



ANTI-CHRIST

PART V

ISRAEL IN THE LAND THE MONARCHY – SAUL

For some 350 years after Joshua died Israel continually fell into idolatry. The history of that period reveals that God delivered Israel into bondage to the heathen tribes that were left in the land. Each time that happened, Israel cried out to God for deliverance, professing repentance for its sins of spiritual prostitution and the sinful perversions that came with it. And each time, God raised up a leader or “judge” to deliver Israel. By the end of the age of judges, around the year 1000 B.C., the darkness of anti-Christ’s kingdom was expanding throughout the rest of the world. Various religions were finding greater expression and were developing into major influences as the anti-Christ spirit drove humanity deeper and deeper into spiritual darkness, having erased the memory of YHWH from its consciousness.

Hinduism (which teaches that everything is part of a universal spirit) especially grows to encompass the entire sub-continent of Asia, most of which would eventually become the nation of India. The people are seduced into worshipping nature to the degree that humans are subordinated in stature to animals and even insects. The caste system becomes ingrained into the consciousness of the Hindu devotees, resulting in terrible living conditions for the poor. While cattle, monkeys, and other animals are protected and cared for, the lower castes are treated as unworthy of compassion. The lie that perpetrates this evil is predicated upon the false religious belief that they are living out their reincarnation according to the quality of their former lives; to help them would hinder their spiritual progression. But not only are the lower castes considered “untouchables,” they are actually exploited and persecuted by some in the upper classes of Hindu society. If there is anywhere that the anti-Christ spirit has been able to subjugate mankind to the darkness of idolatry it has been in the Hindu culture.

In Europe the Iron Age proliferates, as iron goods are made more readily available. Iron weapons prove far superior to the bronze weapons that had been in use for almost two-and-a-half

millennia. Soon Rome would arise, depicted in Daniel’s vision of the world’s empires in the form of a great idol as a nation so great and terrible that it is represented as legs of iron (Daniel 2:33).

Even before the Iron Age, however, iron was in use to some degree. The first mention of iron is found in Genesis 4:22 where we are told of Tubalcain being an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron.

There is no dating of Israel’s first use of iron weapons, but iron is mentioned often throughout the writings of the prophets.

As the world marches inexorably toward the darkness of anti-Christ’s kingdom, Israel struggles to keep its identity with YHWH. Not content with God’s judges, Israel eventually began to seek a permanent leader – a king – to whom they could look for protection and guidance. The last of Israel’s judges would be Samuel, upon whom would fall the duty of anointing Israel’s first king.

Samuel was born as the result of his mother Hannah’s prayers and her promise that if YHWH gave her a son she would offer him to be brought up in the house of God. After Samuel was weaned Hannah took him to Eli the priest and left him there to be brought up in the knowledge of YHWH.

God had promised Eli’s ancestor Levi that his house would minister before Him forever. But the anti-Christ spirit had corrupted Eli’s own sons who did not esteem their inheritance, but abused the people and committed fornication with the women. Their evil had grown to the degree that God rescinded His promise to Eli’s house:

And a man of God came to Eli, and said to him, “Thus says YHWH, ‘Did I plainly appear to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before Me? And did I give to the house of your father all the offerings made by fire from the children of Israel?’

Why do you despise My sacrifice and My offering, which I have commanded in My tabernacle, and honor

your sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of My people Israel?"

"Therefore YHWH God of Israel says, 'I indeed said that your house, and the house of your father, should walk before Me forever.' But now YHWH says, 'Be it far from Me, for them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come that I will cut off your arm, and the arm of your father's house, so that there shall not be an old man in your house, and you shall see an enemy in My tabernacle, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. And the man of yours, whom I shall not cut off from My altar, shall be to consume your eyes, and to grieve your heart. And all the increase of your house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign to you that shall come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day both of them shall die. And I will raise Me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in My heart and in My mind, and I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in your house shall come and bow to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, "Put me, I ask you, into one of the priests' offices, so that I may eat a piece of bread."'" (1 Samuel 2:27-36)

Eli's sons fell from grace and were destroyed, but God raised up Samuel to be His priest and prophet to the nation. And all Israel recognized Samuel's anointing.

