

A HISTORY OF ANTI-CHRIST PART IV

ISRAEL IN THE LAND THE TIME OF JUDGES



Dividing The Land - Raphael

Israel entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua around the year 2700 according to the Hebrew calendar, or approximately 1300 B.C. Of course there is no way to accurately pinpoint the exact year, let alone the exact day. But the dating of Scripture according to the lineage that led to Moses' birth and his age when he died, allows us to closely approximate the time.

By the time Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, the Trojan Wars among the Greek city states Troy and Mycenae had ended, and the glory of Egypt's New Kingdom had passed. It was about this time that the boy-king, Tutankhamen, died and was buried, his tomb to lie undisturbed until the early 20th century.

Anti-Christ had been working in human history for almost three millennia, having erased the memory of YHWH from the nations that populated the earth since Noah's Flood. Only Israel retained devotion to YHWH, and then only because of a few men who would not allow the nation to forget.

God told Moses that after he died the people would turn from YHWH to worship the foreign gods of the lands they would conquer (Deuteronomy 31:16-18):

And YHWH said to Moses, "Look, you will sleep with your fathers, and these people will rise up and go whoring after the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and will forsake Me, and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day,

and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?'

"And I will surely hide My face in that day for all the evils which they will have committed, in that they have turned to other gods."

Even so, God was faithful to His promise in helping Israel to conquer the Land (Joshua 21:43-45). Israel was not so faithful in driving out all of God's enemies, but allowed many to survive in their midst. Joshua knew the people's hearts were easily turned against God. He made them swear that they would not forget YHWH, but would resist the foreign gods of the people left among them:

And Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve YHWH, for He is a holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake YHWH and serve strange gods, then He will turn and hurt you, and consume you, after He has done you good."

And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve YHWH."

And Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen YHWH, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses."

"Now therefore," he said, "put away the strange gods that are

among you, and incline your heart to YHWH God of Israel."

And the people said to Joshua, "YHWH our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey."

So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and established for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. (Joshua 24:19-25)

This was the last time Israel would be united on the side of the True God. The subsequent history of the nation reveals warfare among themselves and constant turning away from YHWH. The anti-Christ spirit never left the Land, largely because the Israelites allowed those who worshipped false gods to remain among them. For example, the eastern tribes (Judah, Issachar and Zebulun) failed to drive out the Geshurites and the Maachathites (Joshua 13:13). Ephraim failed to eliminate the Canaanites, and Manasseh allowed several heathen peoples to remain in their midst. Every Israelite tribe, including Judah, failed to fulfill YHWH's command to thoroughly purge the Land of the pagan influences that would eventually cause Israel twice to stumble to the point where God would have to drive them out of the Land. This failure was a breach of the covenant God made with Israel to prosper them as long as they obeyed:

And an angel of YHWH came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, "I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land which I swore to your fathers, and I said, 'I will never

break my covenant with you. And you shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; you shall throw down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?

"Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out from before you, but they will be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'"

And it came to pass, when the angel of YHWH spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place "Bochim," and they sacrificed there to YHWH. (Judges 2:1-5)

The failure, of course, was Israel. They couldn't say, "The devil made me do it." However, while each individual bears responsibility for his part in the nation's failure, the collective failure is a result of the work of the anti-Christ spirit conspiring against God's plan. Nations don't move in any particular direction without being guided there. The people may succumb to anti-Christ's agenda ministered through his agents, but his plan succeeds only when the people as a whole, or in significant numbers, are seduced into following that agenda. Not every individual in Israel failed; Joshua and Caleb certainly didn't. But the nation largely failed, so all paid the price.

We see this playing out today in every nation that became "Christianized" over the centuries. Western Europe and the entire Western Hemisphere had adopted the biblical ethics of the Faith, even though not all the people have been true believers in Jesus. Yet the outward form of righteousness at least gave us God's protection and resulted in much prosperity. But just like Israel, we have allowed our prosperity to lull us into carelessness and overt sinfulness. Christendom is quickly succumbing to the paganism and hedonism that once characterized the lands it has occupied.

This, too, is the result of anti-Christ's concerted attempts to seduce entire nations through the gradual corruption of individuals. Israel's history should have been a warning to us, but we have failed to learn.

