eranshahr territory from the north. The third part of Alexander's plan would come up from the south and attempt to battle its way up to Babylon. The northern army would see some success and history says that's because the mountainous territory favored Rome's army. However, these also had to be very brutal and hard fought battles which in spite of victory

wore on Rome's army very quickly. This would also explain why this army did not continue to make headway in its effort. As for the Roman forces coming up from the south, they had just the opposite problem. The territory seemed to favor Eranshahr and this part of Rome's forces suffered total defeat as they were surrounded and destroyed. Alexander would choose to retreat but bad planning had failed to establish good supply lines to the army in the North and they would suffer a lot of casualties in this retreat due to not just Eranshahr but also the brutal winter of the area they were in. This left a poorly organized and greatly demoralized Roman army for Alexander to deal with, and it may very well be it was at this point his inexperience hurt him the most.

Between Rome's success in pushing Eranshahr out of northern Mesopotamia and the damage the Roman army coming in from the north had caused, it seemed Ardashir I would pull back to safety as well and never again push westward as he had done. In spite of that, the problem for Alexander was that his army did not feel they had gained victory in any way. They were tired of fighting and had lost almost all confidence in Alexander as a good leader at this point. Military discipline is pointed to as Alexander's main challenge and in the midst of this war with Eranshahr there had even been a mutiny which proclaimed a man by the name of Taurinius as emperor. Alexander successfully put down this mutiny and Taurinius drowned in the Euphrates River while attempting to escape. However, Alexander had faced discipline problems with the military even before this war. Now he was on the brink of losing all control. It was in this tedious environment we finally come to the significant move of the

barbarians in the North. However before we dive into that there is another matter of no small significance to our study which is the fact that at this same time Alexander's mother arranged for him to learn about Christianity. The man she got to teach Alexander no doubt came from those who were already leading Christianity into being a religion instead of about faith because Alexander was to learn Christian doctrine. It seems to be of no importance that Alexander begin a walk of personal faith, only that he be schooled in the doctrine itself. The likely explanation for this is that his mother began to see what Constantine would see later on and which we discussed in our last segment.

The Christian faith was growing in popularity and came to be looked at as a threat. Government and religion had been joined at the hip since the Tower of Babel and this was done by design for reasons we have covered many times. With the rise of the number of Christians in the empire and surrounding world those in government understood this was something they could not just ignore. Up to that point the religion of each empire had been derived from the culture that particular empire grew out of. This is what we see Daniel dealing with during the time of the Babylonians and into the time of the Medes & Persians. The story of Daniel's three friends being cast into the fiery furnace is based on the fact they would not bow down to an idol the king had made. (Dan. 3) Idol worship was a main part of the Babylonian religion but God wanted the king to see he should be worshipping The One True God! The fact the later Babylonian king did not serve God is why we see the story of the handwriting on the wall which told of the fall of the empire and the rise of the Medes &

Persians. (Dan. 5) It was sometime after this we see Daniel being thrown into the lion's den because he refused to pray to the king instead of God. (Dan. 6) In that story we see the king realize he had done a foolish thing to begin with and it would be kings of the Medes and Persians empire that eventually ordered the return of the Jews to the promised land to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple! (II Chron. 36:22-23, Eza. 1:1-4)

This influence on the empires that "ruled the world" was God's way of using the chosen nation even in times when they had rebelled against God's plan so greatly the nation had ended up in ruin. God would continue this way of dealing with man and using the chosen nation right on through the Greeks and Romans. However, the end of the time of great empires existing in the world as single cohesive entity was fast approaching. As we have discussed, the Tower of Babel effect was just too powerful for these empires to accomplish their desired goal and that's one of the main reasons we see each of these empires eventually fall to a new power. That said, by the time of the Romans there was a dwindling of any new cohesive power to take over from them and still we can see the empire was crumbling all on its own. All it would take is some added pressure from outside forces and the empire would be no more. This pressure came in the form of a more minor empire from the east invading Roman territory but Rome's ultimate fall would be caused by a totally none cohesive power, that being the barbarians in the North. This is why, at the time of Alexander and leading on to Constantine, the "salvation" of the empire was looked for. It seemed to be understood the world was changing and if Rome did not change with it, the empire would not survive. Thus, beginning at this time we see the Roman rulership doing

something that had not really been fully done before and that was to totally switch to a new religion in place of the one which had organically grown out of Rome's culture!

