



Shaqah

שפדאן

*“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*

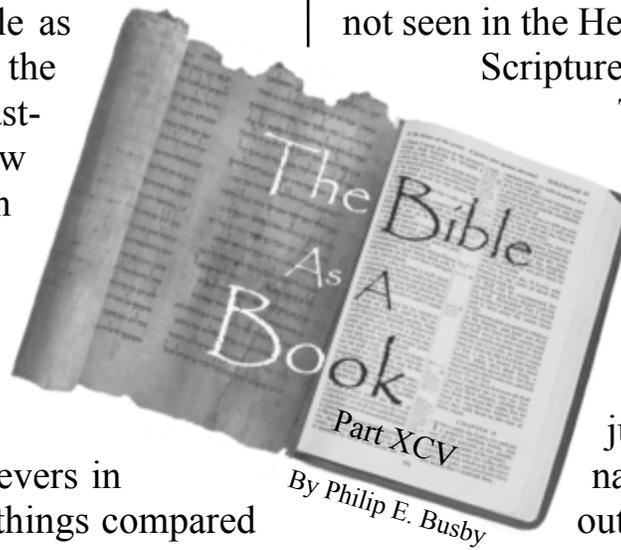
In our last segment we got into a discussion about one item I had brought up in the segment prior to that one which led us into a discussion about how Ruth relates to the other books of the Bible. It also led us to talk about some of the differences between how the chosen nation might see certain books in the Bible as well as specific items in the Law. We ended up contrasting those views with how those not of the chosen nation, but who also accepted Jesus as The Messiah, would see such things. This, of course, caused us to look at both the way true believers in Christ might see and do things compared to the way what calls itself the church has led people to observe many things. This is by far not the first time we have went off into subjects such as these but Ruth gives a unique opportunity to see a lot of these issues, considering Ruth (the person) was not part of the chosen nation by blood but her actions were very much led by a heart that more and more learned to listen to God. Thus, our last segment brought us to a true close to our look at the Book of Ruth, and

that means we are ready this time to move on to the next book which is the Book of I Samuel.

When we look at the Book of I Samuel, probably the most important thing to keep in mind is that I Samuel and II Samuel are not seen in the Hebrew arrangement of the Scripture as two separate books.

The books of I and II Samuel were/are just known as the Book of Samuel. This is of interest right from the start of looking at the Book of I Samuel, not just because it's a fascinating detail but to point out the truth that when we

we've started into a look at I Samuel we're actually saying we are looking at I and II Samuel in many ways. This is especially true when it comes to most of the questions we attempt to answer about each book as we go through this study. To be clear, we will go through such books as separate because that is how they are seen in the Bible arrangement most Christians are use to. However, as we go through questions like the naming of the book, there is no



By Philip E. Busby

separate answer for I Samuel and II Samuel. This means when we do our introduction to II Samuel there will be a lot of overlap in the information given at that time with what we will discuss now. There may also be a lot of simple referring back to what we're talking about for I Samuel and that should make II Samuel's introduction not such a redundant repeat of this introduction.

The other reason we want to talk about this fact of I and II Samuel being one book in the Hebrew, right as we start to talk about the book, is to begin by talking about the why they are split into two books within what I'll just call the "Christian arrangement." This is something that up to this point we really haven't gotten into since way back in the early parts of this study before we began looking at each individual book. The reason for this is, of course, because this is the first time we've come to any of the books that have the same name but are split into two or more books. To start off with a broader look I'll acknowledge, we see this in both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament but the reasons for it are not the same. When talking about the New Testament we aren't talking about Scriptures that were entrusted to the chosen nation before there was any organized church. To everyone, both part of the chosen nation as well as those not of the chosen nation, the "Scripture" was just the Hebrew Bible. When Paul and other apostles refer to Scripture, The Word of God, etc., they are referring to the Hebrew Bible which by that point was the full Law and Prophets Christians see as the Old Testament today. We've talked about these naming issues in the past, but that's why a study like this is so important. The Bible as a whole, whether we're talking

about the Old Testament or the New is a very old book. The Old Testament is by far older than the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament are even older in comparison to other parts/books within it. However, I stress again the fact the Old Testament is what the early church saw as "The Bible." This is an important detail to keep in one's mind and in no greater way is that true than when we read what we call the New Testament!

If we look at the New Testament all by itself, this older/newer issue generally is not true or maybe I should say, it's only relatively true. The New Testament starts off with the four Gospels which shows us the reason(s) the New Testament exists at all. It's hard for many believers, especially those not of the chosen nation to wrap their head around a day and time there was no New Testament and thus, no Gospels to read as Scripture, but it's a fact! The four Gospels give us the story of Jesus, Who was and is The Messiah. As we got into some last segment, the chosen nation as an overall doctrine did not accept this fact, but there would have been no separate group of believers who did accept Jesus as The Messiah had there not been those first of the chosen nation who believed! This is why the beginning of the Gospel of John tells us Jesus came unto His own but they received Him not. (John 1:10-13) As I just said, some believed but the overall nation and its religious thoughts did not accept it into their doctrine. The struggle to accept this truth becomes, or should become, more clear to us as we go through the New Testament. This becomes specifically clear as we move from the Gospels to the Book of Acts which covers the true beginnings of there

being a group of believers who did accept “The Good News” (which is what the word “Gospel” means) that The Messiah had come in the man Jesus Christ. What becomes more and more obvious is that the church which believed in Jesus as The Messiah was going to be prominently non-Jew and it would grow without the support of the official religious leaders among the chosen nation.

This might seem obvious to us today but that's just because that's how it happened. At the time there was likely hope the full nation would open their eyes and turn to Christ, and as enough of them did so it would change the very fabric of how we see the core of the church! This is certainly the hope the Apostles went out with the Gospel holding onto, and whether they believed the chosen nation would totally turn or not was not as much the point as giving it the best chance to happen they could. Thus, Jewish believers went into the world away from the promised land and the religious leaders directly responsible for The Messiah's execution to teach Jews far and wide that Jesus was The Messiah the nation had been waiting for! This is a pattern of their ministry not so often talked about in Christian churches today because there is still that underlying snake of anti-semitism which very wrongly was made a big part of the Christian religion's doctrine by people who wanted to minimize and ultimately destroy the chosen nation's hold on the beliefs they wanted to hijack and mold into a religion; a religion that could literally make up its own beliefs without answering to the Word of God or the chosen nation. This fact is the

reason there were attempts made within the “church” to keep common people from having access to the Scripture which is just the opposite of what the synagogue system among the Jews had so largely been established to accomplish. Instead of churches being the place to obtain a growing knowledge of the actual words of Scripture, Christian churches became the place believers were told to go in order to have what God wanted taught to them by a hierarchy of priests and “Christian leaders” as we are so fond of calling them today!