Even as Samuel led Israel, God allowed Israel's enemies, the Philistines, to plague them. After suffering defeat at the hands of the Philistines in a battle near Ebenezer and Aphek, the Israelites decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh where it was kept in the Tabernacle of God. They were aware that Israel had previously gained victory by the presence of the Ark. Yet they did not understand that they were not motivated by God's Spirit, but by another spirit. This led to a greater defeat and the capturing of the Ark by the Philistines. It also resulted in the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas, as prophesied by the man of God to Eli. It also resulted in the death of Eli that same day:

And the Philistines fought, and Israel was struck down, and they fled every man into his tent. And there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

And a man of Benjamin ran out of the army and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes torn, and with dirt upon his head. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the Ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all of the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, "What does the noise of this tumult mean?"

And the man came in quickly and told Eli.

Now Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see. And the man said to Eli, "I

am he that came out of the army, and I fled today out of the army."

And he said, "What is done there my son?"

And the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are also dead, and the Ark of God was taken."

And it happened, when he made mention of the Ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck broke, and he died, for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years. (1 Samuel 4:10-18)

Eli's heart was distressed not for his wayward sons (he knew God's judgment upon them), but for the Ark of the Covenant. For he knew that the presence of God went with the Ark, and that without it Israel had no contact with YHWH for atonement or protection.

This is reflected in the lament of Phinehas' wife upon her deathbed after giving birth that same day:

And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, close to being delivered. And when she heard the news that the Ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bent herself and brought forth, for her labor pains came upon her.

And about the time of her death, the women that stood by her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have born a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard it.

And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel," because the Ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband.

And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God was taken." (1 Samuel 4:19-22)

The Philistines, driven by the anti-Christ spirit, thought that they would be invincible because they now had the Ark. The same spirit that seduced Israel into thinking that the mere presence of the Ark would protect them, seduced the Philistines into thinking the same.

The Ark had become an object of superstition to Israel; that is why the nation suffered this defeat. They were not looking to YHWH, but to the Ark for their protection. Now the Ark had become a source of cursing for the Philistines who also thought that the gods of Israel would protect them because they possessed the Ark. But YHWH demonstrated that He is the true God in a most remarkable way:

When the Philistines took the Ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early the next day, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the Ark of YHWH. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

And when they arose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the Ark of YHWH, and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into

Dagon's house, walk on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

But the hand of YHWH was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and He destroyed them, and struck them with tumors - even Ashdod and its borders.

And when the men of Ashdod saw this, they said, "The Ark of the God of Israel shall not dwell with us, for His hand is hard upon us, and upon Dagon our god." (1 Samuel 5:2-7)

The people of Ashdod sent the Ark to Gath, but God struck Gath as He had Ashdod. So they sent the Ark to Ekron. But the people of Ekron were also plagued with death, and they panicked. Those who did not die were stricken with tumors. So they called for the Ark to be returned to Israel.

The Philistines put along side the Ark guilt offerings of five golden tumors and five golden mice to represent the plagues upon the five Philistine rulers and their people. They then placed the Ark on a new cart, hitched two cows that had calved and never been yoked, and sent it on its way to Beth Shemesh.

When the Ark arrived in Beth Shemesh the people rejoiced at first. But then seventy men who dared to look into the Ark were struck down by God. The people then sent messengers to Kiriath Jearim, telling them that the Ark had been returned, and to take the Ark to their place. The men of Kiriath Jearim took the Ark to Abinadab's house and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard it.