One of the main reasons we see the change in representative metals in the statue of the king's dream in Daniel chapter 2 is exactly this idea. The Babylonians were so ridged in spreading their cultures as the one great culture all the world should yield to, only God could push them in another direction and He did. However, even with that push they quickly went back to thinking theirs was the greater way and we see this in the party that brought the handwriting on the wall. The king was so arrogant he thought he could take cups and things which came from the temple in Jerusalem to use at his feast. After all, it was his feast, he was the king so he should get to do whatever he wanted, right? Wrong! God brought judgment down on the empire and that very night the Medes and Persians took power. The Medes and Persians Empire was a little less rigid but not by much. This is why the king so easily fell to the idea evil men had put in his mind to make a law everyone should pray to him. Again, he was king he should get to do what he wants, right? Wrong! God showed that to him by sparing Daniel from the lions' den. This caused the king to turn around and this softening of total rigidity would eventually lead to a later king sending the Jews home. The Greeks would come to power next and they simply believed their culture was so great others would flock to it all on their own. On many levels, they were right! In fact they were so right that they greatly influenced the next power's religion and that's where the Romans come in. They had what they thought of as a great culture and they would not give it up to totally take on the Greek ways, but in a sign they almost knew they

were wrong they didn't ever attempt to force their culture on the world instead allowing religions of all sorts to exist within their empire.

As time went on what the Romans saw as just another religion, became so powerful it was turning people not just from Roman cultural norms but Greek norms as well! This was a stunning sight to see and it was the Romans' fiery furnace and lions' den moment. It was not such a specific incident as those were but God was showing His ways to be higher than man's ways just as God had shown empires before them. In the past such actions on God's part were seen as coming out of the Jewish nation/people and this made clear people were to serve the same God the Jews served but the Jewish culture was not something which could be made the official religion of the empire. No, the Law clearly belonged to the chosen nation and unless everyone wanted to become part of the chosen nation it wasn't possible to use their culture/religion in the way a governmental power wants to. This should have been seen again when it came to the Christians because Jesus was The Messiah Who had come to the chosen nation. Most all the first people who followed Jesus were Jewish! The difference was that Jesus had given a clearer view of what it meant for people outside the Jewish nation to begin believing in and serving The God of the Jews. As I keep mentioning, this truth came to have a descriptive name and that's why Christians came to be called Christians.

There was no such organized thing as what the Christian religion would become but Alexander's mother obviously saw the Christian way as being a powerful thing and

she wanted to be sure her son was well versed in what Christians believed. It is at moments like these we see the truth coming about that the writers of the New Testament warned of. The whole point in educating Alexander in Christian things was not so he could be a Christian; as in his mother greatly cared about her son's salvation. No, it was so Alexander would not be ignorant of what Christians believed and in being educated on the subject he had opportunity to turn this to his advantage. The Roman culture and way of doing things was losing ground in way of popularity but there was an opportunity to bring together the power of the people under the banner of a new religion based on a Man Who had come out of the Jewish nation. The irony of this is lost in many ways when it comes to how we think today because even Christians who recognize and acknowledge the Jewish roots of Christianity see it as a religion separated from the Jews. The real beginnings of why countless millions of people see it that way is right here in stories such as Alexander's. However it is my hope we can see how ironic it is that the religion/people the world had attempted to blot out were directly responsible for what would be congealed into a new religion looked to as a way to save the faltering beast created at the Tower of Babel! (Rev. 13:11-18)

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

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

FBS continued from pg. 8

to being part of what maintained their daily living environment. Many of these women would also be younger than Sarah. Older servants would not be any more capable than their masters in older age so younger women would be brought in. In a good house the older servants would not be discarded but become any number of things to their master(s) including individuals relied upon for wise counsel and the like. Sarah likely had more than enough female servants to maintain her entire living circumstances and they would have continued in maintaining her place, room or “tent” after she was gone for as long as Abraham and/or Isaac had need of it.