In no way am I mocking Christianity, as many would accuse when I say things like that, but I am mocking the way the religion that calls itself Christian has taught us to think! It's wrong and much of it needs to be disposed of if you're going to get your walk in faith correct and see the growth in faith all true believers should want to see. So I repeat, if Christian churches had been, and were now, the places they were/are suppose to be, they'd primarily be a place people could go to gain direct knowledge of God's Word for themselves. While many people would argue the printing press and eventually lower costs of books in general have in many ways made this point irrelevant on the basis about anyone who wants to can find a Bible or afford to purchase a Bible to read for themselves, I would beg to differ. The main point I would argue against this idea is the simple fact we as believers need to be clear that the past has been what the past has been. That combined with the fact the Protestant apple has never gotten very far from the Catholic tree, it's a truth still today that the Christian religion is about



interpreting the Bible for you, not teaching the actual words to you. Not only is this something attractive to so called Christian leaders because it allows them the very same freedom the religious leaders of the Jews had and gave them the power to crucify The Messiah, it's also attractive to the general population that calls itself Christian.

Those two points were the foundation for why the church became what we see today! Leaders want power to control the narrative (this is how propaganda works) and people want the easy route when it comes to being a Christian. Why bother knowing more than some passing memorized verses of the Bible when in general the church tells us how to get to heaven! I'm not saying many Christians have never read the Bible from cover to cover for themselves, though you'd probably be surprised how many have not, I'm saying many people have not read the Bible to understand It for themselves. As much as it might not seem like there should be, there is a huge difference between reading the Bible with the intent to understand It for yourself and just reading through It to be familiar with the stories and the like! Since it's never been the tradition of what calls itself the Christian church to encourage, much less attempt to facilitate, people reading to understand for themselves, a vast majority of Christians never give it a second thought. Again, we are at one of those moments when we should be able to see what a great difference there would be in the look of what calls itself the church if an emphasis had been put in the proper place instead of where it was, and is still today. How different would church feel and the ceremonies conducted be if learning the Word of God had been the

main focus on why groups of believers gathered; no matter on what day they did it!

The second argument I would bring to the table when it comes to people saying our earlier point is no longer reverent due to wide availability of Bibles is that, your view in saying that is narrowed by the place you live! If you're making that argument standing on the streets of the United States or Europe, sure it seems you have a good point. If you're standing on the dirt of many places around the world not nearly as "modernized" as the United States, Europe and what is often generally referred to as Western Civilization, trying to make that argument might leave you feeling a little foolish. As amazing as it might seem to many people who don't stop to think about it, it's a fact there are plenty of places around the world where Bibles are not readily available, if at all! This is especially true of people speaking certain languages. As much as that should cause a great amount of the churches' resources to be pushed in the direction of helping lessen such deficiencies, I'm afraid there is only some token efforts doing much of anything to change this. I apologize to any ministries whether small or large doing this work that I say it that way but I only mean to point out, something that should be a huge focus of the church is nothing more than just one of the many branches of ministry a certain amount of funding goes to. This truth is so bad, there are still places even in the United States where people simply can not get their hands on a Bible of their own. Believe it or choose not to but this ministry has witnessed it, even in places there are specific ministries organized to fill the need in those places!

Following the Biblical Stream:

By Philip E. Busby

In our last segment we talked about how Isaac went out from the Philistines to living on the promised land as God wanted him too. In that discussion we specifically covered the fact Isaac had been asked by the Philistine king to leave the Philistines, but Isaac did not go far. This was not because he wanted to stay near the Philistines but because it was a simple fact that living down on this south end of the promised land put them in close proximity to each other. Thus, we emphasized how much what Isaac and his father before him did on this land was all about establishing this family and in so doing setting the stage for the chosen nation as a whole living on this land. God used the lives of these men we call forefathers of the chosen nation to show the world, whether they like it or not, God was giving this land to His chosen nation to use for His purposes. The world and even many who call themselves Christian might not like the way this has been reinforced and made true in both past and present time periods, but God will not allow man to stand in the way of His will and/or change His ultimate plan He started with in creating humans. This is why we discussed how Isaac found the Philistines had filled in the wells Abraham had dug in the region but Isaac took his men and went right back to each of these wells and opened them back up; even calling each one by the name his father had named them. All this brought us through Genesis chapter 26 verse 18, and we are ready to begin this time in verse 19.

Verse 19 is where we see the further evidence that Isaac's household was growing even beyond that of his father's. This, of course, was even more so talking about herds and possessions than people born to Isaac as he and Rebekah only had the two sons and there was never any extra issues with Isaac having children with a surrogate or second wife of any kind. Isaac's house might have grown in number of servants he employed to tend to all the possessions God was blessing him with but that's the extent to which his house grew in numbers of people it included. Thus, when verse 19 tells us he went into the valley and in digging found a spring of water, it's talking about a new well beyond all the wells Abraham had dug and which Isaac had reopened. We are further assured of the fact his men were digging new wells in the truth the following verses tell us Isaac gave names to these wells, and we were already told Isaac called each of the wells he restored by the name his father had given them. This verse also confirms for us they were still there in the valley Isaac had went out from the Philistines and settled in. Now, how far on down that very long valley isn't shown to us until the concluding verse of this well struggle Isaac was in, but understand he was headed south. North would have been more so moving out from land the Philistines tried to claim but we see again, Isaac was not running away.

That said, Isaac did not fight and fight over the new wells his men would/were digging. He just moved to find new wells of

water and in so doing it just made for that much more land he and his father had staked their claim on. This might not mean much to most people but the student of the Bible should consider this fact in looking at just how much land God was reserving for the chosen nation. As we talked about last time, trying to stand in God's way is not a wise choice because you will lose every time! However, in these verses we see Isaac used this striving with the Philistines as a way to allow God to guide him where He wanted Isaac to be next. Thus, verse 20 tells us the herdsmen of Gerar fought for the water of this new well, claiming it was theirs. This was obviously not true but, again, the Philistines wanted all this land. Their wrong is clearly shown in that on one hand they attempted to destroy wells and on the other hand they'd claim wells and water that clearly wasn't theirs if they could. We are told due to this fighting Isaac would call this well "Esek." If you look up the meaning of this word you'll likely find it means simply, "strife" or "contention." Of course, how much this is exactly what Isaac believed he was naming the well we can't say because the reason we would say it means strife or contention today is because we've read this story. That aside, that is basically the jest of what Isaac was saying. Digging this particular well brought further contention between he and others in the valley no matter if those others were Philistines or people of other households. This was something Isaac didn't want so he would simply be (as we might say today) the "bigger man" about it and move on.

By saying he moved on I only mean he didn't continue to fight for that specific well. Exactly how far away he moved we don't

know and verse 21 gives us no indication that it was any distance to speak of. Verse 22 says Isaac removed and went to another place, but 21 just talks about them digging another well. I might also add here the fact what they were doing at this point was looking for new water supplies without knowing where that might be. As we talked about last time, Isaac and his servants were likely really good at this since this was their way of life but the point is, we don't know how many wells the men had to attempt to dig before they found water. They were also not just looking for any water; they were looking for enough water to maintain a large number of animals plus themselves. They needed to find more than just some shallow small place where water gathered after a spring storm or the like. They needed to tap into underground water that was abundant and consistently there. When we talk about them finding a spring of water when digging Esek we are talking about a very good thing to find. Now, they would dig until they found another body of underground water that would also suffice their needs, and that they did. How good this well was, as in was it a spring or did it appear they hit a large underground aquifer of water, we don't know because again the verse doesn't specify.