In all, the Philistines retained the Ark for seven months. After it was returned to Israel it stayed in Kiriath Jearim for twenty years. After that, Samuel called for Israel to rededicate itself to YHWH:

And Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to YHWH with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts to YHWH, and serve Him only, and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

Then the children of Israel put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served only YHWH.

And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel in Mizpeh, and I will pray for you to YHWH."

And they gathered together in Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before YHWH, and fasted on that day, and said there, "We have sinned against YHWH."

And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together in Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to YHWH our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it wholly for a burnt offering to YHWH. And Samuel cried out to YHWH for Israel, and YHWH heard him.

And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But YHWH thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines on

that day, and crushed them, and they were struck down before Israel.

And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh and pursued the Philistines, and struck them until they came under Bethcar. Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, "Yet here has YHWH helped us."

So the Philistines were subdued, and they no longer came into the border of Israel, and the hand of YHWH was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. (1 Samuel 7:3-13)

This period in Israel's history reveals that the true God is a jealous God who does not respect the religions of men - even the religion of His own chosen. Israel thought that as long as it possessed the Ark God would protect the nation. So it became complacent and succumbed to the seduction of the anti-Christ spirit to engage in idolatry. The nation learned that the same destruction that God wreaks upon the enemies of Israel He will wreak upon Israel regardless of how much lip service Israel gives to Him. Israel had to repent of its idolatry before God would grant it victory over the Philistines. The presence of the Ark meant nothing if God was to share His glory with the false gods of the other nations.

God destroyed Dagon in his temple, and punished the Philistines for their idolatry and superstitions. Likewise, He punished Israel for its idolatry and superstitions pertaining to the Ark. Even the Ark had become an idol competing with the God whose presence went with it.

God's people today should learn from this even as we enter into communion with one another and with the Lord Jesus Christ:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you demonstrate the Lord's death till He comes.

Therefore whoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

But let a man examine himself, and then let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment upon himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

For this reason many are weak and sickly among you, and many die. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord so that we would not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:26-32)

Even our communion can become an idol if we think the elements in themselves somehow draw us closer to God, or if they are worthy of worship. Only the true God Himself is worthy of worship, and our service to Him in truth is the best worship we have to offer.

But just as Israel did, Christians today do. Not discerning the Body of Christ, they look to men to lead them and to be their mediators to God. Priests, ministers, pastors - they are often looked to as mediators in place of Jesus, even against the wishes of some of them. And while many relish that adoration of men,

some try to point the people back to God's Word as their source for truth and healing.

"If you return to YHWH with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts to YHWH, and serve Him only, and He will deliver you," said Samuel to Israel. God says the same thing to us today. Our Philistines are the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world entices us with money, power, and prestige; the flesh entices us with illicit sex, gluttony, drunkenness, and other lusts; the devil entices us with false teachings, and religious attitudes and beliefs that enslave us to idols - many of the human variety that beguile the foolish in the name of Jesus Christ.

Saul Is Chosen

Israel never fully surrendered to God and to His Word. They rejected God as their King and demanded a man to rule them:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

But this displeased Samuel, when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to YHWH. And YHWH said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not rule over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so do they also to you. Now therefore listen to their voice. But protest solemnly to them, and show them the kind of king that shall rule over them."

And Samuel told all the words of YHWH to the people that asked a king of him. And he said, "This will be the kind of king that shall rule over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint himself captains over thousands, and captains over fifties, and will set them to plow his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

"And he will take your daughters to be confectioners, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive gardens, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give it to his officers and to his servants.

"And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep, and you shall be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king which you shall have chosen for yourselves, and YHWH will not hear you in that day."

Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel, and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, so that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." (1 Samuel 8:4-20)

It is clear that Israel no longer trusted God to be their King. The anti-Christ spirit had confused their reasoning and blinded their eyes to their lack of faith. On the one hand they acknowledged that God spoke to them through Samuel; they thought that they trusted God to lead them in their battles with their enemies. On the other hand, they didn't understand that their trust in the Ark rather than in God was the cause of their defeat at the hands of the Philistines. Rather than continue in faith and repentance, they chose to reject God in favor of a man to lead them. By doing so, they made it easier for anti-Christ to plague Israel. If the man Israel chose over God failed, Israel would suffer as a consequence of his sins. Before, when every man was a law unto himself, each man suffered for his own sins; now the nation would suffer for the sins of its kings.