Thus, it would be into this environment Isaac would bring Rebekah in the most literal sense of the word but the reason to do this was more figurative in nature and meaning. Sarah was the undisputed female head of Abraham's house. This is why when she said Hagar and Ishmael needed to go, they needed to go, and God even told Abraham to yield to Sarah's wishes in that matter. (Gen. 21:9-14) Now Sarah was gone and in a way that left what we would call a vacuum of power and position in the household. There was no female head in the house after Sarah's death but the place for that power to once again exist was maintained. Isaac would not bring Rebekah into his mother's tent just to please tradition, nor are we told this just to satisfy some cultural norm. We are told he did this to make it clear Rebekah was now the clear undisputed female head in this house. The other point of note here is that this also meant Isaac was not beginning his own house but solidly continuing the house of Abraham. This is an issue that becomes very prominent

when we get to the story of Jacob and Esau. The idea Isaac gives the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau is a huge issue but here there is no debate. Ishmael had been sent out of the house to be his own man and house long ago and Isaac was the only son of both Abraham and Sarah. His wife would now take Sarah's place in this house, and this probably means more than we can grasp in the here and now about our relationship to God in being the bride of Christ.

The other important point in understanding Rebekah had taken Sarah's position in the house becomes apparent in the very next verses for there is a shift in the narrative from following the important events that would shape the chosen nation to the more personal finalizing details of Abraham's life. The baton had been passed at this point to Isaac. The end of verse 67 tells us Isaac was comforted after his mother's death and this was in the fact he now had a wife whom he loved deeply, but just as important was the fact he was now established to take over the house fully. That is exactly what happened, so as we look at the flow of the story in relationship to God bringing out of Abraham a “great nation,” our eyes are now on Isaac and Rebekah. The next verses simple tell us some very human details about how the man Abraham finished out his life and interestingly enough we see Abraham takes a new wife named Keturah. Abraham would also go on to have six sons with this woman. This has all kinds of interesting thoughts to it. One of which is the fact some people use this detail to say it truly was Sarah who was past her time and not so much Abraham who had any inability to have children in their old age. First off I'll just say, arguing over the technicalities of who was physically unable to have children

is pointless other than the recognition God preformed a miracle to allow Isaac to be born. That said, we know Abraham considered his body dead by that time and he was old enough to truly believe that was true when it came to fathering children. Thus, God's miracle was turning back the biological clock on the parts of both Abraham and Sarah which were needed to have a child.

Sarah being the woman would have had even more of a change when this happened than Abraham for she had to carry the child, give birth, and then nurture Isaac as a mother would. By the time Abraham and Sarah had this son the point was very clear this had all been done to make Isaac their only child. Thus, no matter if they did or did not have the ability to have another after Isaac they did not have one. I'm sure considering their advanced age this was not a hard choice to make, but this Keturah was obviously a young enough woman she was still well inside her child bearing years. Obviously in spite of his advanced age Abraham was still very capable of having children with her, and six sons in that day and culture would be considered quite the blessing. In truth it's not hard to imagine God gave Abraham the ability to have these children because it is what would have been the dream to have. We see the anguish both he and Sarah go through at the thought Abraham did not have a son for so many years. This anguish resulted in the birth of Ishmael, and all this happened because it was a big deal to have a son to carry on one's house and name. However, it was also a big deal to have children in general due to the cultural thoughts of the day. When God told Abraham he would be the father of many

nations, Abraham no doubt believed that would come about by having multiple sons but that never happened.