It would be my speculation that this well was good but not as good as finding the spring they found when digging Esek. That being true, one might think the herdsmen of the area wouldn't have such a problem with Isaac's house having that well, but in any case, that was not what happened. Yet again, the herdsmen of the region wanted possession of this well too. This caused Isaac to name this well "Sitnah," which means "ac-

cusation” or “hostility.” In many ways it means both. The name is speaking to the fact the herdsmen of the region were making hostile accusations that Isaac and his men were stealing what was rightfully theirs. We see in all this again how much others were discriminating against Isaac's house and wanting him to move away and out of what they considered theirs. For as much as it may seem some of what we talked about last time is canceled out by the fact Isaac was willing to move on in these accusations, it really doesn't. Abraham had been in this area and the Philistines tried to erase that truth. Now Isaac was living here and they were trying to push him out, but no matter how much they wanted to push him out, they were not able to do so before he opened all his father's wells again and named them what his father had named them. Isaac was saying to a whole new generation of the people in the region, this land was claimed by my father and now I am claiming it.

By digging new wells in the area, Isaac was adding to that claim. He was also making the statement that he wasn't just reaffirming his father's claim on the area by redigging the wells he did but Isaac was showing he fully intended to stay and utilize the area further by digging new wells. The people of the area could fight Isaac on these matters but it wasn't God's intent to fully give Abraham and Isaac this land as yet so Isaac wouldn't fight back. However, what this strife accomplished was that it emphasized how much Isaac had been and intended to be in this area. When we look again at the idea that later generations might have seen Israel coming up out of Egypt as people with no right to the region, we have here

another evidence that it was clear their forefathers had been in this area for a very long time in the past. One could say the people of the area should have considered themselves warned when it came to seeing Israel returning to the land. With the way God continued to bless these forefathers of the nation there should have been a sense of caution in dealing with the later descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There should also have been a knowledge their God would give them this land if He so chose to do it, and that He did! Thus, it was not for Isaac to fight for these wells. The point had been made and people could heed it or ignore it but as much as anything was in those days, it had been put on the official record that this family was not just passing through the region.

This is why verse 22 tells us Isaac removed his house for a new area which geographically was south to the point it was almost further south than the end of the Dead Sea. What's interesting about this is that this was laying claim specifically to an area the children of Israel would come directly up into. I talk a lot about how Israel should have gone into the promised land at the south end because this is an important truth in the events that took place. However, one of the reasons that's true is that God was clearly using Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to set a precedence that this south land would be Israel's true home one day. The south of Canaan was without a doubt the home of their forefathers so it only made sense and as we talked about last time, their coming to this south end after leaving Egypt should have come as no surprise to the people there like the Philistines and others. It's a simple

fact that Israel refused to obey God in this matter and ended up not making the powerful entrance to the land God wanted them to have. This would cause the forty years of wandering Israel would endure and end up to the east of the Jordan before they entered. These are all facts we're pretty familiar with, but a fact we don't think of is how much Israel was already home in a way by being where they had come to when God told them to go up into the land!

Isaac would move from the part of the valley that was near Gerar and go south. Gerar is already a long way south when it comes to the land Bible students think of being the promised land, but Isaac would go even further. Verse 22 tells us Isaac would move and there dig yet another well and in that place no one would fight him for it! Then Isaac does something completely prophetic. He names that well "Rehoboth," declaring God had at that time and in that place made room for him and his house; a place where they could be fruitful. Now, Rehoboth simply means "broad land." We might say, wide open space or land today, but this is so interesting considering we just don't think of the promised land as extending so far south! Even the saying that came to describe the promised land later in their history was that the land extended from "Dan to Beersheba." (Judg. 20:1, I Sam. 3:20, II Sam. 17:11) Yet, Rehoboth is about 20 miles south of Beersheba. It's about the half way mark between Beersheba and Kadesh-barnea which is the general area where Israel was camped at the time Moses was told to send the spies into Canaan. (Num. 13) If you look at a map of the promised land as originally divided up among the tribes you'll see that the tribe of Simeon was

given this far south land as a main portion of their share. It is clear here with Isaac and again in the early days of Israel possessing the land that, this far south, was always meant to be a part of what God would give the chosen nation. In spite of that fact this part of the region was no long term part of Israel's possession (at least not in a very obvious way) after those very beginning days until the modern establishment of the nation of Israel. Looking at a map of Israel today it's clear that Israel owns a triangular wedge of land at the south end extending all the way south to the tip of the Red Sea.

What is more immediately interesting to our verses here in Genesis is that by going even further south than the south end of the Dead Sea, Isaac was building his home in the wide open area Israel would come right back up to when coming out of Egypt. This means when God told Moses to send spies up into the land they were already home. The point of sending spies was in the fact they needed to expand north from where they were to open up even more land to live on. If you look at later instructions to Israel you will find they are told by God not to take the land all at once. (Deut. 7:20-22) The purpose of this was that if they did the houses they did not build and the vineyards they did not plant would go to waste during the time they were too small in number to truly make use of all these things. However, that instruction is given way down in Deuteronomy. By then Israel had traveled a long way and were poised to take a great deal of the land. I grant you, the nation had, had time to grow during the forty years of wandering so they were bigger in number than they were when God was attempting to get them to go into the land at the south end. However, the

What About God's Chosen People?

Part LXIX

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.”

As we continue our look at the history that shows us how the Roman Empire came to be looked at as a Christian empire, last time we stayed with the discussion started a couple segments before. In that discussion we talked a lot about why a study of the Roman Empire holds meaning to understanding where we are now and the way God has and will use the chosen nation. This means the last two segments have not covered the historical facts of the Roman Empire specifically and we would like to get back on track with those facts in this segment. To do that we have to get our minds all the way back to about 293 A.D. when a man named Diocletian was emperor. However, what really got us off on the conversation about all we talked about in the last two segments was the fact Diocletian had divided the empire into east and west for administrative purposes. In 286 A.D. he had put a man by the name of Maximian in charge of the western part of the empire while Diocletian himself would take care of the east. In 293 A.D. Diocletian would take this further, giving two men the title of Caesar but whom would be considered “junior colleagues” to he and Maximian who served as co-emperors. These two men named Galerius and Constantius I would rule over divisions that separated the west and east divisions into north and south divisions.

This made the empire four separate administrative districts that still claimed to be the Roman Empire as a whole. The idea the empire was still a cohesive empire was furthered by two facts. One, none of the four divisions were given names to designate them as separate nation states and they certainly were not proclaimed empires of their own in any way. Knowing who ruled what out of the four rulers was all about stating who ruled what provinces. Of course, having the provinces a particular man ruled over be a set of those that formed a cluster instead of being scattered across the empire was only logical. However, it did/does make a map of the divisions look a lot more like separate countries than an empire. The second thing that made the argument stick that there was still a cohesive empire was the fact the four men were considered a Tetrarchy which is to say, “rule of four.” In other words, these men all four ruled as one or in unity and cooperation with each other. The reason this worked at all has everything to do with the fact none of the four men were power hungry enough to want to kill one or more of the others in order to literally add their division to their own and/or rule as the sole emperor of the empire. This is actually remarkable considering all the times leading up to this point emperors had come to the throne by, shall we say, hostile takeovers.