As we look at Israel's failures we see that our ever-merciful God forgave them time and time again. Each time He forgave, anti-Christ was quickly at work to subvert His plan of redemption by hoping to destroy Israel. His methods changed from time to time, as did God's way of guiding the nation. We will look at those methods with the hope that we will learn from them.

THE TIME OF JUDGES

As long as Joshua and Caleb lived, Israel held more closely, if not perfectly, to YHWH's commandments:

And the people served YHWH all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of YHWH, that He did for Israel.

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of YHWH, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all of that generation were gathered to their fathers. (Judges 2:7-10a)

In time, however, the Israelites succumbed to anti-Christ's calling to worship other gods. Having developed into an agricultural society upon putting down roots in the Land, the Israelites became attracted to the Canaanite cult of Baal and other gods and goddesses associated with fertility and the growing of crops.

And there arose another generation after them, which did not know YHWH, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel.

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of YHWH, and served Baalim. And they forsook YHWH, God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods—the gods of the people that were round about them—and bowed themselves to them, and provoked YHWH to anger.

And they abandoned YHWH, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. (Judges 2:10b-13)

In His anger, YHWH allowed the Israelites to be plundered by invaders who raided their homes and fields. Although they tried to fight, God's hand was against them, and their efforts were futile.

In His desire to save Israel, God raised up certain judges who guided them and helped them resist the invaders. Yet even then, they continued to rebel against YHWH.

Nevertheless YHWH raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those that looted them. And yet they would not listen to their judges, but they went whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves to them. They quickly turned from the way in which their fathers walked, obeying the commandments of YHWH, but they did not do so.

And when YHWH raised up judges for them, then YHWH was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge, for YHWH turned due to their groanings because of them that oppressed them and troubled them.

And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings, or from their stubborn way.

And the anger of YHWH was hot against Israel, and He said, "Because these people have transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not listened to My voice, I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died." (Judges 2:16-21)

These righteous judges were somehow able to guide Israel in the ways of God, at least sufficiently that God stayed



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His judgment upon the nation. But the struggle was a see-saw effort that resulted in judgment, then mercy, with the cycle repeated innumerable times.

Among the judges of Israel, the first mentioned by name was Othniel, a nephew of Caleb. Under Othniel Israel had peace for forty years. But the anti-Christ spirit that drove the majority of Israelites to rebel against God from the time of the Exodus continued to thrive, waiting for Othniel's death. So God again gave Israel into the hands of an oppressor, Eglon, king of Moab, for eighteen years.

Then arose Ehud who assassinated Eglon, then led Israel to victory over the Moabites. God granted Israel peace for eighty years.

After Ehud's death, the Israelites again succumbed to the anti-Christ spirit and did evil in following after the false gods in their land. So, again, they were oppressed, this time by Jabin, a king of Canaan, for twenty years.

At this time came Shamgar whose brief history mentions only that he slew six hundred Philistines with an ox goad and delivered Israel (Judges 3:31).

Ask most Christians to name the judges of Israel, and the first (and perhaps the only) name they will offer is that of Deborah, probably because, being a woman, she was unique as a judge in Israel.

Because she was a woman, "Christian" feminists like to point to Deborah as an example of how God has no preferences for leadership between men and

women—that a woman may rule over a nation just as well with God's blessing.

But the only reason Deborah was anointed as a judge and a prophetess was because the men of Israel had become weak and spiritually impotent. Even so, it was God's design that Barak lead Israel's army against Jabin's general, Sisera. Because Barak was fearful and lacking trust in God, he would go only if Deborah accompanied him. He knew that Deborah, as a prophetess, would give him God's truth, but he feared not having her alongside in order to know for certain that God was with him. There is no mention of Barak being anyone other than the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali. There is no record of his being royalty, since there were no kings in Israel to this point. Yet God chose him to lead Israel's army to victory over the Canaanites. But he had to share the glory of that victory with Deborah who did not actually lead the army or engage in the battle.

After Barak's victory Israel had peace again for forty years. Yet, again, the nation fell into idolatry, demonstrating that the anti-Christ spirit among men does not sleep for long. This time God gave them into the hands of the Midians. But He also raised up Gideon, a reluctant hero who, with God's power and a mere three hundred men, destroyed the Midianite, Amalekite, and other eastern people's armies, whose numbers were beyond counting (Judges 7:12).