Yet God did not leave it to Israel to choose their first king; He made the choice and brought Samuel into contact with Saul, a Benjamite who entered into Samuel's area in search of his father's donkeys.

Saul was confused that someone of his low estate should be chosen to rule over all Israel.

It was sometime around the year 3100 by the Hebrew calendar, or 1000-900 B.C., that Israel's first king, Saul, was anointed by the prophet Samuel to rule over Israel. At first Saul exhibited the humility necessary to serve God and nation. Yet within two years of being crowned king he acted faithlessly. Early in his instructions to Saul, Samuel told him to wait seven days for Samuel to come to him after Saul went to Gilgal. There Samuel would sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (1 Samuel 10:8). After Saul initially defeated the Ammonites in battle, he led Israel to victories for two years. When he got to Gilgal he waited for Samuel as he had been instructed. But his men were in fear because Saul's son Jonathan had attacked a Philistine outpost and stirred the Philistines to come against Israel with a great army. In response to the fear of his men, and with Samuel not appearing at the appointed time, Saul became impatient and decided to offer the sacrifices himself - something he was not anointed to do:

When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were distressed) then the people hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he stayed in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

And he waited seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from him.

And Saul said, "Bring here a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings."

And he offered the burnt offering. And it happened that as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him, that he might bless him. And Samuel said, "What have you done?"

And Saul said, "Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash, therefore I said, 'The

Philistines will now come down on me in Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to YHWH,' I therefore forced myself and offered a burnt offering."

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of YHWH your God, which he commanded you, or now YHWH would have established your kingdom upon Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. YHWH has sought Himself a man after His own heart, and YHWH has commanded him to be captain over his people, because you have not kept that which YHWH commanded you. (1 Samuel 13:6-14)

Although Saul ruled Israel for forty-two years, all that time was spent in fear and anger for having lost his kingdom to another. He knew his days were numbered, but he didn't know when they would come to an end.

In this tragic saga we see the anti-Christ spirit creating conditions to tempt Saul to disobey God. The idea was to thwart God's anointed king and hopefully destroy Israel as a result. From that time on Saul's kingship was cursed, and the anti-Christ spirit came against him in force. Yet God blessed Saul with victory after victory. But the anti-Christ spirit, which always acts contrary to God's Word, infected Saul and his army. They proved faithless when, after defeating the Amalekites, they did not destroy all life among them, but kept the better livestock, as well as sparing Agag, king of the Amalekites. For Saul's part, he lied to Samuel, first about performing all of God's commands, and then by telling him that the livestock were taken in order to sacrifice them to YHWH:

Then the word of YHWH came to Samuel, saying, "It sorrows Me that I have set up Saul to be king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments."

And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to YHWH all night.

And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and, look, he set himself up a place, and has gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal."

And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you by YHWH. I have performed the commandment of YHWH."

And Samuel said, "Then what does this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear, mean?"

And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to YHWH your God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stay, and I will tell you what YHWH has said to me this night."

And he said to him, "Say on."

And Samuel said, "When you were little in your own sight, were you not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and YHWH anointed you king over Israel? And YHWH sent you on a journey, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until

they are consumed. Why then did you not obey the voice of YHWH, but flew upon the spoil, and did evil in the sight of YHWH?"

And Saul said to Samuel, "Yes, I have obeyed the voice of YHWH, and have gone the way which YHWH sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to YHWH your God in Gilgal."