In any case it worked for a time, but there is an interesting point of fact beyond the way it makes a map of the empire look which



adds to the feeling these were four separate countries simply working in cooperation with each other. That's the fact all four divisions had a capital. That might seem like an odd thing to point out considering it would only seem logical each man would have a seat of power somewhere in the provinces he was responsible for. However, would it surprise you to know the capital of the division that included Italia was not Rome? Would it further peak your interest to know the man who ruled said division was not Diocletian? The man ruling that division was Maximian and his capital was Milan. Remember in all this the senate still existed and according to the rules of a republic they should have been the ones approving or disproving all these actions, but on many levels they had become almost irrelevant. Diocletian re-imagined the empire, if you will, all on his own and made his capital all the way east in Asia Minor at Nicomedia which is very close to the later Constantinople. The fact the man who had ascended to the throne of emperor chose to take the eastern division instead of the western one which included Rome, in and of itself is a bit of an eyebrow raiser. Had the great city of Rome lost its appeal? How much did this have to do with outside people coming in to shore up the diminishing population of the once great empire? In total truth we can't say for sure, but there is an appearance no one cared as much about the city of Rome itself as they once had!

That issue aside, in these divisions and seats of power we see how true it is to say this set the stage for the later and more full division of the empire into east and west! This truth is what caused us to talk about how decentralizing the empire turned out to be the key to "restoring" the empire, in spite

of the fact an empire is actually all about one big centralized system. I realize many would say it was still centralized because Diocletian was still the true top ruler but the system he put in place worked because he didn't really act as the guy in charge as much as a coordinator, if/when one was needed, between the four men. The simple point is, the days of a large empire ruling itself as one big entity from one centralized location was coming to an end. That being as true as it may be, Diocletian is so important to history and in particular the history we as students of the Bible should look at. I'm not talking so much about the man as in who he was but totally about what he did in seeing this form of administering the empire as a good idea. We have talked over and over in this study about the fact the Bible tells us of a string of empires who ruled and influenced the world as a whole, but we've also talked about how each of them failed. The vision of the Babylonian king which Daniel interpreted tells us the idea of one man ruling the world, or a large portion of it, from one central location came to its peak with the Babylonians. (Dan. 2)

From there the representation of the empires that followed would be that of metals not as valuable as gold but in so many ways more in truth useful for getting a job done. This dream of the kings shows us how much God was giving something, not just for that day and time, but for millenniums to come. Today we use money and most of it is paper or, at the very least, unrelated to the value of the metal the coin or the like is made from. Some governments of the world are even pushing to implement totally non-tangible currency such as digital. As it stands now the "worth" of many people is nothing but a

number on a computer screen at one or more financial institutions. We no longer trade and/or barter to any great degree with items that hold value in and of themselves, even if that value is in the metal our money is made from. In spite of that truth, we still see clearly the symbolism of each of the metals in the kings dream in much the same way they did at the time! Gold is still looked at as a very valuable item. Many people own no gold other than the little their jewelry is coated with yet the idea of a chest full of gold would still be a treasure most would be willing to go after if they thought they knew where it was. Silver is not so much that way yet it is still considered valuable as a decoration. Having silver plated items or items like the utensils one eats with made from silver is a status symbol almost no one would trivialize. However, even in that thought that we might make utensils to eat with out of silver is the truth it's more utilitarian than gold. You could plate utensils with gold, but making things out of pure gold doesn't make much sense unless the item itself is made to have the value that amount of gold represents.

Brass is a very pretty metal and in some ways resembles gold when it's polished. However, brass is by far more valuable for what you can do with it and make with it than it is as just an item or for its beauty. The other interesting fact about brass is that it's an alloy. Both silver and gold can be considered anything from virtually useless to totally useless if it's not pure enough. Brass, on the other hand, is valued because it's more useful and durable due to the fact it's the combination of copper and zinc. Then we get to the legs of the statue which were made

of iron. To describe it by using an idiom one could say, iron is the salt of the earth. By mass it is the most common element on earth or at least from what science now believes which takes into account the idea the earth's very core is made of iron! When it comes to usefulness iron is hard to beat. Many people now might say steel is the true king of the useful metals, but what is steel? It's an alloy of iron and carbon. This brings us to the interesting truth the toes of the statue in the king's dream were iron mixed with clay. At the time clay was about the most useful and certainly the most plentiful of materials to build with. So much so, it was available to the most common of the common man. In our modern world that could be said of steel. Not because steel is available to every one to build with (though you could almost say that) but because steel is so common today about everyone in modern societies depends on it in ways they don't even think about. Most of us would be hard pressed to make a complete list of all the things we depend on which have steel as a crucial component of its construction. At the time of the dream it seemed impossible to build anything stable that was a mixture of iron and clay, but steel is literally iron combined with the chemical element most scientist would tell you is the basic building block of life itself, carbon!

If you think the Bible is just some old dusty book with no real value to the modern world and way of living, consider that! God is always talking to us in ways we can understand. At the time of the dream the last metal in the statue couldn't have been steel because no one would have known what that was and been able to see what it symbolized. Today we can look at the iron mixed with

clay and see the very metal one could argue our modern world is built on! Only God could have spoken to people so ancient while still speaking directly to us at the same time. Since God did all this we see through a study of history that He knew what He was talking about. You can look at the idea God knows the future in so many ways, but what's important isn't that one believe God knows the future like seeing it as a picture He can look at all parts of. The importance in seeing things like we just covered is that it proves, at the very least, God created us and knows us so well, He knew where all our efforts were going before we ever tried them in the first place! He knew we loved the Tower of Babel idea and would never fully give it up. We were already showing that fact by the time of the Babylonian Empire because through the Assyrian Empire man had resurrected the great monster that threatened human existence which God through his mercy had slain for us at the tower.

By the time of the Babylonian Empire we had already taken the idea to the most glorious state achievable. The fact the Babylonians fell would cause us to accept a more workable version of the idea, and God knew every empire that fell would bring us closer to simply accepting the most workable version we could achieve. This is why Revelation's prophecy shows us events like World War I and World War II as a single event. It wasn't just that during those events, in particular the second one, the world would go after the chosen nation, but those wars represent the pentacle of the struggle man would and did come to in some thinking the more workable ideas of empire could be stepping stones back to the head of gold and others

disagreed with that greatly. When the result of those two wars was the development of weapons so powerful man now has the ability to destroy this entire world many times over, we realized we had to go back to the more workable as our best option. It's not really an empire but it is a connected world that would like to see more standardization in the way we all live in it. Even then, for all the strides we've made, there are still wars and constant rumors of wars. The fact no one has pushed the big red button shows at least most of us know we can only push it so far! (Matt. 24:3-14) To jump ahead in our history study, this is why the idea of what we know as the "United Nations" was greatly forwarded by a United States President in 1910, but when the League of Nations (as its first iteration was known) was formed, the United States never joined it. Cooperation is hard to come by, but the fact only a model like we are seeing here in the time of the latter Roman Empire was/is going to work to any great degree is why the idea continued through World War II to eventually become the United Nations.