In their pursuit of the remnant of their enemies' armies, Gideon and his men encountered resistance from anti-Christ in the men of Succoth and Peniel who refused to give food to them in order that they might be refreshed. But God gave Gideon's army the strength to continue, and to eventually overtake and kill the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna. Again, anti-Christ's designs were thwarted by God. Yet he was allowed to remain in order to continue testing Israel after God gave the nation peace for another forty years.

Upon Gideon's death, Israel again prostituted themselves to the Baals and forgot YHWH and all that Gideon had done for them.

Up to this time Israel had no king, but God administered His direction of the nation through His prophets and

judges. Satan knew that as long as Israel depended upon God's direct prophecies to guide them the nation could not be totally subverted. It was necessary to place the nation's directions in the hands of fallen men. The first attempt to set a king over Israel came in the person of Gideon's son Abimelech, who was born to Gideon's concubine. Abimelech gained the support of his uncles on his mother's side, who convinced the people of Shechem to follow Abimelech. They slew all but one of Gideon's seventy sons—Abimelech's half brothers by Gideon's wives—and set about to crown Abimelech king. Only Jotham escaped, and he fled to Beer in fear of Abimelech, but only after pronouncing a curse upon Abimelech and Shechem.

Abimelech's reign over Israel lasted only three years, when God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem. This evil spirit seduced the people to support Gaal, son of Ebed.

This is an interesting passage. It demonstrates how God uses the anti-Christ spirit to accomplish God's will. These evil spirits, including Satan himself, have no allegiance to anyone. Yet they are bound to accomplish God's purposes if God so demands. Even though Jesus was to later ask his adversaries how Satan's kingdom could stand if Satan's house were divided among itself, it is obvious that Satan's house is divided. Thus it must be assumed that Jesus was speaking facetiously, causing his detractors to stumble upon their own ill-conceived assumptions.

So this evil spirit sent from God set in motion events that would bring down the illegitimate reign of Abimelech as self-appointed king over Israel. Although Gaal's prideful attempt to depose Abimelech failed, Abimelech was killed in the battle at Thebez when a woman who had fled with all the citizens into the city's tower dropped an upper millstone on his head. Rather than have the people say he was killed by a woman, Abimelech called upon his armor-bearer to kill him with his sword.

Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. And God repaid all the evil of the men of

Shechem upon their heads. And the curse of Jotham, son of Jerubbaal came on them. (Judges 9:56-57)

After Abimelech's illegitimate reign several more judges took up YHWH's work in leading Israel by prophecy. It appears as if Israel escaped the anti-Christ's attempts to drive it back into idolatry between the time of Tola and Jair. There is no mention of backsliding then. But Scripture tells us that upon Jair's death the Israelites again served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Sidon, Moab, the Ammonites, and the Philistines (Judges 10:6-9).

Every time prior to this, when the Israelites confessed their sins of idolatry because of oppression by their enemies, YHWH was gracious in sending them help in the form of a judge who would lead them to victory. This time, however, YHWH tells them to go ask their false gods to deliver them because He would no longer do so. Could it be that anti-Christ would finally gain the conquest of Israel and defeat God's plan of redemption?

It was not to be. The Israelites continued to plead to YHWH and got rid of the foreign gods among them. Eventually, God raised up Jephthah, Gilead's son by a prostitute who was ostracized by Gilead's legitimate sons. When they saw they were powerless against their enemies they pleaded with Jephthah to lead them against the Ammonites, which he did.

Thus, anti-Christ's designs were again thwarted by God and His plan of redemption continued on.

After Gilead died Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel for seven years, followed by Elon for ten years. After him came Abdon, son of Hillel, from Pirathon, who led Israel for eight years.

There is no mention of Israel's defecation to idolatry during these times. But, true to form, upon Abdon's death, Israel again fell victim to the anti-Christ's seduction into idolatry, and YHWH gave them over to the Philistines for forty years.

It is at this juncture in Israel's history that God performed a mighty miracle through the birth of Samson to Manoah and his wife who had been infertile.

The history of Samson reveals one of the most incredible displays of God's power against the anti-Christ enemies of

Israel. Space doesn't allow for a detailed retelling of these displays of power; read them for yourself in chapters 14 and 15 in the Book of Judges. But there is a lesson for us all in Samson's failure and ultimate triumph over the Philistines.