How could a man be the father of many nations who has no sons? How could he even be the father of one chosen nation if that were the case? Abraham and Sarah attempted to answer that question by having Ishmael through Hagar but God said no that should never have happened. This took nothing away from Ishmael, it just wasn't God's plan or will for having a chosen nation. That aside, having this one son still did not seem to answer the question of how to be the father of many nations but it had been made clear this practice was not to continue in order to solve that or the chosen nation question. In this we see how our thoughts are not God's thoughts and our ways not His ways. (Isa. 55:8) God would go on to make the focal point of Abraham and Sarah's lives having that one son who would be the father of the chosen nation and leave the many nation question seemingly unanswered. Abraham would accept this and follow God's plan without waver. He did so even to the point Isaac was his focus after Isaac was an adult and in need of a wife. It was not until after this issue of Isaac having a wife was settled that we see Abraham step aside and finish his life more out of the spotlight as we might say today.

In doing this he would take another wife and we don't know if he did this with any thought he could possibly have more children or not. As far as we know Abraham did this simply because he desired to have a woman in his life and he was free to take another wife for Sarah had passed away. No matter why he took this wife the fact is God

used this woman to answer the question once and for all of how Abraham would become the father of many nations. As if what Ishmael would become was not enough Abraham would have six more sons with Keturah. To make this very clear the first four verses of chapter 25 not only tell us he had these sons they go on to list the sons these sons had. In just the space of four verses we see what one might have been holding their breath to see happen all throughout Abraham's life. Suddenly he had sons and grandsons in abundance but verse 4 ends with the simple truth, these were the sons of Keturah! What does this mean? It means they are a true separate family of Abraham's. Who they were and what they would become would be completely aside from what Isaac and Rebekah were.

This is why we see beginning in verse 5 that Abraham gives all he has to Isaac. To these sons and their already growing families Abraham gives gifts and sends them away. Like Ishmael, they would not inherit Abraham's house jointly or in part with Isaac. What these sons would receive were the beginnings of a household to build for themselves. Abraham was massively wealthy due to God's great blessings and giving each of these sons enough cattle and other valuables to go out and make their way in the world would be nothing more than drops from the full bucket of Abraham's possessions. Abraham would do this because he was a loving father but it was also necessary it be clear they needed to begin their own households without bothering or feeling they should own a share of what was Isaac and Rebekah's. This is why along with these gifts Abraham would send them away to the east country. This was land which had small populations at best. We know from

later information that Lot's two sons grew into two nations of people out in this area, but now these sons of Abraham would go out to also build nations. Who exactly they became is not totally clear but we need to keep in mind that in light of other information we know the idea of heading east also included going north of Canaan. This means the six sons of Keturah would create some of those nations known at later times in the North and only God knows for sure how far east of there going above and beyond Mesopotamia where Abraham originally came from. The one thing that should not be in doubt is that they are the reason there was such a diversity of people living out from and around both Canaan and Mesopotamia who would show up in the later stories instead of there being only or mostly people who could trace their roots to groups coming directly out of Mesopotamia.

That brings us to verse 7 where we are told how old Abraham was when he died. Abraham lived to be 175 years old. As we look at this some will note this is far beyond the limit of 120 God set at the time of the flood. (Gen. 6:3) We are also far enough down the line from the flood that the limit had taken full grip, meaning there were no longer people regularly living beyond that mark due to the fact setting the mark was like God turning down the flow of human longevity. In truth, it's good to recognize that Abraham lived this long because it shows us how much God set the 120 mark because He determined there was no use in men living longer than that in a temporal world where sin brought death to all. One hundred and twenty is plenty of time to make up one's mind as to if we want to follow God or go our own way, and it's certainly enough time for anyone to live in a world as devastated by sin

as we now see it has become. However, when it came to the case of Abraham God had a plan and a purpose for his life and that plan and purpose had been largely fulfilled by the marriage of Isaac to Rebekah. The next generation of the chosen nation had been settled and getting that in place was the focus of Abraham and Sarah's life only interrupted by very human mistakes of which there was only really one of any consequence.