The iron is truly mixed with the clay. The hope is that we can create a united world that is strong as steel, but the truth we won't even accomplish something that good is another reason God didn't use steel in the representation of the statue even if it had been understood. We can blame God for confounding our language for why this is true, but the real truth is that God confounded our language because it has been true since the taking of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. You'd think the fact the first murder happened in only the second generation of humans, and while there were only two humans in that generation, might have given

us a clue but humans just refuse to see what they don't want to admit. It's the evil in the hearts of men that keeps even a cooperative one world government from being a reality. God made sure this truth showed through by confounding our language because, can you just imagine if we had accomplished the head of gold status of the idea long term? For those who would have loved to hold the power it's the dream but for most living under that power, it would have been an understatement to say it would have been a living nightmare whether we recognized it as that or thought it was a utopia. Therein is the big problem. As dangerous as it would be for a one world government to exist in the hands of evil men, it would have been far worse for everyone to just believe everything was great!

Not only is that not what God created us to be, some kind of mindless drones, but it would have been an endless conveyor belt of humans living and dying without God or any thought they needed Him. God couldn't and wouldn't let that happen, and that's why the only way we get close to a utopia with a one world government is with God as its head. As we have discussed, that will happen when Jesus returns but man won't be happy with that arrangement. Students of the Bible should see history showing us God is true and right, but evil men see history as a glimpse into what could have been and might still be if we can just push everyone aboard the same boat. This is why I say and have made such a big point of what Diocletian did. It was the next step of humans seeing the more workable (or in many minds the starting point for getting back to the head of gold) idea was smaller segments of more independent governing bodies that only at

the highest levels connect with each other to still consider what we have an empire. History should believe the true Roman Empire breathed its last breath with Numerian and if not, certainly with the death/defeat of his sons. Instead, what Diocletian did is hailed as a brilliant move that rescued the empire from the crisis of the third century and continued the empire into the fourth century. At the same time, history has to admit Diocletian built the biggest bureaucracy the empire had ever seen. The four administrative divisions were working far better than trying to hold the empire cohesively together by force, but instead of letting it go at that Diocletian paved the way for governments building hugely expensive and complicated means of holding it all together so it could still be considered an empire.

This is the way in which Diocletian was not some hero or great thinker. In truth Diocletian was forcing the empire to stay cohesive in any way he could no matter what it cost and we all should know, the cost is always paid by those who have the least power to resist paying for it. Diocletian set the model in that way that the governments of Europe would base their practices on. As much as people fled to the Americas in the hope of finding freedom and relief from the burden of paying for the king's existence, the system built here so closely follows the same basic ideas they were bound to fail in being any less a burden in the long term. Diocletian can be credited with saving the empire while at the same time sealing all future generations fate to have such self-serving governments that bankrupting the kingdom is by far the majority reason nations fail. That might seem a lot of conclusion to draw from one simple man's actions so long ago but it really

isn't when we see the model still in primary use today. It can be a democracy, a republic, a communistic or socialistic society, but they all come to be the same thing. The bottom line is that humans have enough trouble ruling their own house well, and the reasons for those troubles only increase with the size of the group a ruler or government tries to rule over.

With that let's get back to follow the history more directly again. A fact we have yet to cover but should, at the very least, be of interest to the student of history is that one of the reasons this division of the empire worked is that the four men had military and family connection. Constantius, whom we'll add an "I" to which wasn't applied until later times, had served in Gaul as Maximian's Praetorian Prefect. He was also married to Maximian's daughter Theodora before being named Caesar by Maximian. On the other side about the same was true for Galerius. He was believed to have served at some point as Diocletian's Praetorian Prefect and he was married to Diocletian's daughter Valeria before being named Caesar by Diocletian. In time, Diocletian and Maximian began to present themselves as if they were actually brothers and they would officially take Galerius and Constantius I as sons. In this way they seem to be confirming the idea the empire was still an empire simply ruled by a family instead of just a sole emperor. This is where a man we've all been waiting for shows up because by making it official that the two Caesars were sons of the co-emperors they became the heir apparent to their respective "father's" throne!

More practically, this caused the sons of Galerius and Constantius I to be looked at as the heir apparent(s) to their father's title of Caesar. Maximian's son's name was Maxentius, and almost no one who doesn't study history further than a passing class of history in their school years remembers him. However, Constantius's son's name was Constantine and yes, this is the man later known as Constantine the Great! To be clear, he was the son of Constantius I but Maximian's daughter Theodora was not his mother. Constantine's mother was a woman named Helena who was considered a woman of low birth. In spite of this he and Maxentius were taken to serve in Diocletian's court at the capital of the east, Nicomedia. This was to prepare them for one day ruling the empire, at least in part. In any case it shows how the man whose dream would become to move the capital of the empire to the east totally took to heart the idea suggested by an early historian who said, "Rome is where the emperor is." instead of seeing the city itself as the the great city the Roman Empire would always be ruled from. Constantine would begin his political journey very near the place his future capital would exist and one of his first major assignments as a military leader would be against the ever present threat of the Persians in the East. As if man never stopped looking over the horizon to the great city of Babylon, taking the East continued to be a dream of the Roman emperors to the bitter end.

As the years moved on Diocletian lead military campaigns along the Danube River which continued to be a constant challenge as a northern border of that region of the empire. After several successes Galerius

would also take up the challenge and while Rome would ultimately pay a heavy price, as had almost always been the case when fighting in the North, by the end of Diocletian's life it would seem the entire length of the Danube River had been secured for Rome. However, these victories were somewhat hollow in that such security was usually relatively shortlived and demonstrated over and over how much there was never any real hope the empire could be expanded to the North. Thus, in ways not talked about a lot, the original dream that Rome would one day rule the world had been significantly stifled and in a seemingly permanent way. There also continued to be trouble in the South which was what occupied Galerius' time during the first part of Diocletian's fight in the North. Upper Egypt had become almost as constant a challenge by this point in history as the barbarians. Galerius had to put down yet another uprising in Egypt that was constantly attempting to pull away from the grasp of the Roman Empire. The fact this kept happening showed how much people wanted their freedom from Rome. Long forgotten was the thought of it being a point of prestige to be part of the Roman Empire.

Galerius had no more than left Egypt for Syria to engage the Persians when in Rome's side yet another revolt began in Egypt. This time the uprising was even more universal as Diocletian was attempting to make Egypt more truly Roman by bringing its tax system more in line with the Roman way of doing things. The Egyptians didn't like this at all! A man by the name of Domitianus rose up and declared himself ruler of Egypt, even taking on the Roman title of Augustus. Almost all of Egypt recognized his rule and so it can be said that for a

time Egypt had successfully broke away from the empire once again. As we learned from past incidences of this happening, this was not something Rome could really afford considering how much it was dependent on the grain supplies that came from there. Diocletian would quickly turn his attention to this problem and led his own troops into Egypt to begin the takedown of Domitianus in the autumn of 297 A.D. He would take most of the countryside fairly quickly and lay siege to Alexandria. Domitianus would die in December of 297 A.D. but his commander who was in charge of holding Alexandria would continue to hold out until March of 298 A.D. Diocletian's eventual victory over the city would result in the building of Pompey's Pillar which was erected in Diocletian's honor.