Most people are familiar with the account of Delilah's deception and betrayal of Samson. Although his heart was toward God and he was used mightily by God, the weak spot in his spiritual armor was his lust which anti-Christ was able to exploit. His attraction to Philistine women was especially crucial. His Philistine wife was instrumental in starting his warfare against the Philistines. Although it appears as if Samson was playing into the anti-Christ's hands by urging his parents to get him the woman he chose from among the Philistines, it was really from YHWH who was establishing a reason to confront the Philistines in order to deliver Israel from them (Judges 14:1-4). This is another example of God using man's weaknesses and Satan's plans, to accomplish His own will.

Although Satan gained a temporary victory over Samson through Delilah's treachery, the secret of God's strength through Samson's Nazirite vow was revived when his hair again grew out, and he was able to gain the final victory by destroying the leaders of the Philistines in Dagon's temple.

Samson's rule over Israel lasted twenty years.

Civil War

After anti-Christ's efforts to destroy Israel through its heathen inhabitants had failed over a period of a few hundred years, he attempted a new strategy: destroy Israel from within through civil war. This began with the experience of a Levite who is unnamed in Scripture.

This Levite, journeying from Bethlehem after retrieving his unfaithful concubine from her father, came to Gibeah where Benjamites were living. There he accepted the hospitality of a man to spend the night. In an account reminiscent of Lot in Sodom, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house and demanded that the man send out the Levite so they could have sex with him. In response to the custom of protecting one's guests, the man offered to send his virgin daughter and the Levite's concu-

bine to them. The Levite sent out his concubine who was raped and abused throughout the night, resulting in her death. The Levite cut up his concubine and sent her parts throughout the tribes of Israel in order to rile them against the Benjamites. This created the condition for the rest of Israel to respond with a vow to destroy their Benjamite brethren for the horror of what had been done.

At first the Benjamites were able to gain a victory by slaying twenty-two thousand Israelites at Gibeah. The Israelites wept at their defeat and inquired of YHWH whether they should pursue their cause. Thus began a see-saw battle of loss and victory which, at first, seemed to demonstrate God's misjudgment:

And the children of Israel went up and wept before YHWH until evening, and asked counsel of YHWH, asking, "Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother?" And YHWH said, "Go up against him."

And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.

And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men; all these drew the sword. (Judges 20:23-25)

The question arises, "Why would YHWH tell Israel to go against the Benjamites, then allow the Benjamites to kill eighteen thousand more Israelites? The answer lies in the next few verses of Judges 20:

Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came to Bethel, and wept, and sat there before YHWH, and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before YHWH.

And the children of Israel inquired of YHWH (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days) asking, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of

Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?" And YHWH said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand." (Judges 20:26-28)

This time, Israel defeated Benjamin, killing some twenty-five thousand Benjamites and destroying the town of Gibeah.

While anti-Christ gained some ground in causing Israel to fight against one of its brethren, YHWH used this as a means to teach Israel several lessons. The first lesson was not to go into battle without the Ark of the Covenant. Although YHWH told Israel to go against Benjamin in the first two instances, He did so in response to their self-assurance that they could win without His presence in their midst. After they went to Bethel where the Ark was kept, His presence went with them. This lesson should have been unnecessary, for they had the history of the Ark's role in their previous battles in taking the Land in the first place. So in spite of Satan's ability to deceive Israel into civil war, God used these circumstances to chastise Israel and to teach the nation the importance of its reliance upon Him alone.

Another lesson was the importance of maintaining unity among the tribes. After defeating the Benjamites the other tribes of Israel lamented that they had allowed their anger to bring such devastation upon their brethren. Although they had sworn in anger to never allow their women to marry into the tribe of Benjamin, their repentance was demonstrated by killing the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead and kidnapping four hundred virgins to give to the Benjamites for wives. Also, the elders of Israel conspired with the Benjamites to kidnap young women from the town of Shiloh when they went out to celebrate the annual festival to YHWH.

This subterfuge, though done as a means to avoid the consequences of breaking an oath, demonstrated how men compromise their consciences in order to circumvent the legality of a commitment to God. Yet God honored this as a means to allow Benjamin to survive within the Israelite nation. Still, Israel continued to live in moral compromise, each man a law unto himself. ❖