This is all more of that representation we have been discussing all along. The stories of Abraham's life were all about the chosen nation but Abraham, by the blessings of God, was given even more years to live. In living those years it was almost as if he lived a whole other life in that he got married and had a very large family! So what we see is that both questions were answered in the idea God ultimately gave Abraham something no one could have really seen coming and while many may very well know God was capable of doing such a thing, it's not how we live our lives. There are no shortages of times in the Bible's story and in our personal lives where we act and react in ways not consistent with the thought God can do all things but more so guided by the way our mortal thought patterns lead us. That thought is what brings us to one last issue I want to touch on when it comes to Abraham having this second wife/life, and that's the point some will say Abraham did not wait until after Isaac and Rebekah were married before he remarried. This assumption/argument is based on the idea Abraham could not have waited until after that event to marry Keturah or he would not have had time to have these six sons, watch

them grow up to have children of their own and send them away to build households/nations of their own.

Due to that let's simply run down the numbers and see what they say. Abraham's body was dead but God restored it and gave him Isaac when Abraham was one hundred years old. (Heb. 11:11-12, Gen. 21:5) Abraham was 140 years old when Sarah died meaning Isaac was thirty-nine or forty at the time. We do not know for sure how long after Sarah's death Abraham sent his servant to Mesopotamia but we know this, Isaac was far old enough by his mother's death to be married so there was no reason to wait for Isaac to finish growing up. We also know the servant wasted no time in getting to Mesopotamia, accomplishing his goal, and returning to Canaan so there are no years to worry about there. From the wording that starts that story of sending the servant combined with the words about Isaac being comforted after his mother's death once Rebekah was with him, it appears all this happened not long after Sarah's death. If that is the case Abraham had some thirty-five years left between Sarah's death and his own in order to marry Keturah, have these sons, and watch them grow up. We have no indication children grew up slower in those days and there was no reason why Keturah's sons would wait to have children of their own until they were even as old as Isaac was by the time he married Rebekah. Thus, we can each take from this what we want but there is plenty of reason to argue and believe Abraham truly lived two adult life times in many ways shapes and forms.

Until next time, Shalom!

known place belonging to Israel since very early on and even spoken of during the time of Abraham's original sojourns in the promised land. (Gen. 13:18, 23:1-2)

Samson's affections for Philistine women would continue as next he would go out into a village that bears the same name as the valley that begins just outside Jerusalem and runs west to the Mediterranean where it comes out just a few miles south of the port city of Joppa. In early days this would have been outside Philistine territory but by this time was likely inside what the Philistines held as theirs. In this place Samson would find a Philistine woman named Delilah who he fell in love with. As at other times this did not go unnoticed by the Philistines and they would attempt to use Delilah as leverage against Samson. The Philistines' top leadership would come to her and offer to pay her a great sum of silver if she could find out from Samson exactly where his strength was coming from. This was purely thinking as a pagan in the idea might have been clear that Samson gave credit for his strength to The God of Israel but they still believed there was some ritual or key element to Samson receiving this power from God. This idea was clear to Samson which is a fact many who read the story don't get. However, we see that as Delilah attempts to get Samson to give away his "secret" he toys with her in offering different things as the way to make him "weak."

Delilah was certainly swayed by the money she would receive should she find Samson's secret because she immediately

begins to ask him about it. Samson's first tease to her is the idea he would be as weak as any other man if he was to be tied with seven green withs. This was truly a ritual type idea because these withs would be freshly cut natural cords like the weeping branches that hang from a willow tree. Such cords would not be very strong as such things would normally need to be dried and woven with others to create a full rope. At the same time these withs would be easy for just about anyone to get since they simply needed to be cut down from a common tree that likely grew in abundance there in that valley. The other ritual element Samson put into this was the number. He told her it would take seven of these withs to accomplish the task. Seven may or may not have been a number the Philistines saw as anything special but for an Israelite to use the number seven it would be to invoke God's number of completion. This would have been something Delilah would recognize and it added great credibility to the thought this might really make Samson weak.