Diocletian would take a census while there and forbid Alexandria to continue to mint their own coins independent from Rome. His reforms would bring Egypt a step closer to conforming to Roman standards but not completely. Diocletian would travel further south along the Nile attempting to settle affairs deeper into Egypt and signed peace treaties with a couple native tribes of Africa before turning back to join Galerius who was by then in Mesopotamia fighting the Sasanian Empire. Sassanian had come to be ruled by a man named Narseh who despised his immediate predecessor and desired to return to a more warrior kings like those that had plagued Rome in the past. In early 294 A.D. Narseh had sent what at some point became the customary exchange of gifts between the two powers making it seem all was well in the East. However, by the next year he declared war on Rome and moved quickly to attack and take land in

Armenia. He then moved south into the portion of Mesopotamia controlled by Rome where in 297 A.D. he defeated Galerius in battle more than once. History is not clear whether Diocletian had made it to Galerius before or just after these humiliating defeats, but he made it clear to the people of Rome, Galerius was totally at fault for the losses Narseh had handed Rome.

Sometime in the spring of 298 A.D. Galerius was reinforced by troops that had been fighting along the Danube River but Narseh made no move to advance. With the blame for the earlier losses landing squarely on his shoulders, Galerius would have no choice but to go on the offensive in an attempt to make some kind of recovery. He would move against Narseh beginning in Armenia where the terrain greatly favored the Roman infantry over the Sassanid cavalry. In two specific battles Galerius won major victories by taking this advantage and the second of these resulted in Roman troops plundering Narseh's camp taking his treasury, harem, and wife. Galerius would march his troops on down the Tigris River and even take the capital of Ctesiphon. Feeling his name had been restored along with the territories lost by Rome, Galerius marched back up the Euphrates River into some of the territory he had regained for Rome. The peace treaty that would follow between Rome and Narseh would set the stage for Rome to have a large eastern influence which it had long sought to have and which would make it that much easier for the empire to truly fall apart into the East and West divisions that would come about in following centuries. This influence would also greatly affect the shape of the Christian religion!

It's not clear if Galerius ever gave Narseh his wives back, but Narseh had begged for them. What is clear is that Narseh would be forced to accept the loss of territories in the northeast that Persia had long used as an attack point against Rome. He would also give up control over cities as far east as some to the east of the Tigris River! This all resulted in some interesting changes for the empire as decentralization of the government had allowed Diocletian and Galerius to remain focused on the east while the other rulers handled any troubles in the west. These victories also led Diocletian to consider the south of what he now controlled more fully in the east, and in 300 A.D. he built a road and fortifications along the southern border of the east to attempt to hold the line against the Arabs to the south. As much as this seemed needed on paper since the Romans had never really bothered to worry about the Arabs (at least not for a long time), Rome found yet a new front that was not so easy to navigate. The other large happening of all these events which we will want to pick up on next time, is that Rome's new eastern influence and holdings opened the door for Syriac Christianity to spread rapidly, eventually leading Armenia to be saturated by that form of the religion. Times were truly changing and even bigger changes were yet to come!

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.***

point was always true. God didn't want them wasting resources He had prepared for them by allowing the thorns, thistles, and animal population to overtake most of it.

The big, gigantic difference between the time God actually gave this instruction and the earlier time He was trying to get them to go into the land at the south end is that this instruction would have been followed very organically if they had followed God's original plan. As I just pointed out, in truth the nation had traveled from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula to meet with God and receive the Law. This was a vast area not really inhabited by just about anyone. Israel, in spite of their great numbers at the time, could survive out here because they had provisions they had taken from Egypt and the obvious fact (which they showed was not so obvious to them on many occasions) God was going to take care of them. There didn't have to be a ton of natural resources for the nation to live off of because God could provide anything they needed without them hardly noticing it was happening. Israel did worry about this fact a lot and over and over got themselves in trouble not trusting, but one thing that is pointed out they didn't really notice is that the shoes on their feet and clothes on their back, simply were not wearing out like one would expect them to traveling through such harsh land. (Deut. 8:1-4) It's odd the things we as humans worry our head about while not noticing a hundred other things God is just providing while we take it all for granted.

Getting back to the point at hand, Israel would travel from there to this very same south of the land of Canaan area Isaac re-

moved himself to here in these verses we're studying. There they would have a firm base of operations and be able to simply move up the south end taking the land they needed as they needed it. Things really changed on this issue when they refused and Israel instead had to come into the heart of the promised land from the east and considerably further north. They had made a spectacle of themselves by that point traveling all the way around the Dead Sea and confronting the various people they had to travel past. Eventually they made it to a place where it became necessary to take land from people already there on the east of the Jordan River just for the sake of having a clear base of operations to enter the promised land from this new location. As we discussed last time, God isn't going to let people change His ultimate plan, but we sure know how to mess up the details and lose out on advantages He builds into His plan when we fight God instead of just trust Him. Nothing God had Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob do was without meaning. This is especially true of Abraham and Isaac. While Abraham made some mistakes, God showed him how to correct them and ultimately they didn't cause God to go in a different direction than He was originally planning. This is why Abraham could plead with God all he wanted about using Ishmael for His plan but God was still going to bring about Isaac and use him.

When it comes to Isaac, we don't see him making any such major mistakes. He and Rebekah simply go where God directed them and do what God told them to do. Jacob might have gotten a little sidetracked by his way of going about things but it's really hard to know for sure. Him ending up

out of the promised land and back in Mesopotamia for a time did come at a time Isaac was still alive and it was there God gives Jacob the wives he needed to begin the twelve tribes. The point is, what God does in not telling Isaac to stay and fight for these wells and instead allowing him to remove to this so far south portion of the land is that God really did bring Israel straight up from Egypt to the promised land with only the slight detour into the Sinai to get organized using God's Law. Thus, maybe instead of saying Israel refused to go into the promised land from the south end it'd be more appropriate to say Israel refused to take more of the promised land than was already under their feet! Just like Isaac in his day, God had made a place for Israel to have land without having to fight for it but when it came to trusting God for more of the land, they just wouldn't do it. This puts even more light on why God made them wander forty more years by moving them on instead of letting them stay and be comfortable where they already were.

Verse 23 tells us that from Rehoboth Isaac goes back up to Beersheba. We don't know how long after going down and digging the well of Rehoboth it was that Isaac takes this journey, but in many ways it doesn't matter because when you have a household as big as Isaac's, such distance was covered on a regular basis to check on herdsmen and other affairs of the house. Of course, the other thing about it being easy for Isaac to go to Beersheba is that this was the place Abraham had lived. Abraham had even planted a grove in Beersheba which is something that denotes a longer term presence because groves don't grow to be the

useful things the people who plant them want overnight. Beersheba was the place Abraham was at when the Philistine king decided he needed to deal with the fact this powerful man was very close to his people. Their herdsmen were interacting on a regular basis and conflict had taken place between them more than once. Thus, this is the place the Philistine king came to Abraham to make a peace treaty with him and promise that they both would deal fairly with each other. This is the contract/treaty the Philistines were breaking in causing problems for Isaac, but there is nothing in these verses to indicate Isaac went there to seek God due to such issues.