Upon learning this the Philistines' leadership would bring the withs to Delilah and put men in hiding inside her house to capture Samson if it really worked. It's not totally clear but one can imagine Delilah waited until Samson was asleep and she bound him with the withs. She then shouted his name and claimed the Philistines were there to capture him! Samson would simply break the withs as if they were nothing and it became clear the ritual had done nothing to affect his strength. One might have thought this would bring the matter to a close in showing there was no ritual way for Samson to be made weak but that's not

where Delilah's mind went. As if it was a trust exercise between the two of them Delilah accuses Samson of mocking her in not telling her the secret to how he could be subdued. Samson would continue playing her little game and this time he tells her something that unlike the withs would be expensive to obtain. He tells her the key is to bind him using new ropes that had not been used for anything prior to binding him and that would do it. Once again, there would be Philistines hiding in the house to capture Samson and Delilah would tie Samson up with new ropes as he described. Once again, she would call out to Samson that the Philistines were there to capture him. Samson would snap the ropes off him as if they were small threads.

In spite of this Delilah was undeterred as she goes into the cycle again of accusing Samson of mocking her by not telling her the truth concerning how to subdue him. Samson would continue to play along and when she asks again for the secret he goes a little closer to something that had to do with him being a Nazarite for life. Samson apparently separated his hair into seven groupings. Samson no doubt had a great head of hair considering it had never been cut during the course of his entire life. Maybe he braided this hair or simply tied it into bunches but again we see the number seven being used. This would indicate a ritual to be sure because he tells Delilah if she would take those seven locks and instead weave his hair together using a loom commonly used to make fabric, that would take away his strength. The loom would be something Delilah had close at hand as most

all women of the day weaved as part of their chores if not their livelihood. In any case I'm sure Samson gave her this idea because he knew she weaved and had a loom right there. The loom she would have had would have been solidly connected into the wall of her home or the floor in order to keep the strings of the loom tight. Samson would apparently lay his head down on her lap and she would begin to weave his hair. Samson was likely amused by the fact she once again had gone along with one of his suggestions to have even allowed her the ability to try this one.

Try Delilah would as Samson slept to pass the time. When she was done she again cried out that the Philistines were there to capture him. This time Samson would jump up tearing the loom from the wall/floor simply because his hair was woven in it. Then he walked away with the entire loom still attached. This might have been amusing to Samson but it was not to Delilah for many reasons. She would press the matter harder telling Samson he could not love her if he refused to share his secret with her. Samson did not immediately give her another ritual to try as he was probably tired of the game by this point. However, Delilah would not give it up and continued to press him about it day in and day out much like the woman who was to be his wife had done concerning the riddle. Samson being the man of passion he was did not walk away for good but finally gave in to Delilah. He sat her down and told her, not a ritual but his life's story! He explained to her how he had been called of God to be a Nazarite from his mother's womb and that

meant a razor had never touched his head. He explained how cutting his hair would be a violation of his Nazarite vow and that would take away the great strength God had given him. In short Samson confided in her concerning his life.

Delilah was so convinced Samson had been truthful with her this time she did not test it. She went to the leaders of the Philistines and told them she knew how to subdue Samson and they needed to come with her one more time. Believing Delilah really had found the key the leaders came with the money on their person to pay Delilah should she succeed. Delilah would get Samson to sleep on her lap once again, and once he was she brought in a man who cut off the seven locks of Samson's head. Once she was fairly well convinced this had worked in taking away Samson's strength she again cries out to Samson that the Philistines were there to capture him. When Samson wakes from this cry he believes, just like he had several times before, he only needed to get up shake off his sleep and he'd be his normal self. The difference this time was that he had not given Delilah a meaningless ritual to perform. He had confided in her the facts his strength came from God's calling him to be a Nazarite his entire life. That Nazarite vow had been broken with the cutting of Samson's hair. Thus, it was not the fact Samson's hair had been cut that caused him to become as weak as a normal man but the fact God had left him due to the breaking of his vow.

Samson had been very foolish in telling his life to a woman who had shown if nothing else she was going to test what he told her. There should have been no doubt

in Samson's mind that if he admitted to her that his strength came from his commitment to God's work she would go after the easiest thing she could do to test the truth of his story and that meant she would cut his hair. If Samson's hair had been lost by some other means like an accident God would not have left him just because something physical like that had taken place. Samson's hair was not a magical formula or anything of the like but telling Delilah what action would violate his vow was as wrong as cutting his hair to end the vow himself. Samson had made the greatest mistake he could have made in life and the Philistines would make him pay dearly for it. They did not simply kill Samson but instead put out both his eyes depriving him of sight. This was a symbol of great shame often done to humiliate a captured enemy. They would take Samson to a prison in Gaza where they would use brass shackles to keep Samson under lock and key. They would also force him to do a job that was normally something an animal such as a donkey or ox would do. That job was to push a heavy mill stone round and round in order to mill the grain. This work would put Samson on public display for all to see what the great man of strength had been reduced to.

The Philistines saw this not just as a final triumph over a formidable enemy but as a sign from their gods that they were the greater people. Thus, it was already a truth that everyone who saw Samson gave thanks to their gods for the fact he had been captured. They all knew Samson had destroyed a lot of their country at times and killed many Philistines. In time, the leaders and elite of the Philistines would gather for a feast to their main god named Dagon in

order to give thanks for the fact Samson had finally been subdued. However, by that time Samson's hair had begun to grow back out. I'm sure it was common to leave prisoners in their misery and part of that was not getting to shave or take care of the hair on their head in any reasonable way. However, this reminded Samson of his vow and it would not have been in his mind to cut the hair of his head again even if he could. As the Philistines' celebration continued those in attendance were getting drunk. Eventually they decided it would be fun to bring Samson into the great house where the party was taking place in order to make fun of him. To do this they brought Samson out of the mill and led him to between the two main pillars which structurally held up the house. This they thought nothing of. It was a central place to put Samson on display so it made perfect sense.

Samson, however, had other thoughts. He, being blind was not confident as to where he was but he knew enough to know those pillars were the vulnerable part of the house. Thus, he asked the young man who was guarding him and there to keep him in his place if he could guide his hands to those specific pillars. Samson told the guard he wanted to lean on them and this also would seem to make perfect sense. Surely Samson would be tired from working in the mill all day. It was reasonable to allow him to use the pillars as a means to support himself and remain on his feet. This celebration was so large that all the Philistine leadership and elite were in the house and there were some three thousand men and women up on the roof. Knowing he

was surrounded by a large crowd, Samson would pray once more to God, knowing full well God could grant him the strength he once had. He asked for God to remember him and in a way this was Samson asking to take up his vow with God once more. Samson wanted the strength to again do what his passions move him to do, which at that point specifically was to have vengeance on the Philistines for putting out his two eyes. Samson asked that he be allowed to die with the Philistines in exacting this vengeance and putting one hand on one of the pillars and his other hand on the other main pillar he began to push with the confidence God would answer his prayer.

God did answer Samson's prayer and he was able to collapse the entire house. It came down with all the Philistine leadership inside and thousands of people on the roof, all of whom would be killed. In their arrogance the Philistines had given Samson the opportunity to kill more of them in killing himself than Samson had killed during all the amazing feats of his life! The Israelites and specifically those of his father's house would come to collect his body and bury him at his home in Israel in the tomb of his father. What an incredible end to an incredible man who had served, and now died, in a way no other judge had. He had judged Israel for twenty years and showed the nation in both his life and in his death that God was still willing to save them if only they were willing to call upon Him.

Let's stay in God's Word!