That said, he did likely go there to speak to God. Humans often find certain places to be important to them and such places become even more important if they feel it was easier to hear from their god(s) at such a place. Making a specific place even within an area, such as planting a grove, was done for that very reason. Either because it was a place the person/people already thought of as special or they wanted to make a specific spot to hold that purpose, groves and altars were often planted/built. Later in the Law of Moses doing such things was not something that was to be done and such places the Canaanites had already established to their gods were to be cut down and destroyed. However, this does not speak badly of people such as Abraham for planting a grove or Isaac who may have been going to utilize that grove when we see him going there in these verses. The point about forbidding such practices in the land and being sure to tear down such places that were already built in Canaan once the children of Israel

lived there was due to the fact the Law made for a specific place. The tabernacle and later temple were built in Israel according to the Law to be the place where man could meet with God when they desired a specific place and it was the only place certain rituals and ceremonies were to ever take place. However, that's the point and reason God didn't hold it against people like Abraham who planted a grove.

The Law is full of examples that have to do with the fact God was using the things man did in their interactions with Him to see how man might come before Him. The practice of sacrificing animals comes from the fact Cain and Abel brought gifts and offered them to God. These were gifts that related to the work of their hands on this earth. That's why Cain, who was a farmer, brought fruits of the ground and Abel, who was a shepherd, brought a lamb. (Gen. 4:1-5) Both offerings were totally fine, and for those who dispute this I point to the Law of Moses where in many places offerings of food goods are commanded to be brought as offerings. The difference is that at the time Cain and Abel brought those first offerings to God that almost any man had brought, God used the opportunity to show blood offerings would be treated differently. I always find it strange people want to argue or don't understand what the words in Genesis are saying on this matter considering we see the idea of offering blood sacrifices on an altar of fire becomes common practice from there on. The story tells us Cain was immediately upset and jealous that he felt his brother's offering got more attention from God than his. This jealousy is the basis for the entire incident that follows. However, this is why God restricted this practice for

the chosen nation to specifically what He did and at the Temple. God told Cain if he wanted the kind of attention Abel's offering brought then all he needed to do was bring a blood offering. Cain didn't seem to care about such things anymore, but humans in general took those words to heart! It became the standard practice for worshiping God and in time, false gods. Thus, in the Law God restricted the chosen nation to a specifically designed by God way of doing it and only to Him as The One True God.

The idea of the temple isn't just about sacrificing though. It clearly is about a place of worship and meeting with God's presence. This is why inside the temple was the Holy of Holies and in that place sat the Ark of the Covenant. More importantly, on top of that Ark was the Mercy Seat which was to be God's throne on this earth. All this was to give man a place where they were not guessing or hoping or only knowing by experience they had met with the presence of God but a place where God said, there I will be as close to you as humans will allow. There the Law puts a lot of things in place to surround the Ark and specifically the Mercy Seat so it could be a place where God's presence was unmistakable and powerful. When we contrast the fact that system, due to man's failings, didn't often work in the way it was suppose to with the facts we see here where men like Abraham and Isaac met very directly with God in various places just because they were the men of faith they were, we see how far and fast man's corruption went and is still going. With all the reasons the temple in Jerusalem should have been a clean and easy place to maintain God's presence yet so often was not, it's a stark contrast to see a single man of faith

simply walking into a place and meeting with the direct presence of God so easily.

However, that's what we see Abraham and Isaac doing. Beersheba had been a prayer closet, if you will, for Abraham and it would be so for Isaac as well. In many ways and considering all the hardship he had just went through with the Philistines it's hard to believe Isaac wasn't going there specifically in the hopes of meeting with God. In any case, that is what happens, for we are told in verse 24 that there God met with Isaac. It doesn't say Isaac just heard God's voice and this isn't one of those times we just get the indication that hearing in some form is all that happened. We are told, God "appeared" to Isaac in Beersheba. To make it perfectly clear to Isaac but almost more so for those whom Isaac would share this encounter with, like Rebekah, and of course those of us reading it so many long years after the fact, God tells Isaac He was/is the God of Abraham, Isaac's father. This is another one of those details I find so interesting in the Bible. It has certainly come up a lot of late that people just see God as being changeable in one way or another; often without ever noticing they're thinking that way. That fact on top of the fact many people never really understand the true nature of God to begin with makes people say and argue all sorts of things when it comes to speaking of God's intent or motives in a particular situation. This holds true no matter if we're talking about the here and now or past events, such as this one, we read in the Bible.

God was and has been so much the same from start to now and forever. God has

made it clear time and time again through His actions. It would seem if Isaac was the man of faith we believe him to be it would be completely unnecessary for God to introduce Himself as if he's needing to confirm to Isaac he's speaking/hearing from the same God Abraham believed in and talked to, yet here it is. Again, that has a lot to do with Isaac going home and saying to Rebekah, God spoke this and that to/about me/us and her saying, are you sure you were hearing from the same God your father served? I'm not suggesting Rebekah would have said that, but we honestly don't know. The point is, if that did happen, Isaac could simply say, yes God told me right up front I was hearing from the God my father served. To repeat myself, it's really about us today and the bigger picture of us understanding through all the events the years, centuries, and millennia have brought us through, God has not changed. God didn't tell Isaac this as a way to confirm to Isaac the world had not done anything to change the plan God promised Abraham. No, God was saying, I'm the same yesterday and today. It is from this understanding that we get the words of Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." Even in sending Jesus to this earth to walk among us God is still the same God with the same plan He had when He founded the earth. That truth is something we need to not only get solidly in our heads but be sure to check all our other thoughts against in order to know we aren't thinking something about God that is incorrect!

Until next time, Shalom!

Now, I say all that to say again, just think about how different all this would be if one of the primary reasons for churches to exist had been to put the Bible in the minds of every person who had a hunger for God! Before the world had printing presses church would have been a place to go and hear God's Word read for all to hear. I'm not just talking about the reading of a verse or two before following up with teaching of those verses dictated by the doctrines of the particular church you were in. No, I'm talking about actually hearing the words read for the sake of people hearing the words for themselves! Even long after the wide availability of Bibles became true, we as Christians would still do this. Why? Because it would be our tradition and it would be seen as important. I'm sure many people don't believe that would generally change much when it comes to how the average Christian looks and acts, but that's incorrect. As a teacher of God's Word I can tell you it's a very true saying that the greatest threat to any nation, family, or individual is the dust on the family Bible! It's so hard to teach the truth for one simple reason; people don't know the words of Scripture for themselves! It's not that it was put into their heads as youngsters but it just hasn't been refreshed; it's simply not there! The average Christian is generally familiar with some highlight stories but couldn't begin to put together any kind of cohesive time sequence of the events told to us in the Bible much less place the stories they know within that sequence. Sure, there are plenty of people out there who call themselves Christian who can quote Scripture and seem to know historical context galore but creating

such people isn't even the mission of many "Bible Colleges" much less the church down the street!

It's sad that many Christians couldn't take you through a general rundown from Genesis to Revelation if their lives depended on it, and this has nothing to do with the idea almost no one has the entire Bible memorized verse for verse. It's the total lack of knowing the Bible's history and by that I don't mean the book itself, I mean the history the Book contains on It's pages. People have been taught a lot of doctrine and a lot of ideas in church but valuing a knowledge of God's Word for one's self is not one of them, and that's flabbergasting along with being just flat wrong. The lack of these traditions within the church means when the church is blessed with resources to go out into the world with the Gospel, it rarely to never passes on such traditions to those they "reach." What does that mean? It means in places where physical copies of God's Word aren't available or widely available there are still a great number of people who aren't being fed the right food to grow their faith! "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." Proverbs 29:18 If our vision and goal as a tradition was to stand up and make the reading of God's Word the main event of our services; if our tradition and must accomplish as a church desires were set on making sure every man, woman, and child got a chance to have the words for themselves, we could win this world for Christ, but that's not our vision.

Understand, when I say all this I'm not suggesting the resources exist within the Christian community today to give every-

one a personal copy of God's Word. Bibles in certain languages are greatly expensive and some languages have no good translations to even print. In that way many people do still live like Christians lived before the printing press, but if your tradition was to read God's Word to the church, people who have copies in languages that are not generally affordable would stand up for services and read to those who do not have copies. People who knew languages that good translations of the Bible were available in (not the least of these being English no matter how weak English as a language is) and who also knew a language the Bible had not been translated into, would read and do their best to translate on the go. These activities have in some incidences and would in many, many more places and times, lead to there being copies of the Bible in new languages. Sure, such translations might need to be improved and standardized over time but the process would start and with the help of The Holy Ghost, the value of such work would be immeasurable! This kind of tradition and vision is why the Law given to the chosen nation commanded them to write the words of the Law on their door posts, gates and all the places people pass by regularly. (Deut. 11:18-21) Those who know the words would be constantly reminded of them. Those who did not would get a chance to read them. Can you imagine great Christian cathedrals being built, not as some grand gesture to the power and prestige of the church but as a way to house wall after wall people could walk down reading the words of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation! That might sound ridiculous, but the only reason we aren't compelled to see that as a

dream we want to come true is because we haven't been taught a focus on God's Word like we should have. It's not our vision and the true church is perishing due to it!

I guess by this point it's pretty obvious I can lecture on such things for a very long time. However, trying to get back to what got us going down this road to start with takes us back to the fact Jewish believers in Jesus as The Messiah were the reason the rest of the world was made aware of the Gospel. They are the reason there were ever groups of believers who got together to learn of God in the first place. These Apostles went out just as Jesus had shown. They went first to the Jew but that did not stop them from going to the non-Jews in any and every place there were people willing to hear and receive. Because the Jews valued knowledge of the Law and Prophets the tone was set for the church to also value that knowledge. This is why we ended up with the four Gospels at the start of the New Testament. Just as the Torah is the core of the Bible as a whole and before the existence of the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible specifically, the Gospels are the core of the New Testament. Their value is evident and that's why they were written in the first place and preserved over time. The rest of the New Testament is a collection of writings mostly done by the Apostles in the field doing the work of the ministry among these new groups of believers that were often made up of a vast majority of people who had little to no knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. The letters were not about creating new scriptures. They were written to help such people understand what they

lacked by not having a good direct knowledge of the Law and the Prophets! (Rom. 3:1-2)

Unlike any of the Jewish believers in Jesus, these non-Jewish people received the Good News of Jesus Christ and Him crucified before knowing all the back story for why The Messiah was important. This is a simple illustration of how powerful what God had done by sending Jesus to live among us was! However, this by no means was the end of the understanding these people needed to really grow in faith. Thus, they would be taught the Hebrew Bible. In doing this, teachers were giving them a complete picture of why the message of Jesus is so important and how much He was trying to point us to the truth of what we as humans were created to live. These were just logical steps to take in helping people walk a solid walk of faith. As these Christian groups grew, which is the part the church today likes to focus on while ignoring growth in faith, interpersonal problems came up among these groups along with the struggle for how such a group should be organized. Many people didn't know how to give up their old ways and respond to life's challenges in the correct way a God centered life would compel them to. These truths culminated in the need for the original Apostles to continue revisiting these groups to deal with and correct such issues. However, the issue wasn't going to end with a handful of groups because as the Gospel went further and further into the world new groups were springing up all the time and they too would face the same issues. This is why what became so vastly important to the church of Jesus Christ were the writings these early Apostles and other members of

the fivefold ministry gave different churches. This fact is why we have something beyond the four Gospels and Revelation that we can call the New Testament.

One of the things almost anyone even vaguely familiar with the New Testament could tell you is that the Apostle Paul is responsible for a great deal of these writings. However, if you look at how God guided Paul's life you won't see a man who was told by God to sit down and "write these words for this is your ministry as much as any face to face teaching you'll ever do." I'm not saying Paul wasn't told by God to write the words he wrote or that it wasn't God's will he do so. I just wish to point out that all through Paul's writings you'll see a man almost tortured at times by the fact he couldn't be face to face with the people/churches he was writing to. In his mind, I'm sure there were so many times he found himself asking why God allowed this to happen or that to happen which delayed his ability to get back to places and churches he so desperately wanted to go back to or maybe even visit for the first time! The only satisfactory answer Paul got to those thoughts was something we all have to lean on as believers and that's the truth we seek to serve God, but from there we must let Him guide our path even when that path doesn't make a lot of sense to us. (Phili. 4:11) Everything happens for a reason but we want to be sure as much as we possibly can be that the reasons aren't because we are fighting being where God has brought us. Thus, Paul sat down in the place he was in and put his hand to the work of writing things he so desperately wanted to tell these churches he couldn't just then go back to. In so doing he was, in ways he could not have

seen at the time, blessing the entire church with teaching that would benefit not just a wider circle of churches throughout the world but generations very, very far off in time!

This same dynamic is not necessarily why we have all the letters from all the men we read in the New Testament but getting needed instructions to a fledgling and vulnerable church, be it specifically one or intended for many, maybe all the churches as whole, has a lot to do with why a bulk of the writings of the New Testament exist. Maybe I've taken the very long way around to say this but this takes us all the way back to the issue of there being books that bear the same name but are split into two or three individual books. When we see it in the New Testament it's an, at the time, event. What I mean by that is that circumstances caused it to happen at the time of these writings. Paul or others would sit down and write a letter. Sometimes the letter would come to an end because what needed to be said at the time had been said, but at other times circumstances such as time constraints dictated the ending of a letter. It seems clear Paul often ended a letter because it's what he had the time to write before the person who was going to deliver it was ready to leave. There was at times a balance between how urgent what Paul had to say was compared to how urgently the minister he was sending to the church and/or who would take the letter with him needed to get there. Paul often says things about a certain person setting in order the rest when he arrives. "The rest" meaning the things and/or details Paul didn't cover in the letter they were reading right then. We

also see words encouraging or acknowledging letters would be or had been shared by the church and should be shared. These are all the things that caused there to be letters, or "Epistles" as we call them by tradition, to a specific place and/or written by a specific person that consist of a first, second, and on one occasion, a third book.

It's safe to say that on many occasions there was no intent to write a second Epistle when the first one was written. However, similar reasons to why a first Epistle was written would cause a second to be written at a later date. Of course, this is all a truly hitting the high points kind of crash course on why the New Testament has these first and second books, but saying all that is to put in contrast the fact books in the Christian arrangement of the Hebrew Bible appear to have the same issues, but they do not. When we look at what Christians call the Old Testament, the reason(s) in that case are very after the fact; as in, not at the time of their writing. I just made the statement above that far more than not there was no specific intent of a New Testament writer to write a second Epistle while writing what we know as the first. The only similarity between that and the Old Testament writers is that they too did not intend to write a first and a second when writing their books, but that was because they were compiling a single book. It would be long after their book's completion that anyone would split it into a first and a second!

Let's stay in God's Word!