And Samuel said, "Has YHWH as great a delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of YHWH? Look, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of YHWH, he has also rejected you from being king." (1 Samuel 15:10-23)

Saul blamed his army for his own sin. He had the authority to demand total obedience to God's command, but he gave in to his men. Whether or not they took the livestock to sacrifice to YHWH, or Saul said this in an attempt to appease Samuel, the truth remains that this was an act of disobedience. We cannot assume that the intent of our hearts is sufficient reason to act contrary to God's Word. We may think that a "good work" will please God, but if it is contrary to His Word we would be in rebellion.

An example prevalent in the Body of Christ today is that of women teaching in and/or taking authority over God's assemblies, and even to the Body of Christ at large. Many teach in the Christian media, some thinking that because they have their husband's or pastor's approval it must be acceptable to God. Women may have a natural talent to teach, but they are not anointed to teach God's Word. Scripture restricts the elder women to teaching the younger women to be good wives and stewards at home. They may certainly disciple other women, evangelize, prophesy and join in discipling individual new believers, as did Priscilla with her husband Aquila. But beyond this, women are not to teach, certainly not in the assembly or to the Body of Christ in general.

I mention this not to denigrate women, but because it is such a prevalent form of rebellion today. Nor should we neglect the same sin of rebellion in men who assume authority over God's people without His anointing - who lead them astray through glib oratory and flattery. All these are succumbing to the same anti-Christ spirit that seduced Saul. Theirs is the same sin Saul committed, thinking that his sacrifices were worthy when they were offered contrary to God's commands. Both at Gilgal and after defeating the Amalekites Saul exhibited self-pride; the humility that he possessed at the start of his rule over Israel had given way to the anti-Christ spirit of rebellion. Even though he confessed his sin, Saul was never to find favor with God again. God had someone else in store - someone of whom God would say, "He is a man after My own heart." The stage was set for Saul's departure, but it would not be until David had been tested by God to show his worthiness to be king. That testing took several years, during which the anti-Christ spirit in Israel as well as in Israel's enemies repeatedly manifested itself.

David's Anointing

Even while Saul continued to reign as king in Israel, Samuel was commissioned by God to seek out God's choice to replace him. Following God's direction, Samuel was led to a small shepherd boy, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem. The transition of the throne from Saul to David would involve the anti-Christ spirit's attempts to kill David through Saul, even though that spirit was sent by God Himself:

But the Spirit of YHWH departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from YHWH vexed him. And Saul's servants said to him, "Now look, an evil spirit from God vexes you. Let our lord now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is a skillful player on a harp, and it will be, when the evil spirit from God is upon you, that he shall play with his hand, and you will be well."

And Saul said to his servants, "Now provide me a man that can play well, and bring him to me."

Then one of the servants answered, and said, "Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is skillful in playing, and a mighty, valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a handsome person, and YHWH is with him."

Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep."

And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son to Saul. And David came to Saul and stood before him. And he had great affection for him, and he became his armor bearer.

And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David, I ask you, stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight."

And it happened that when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took a harp and played with his hand. So Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit left him. (1 Samuel 16:14-23)

David went back-and-forth between his father and Saul. He was with his father, tending sheep, while his three older brothers followed Saul to war. At that time the Philistines were stirred up by anti-Christ to threaten Israel. They sent their champion, Goliath to challenge Israel to send its champion to meet him in combat. The terms set forth by Goliath were that if he won, Israel would be subject to the Philistines; if the Israelite won, the Philistines would become subject to Israel. Because Goliath was a descendant of the Rapha – the giants of that day – he was a fearsome opponent. No one in Israel came close to him in size and strength. Surely the challenge could not be withstood with any assurance of victory on the part of Israel. Anti-Christ was convinced that if Israel attempted to stand up to this challenge he would gain a significant victory, causing God's people to become subjected to him through the Philistines.

But God's people do not stand by human strength, but by the Spirit of God (Zechariah 4:6). And God sent David to face Goliath. Coming to the Valley of Elah, where both armies had drawn battle lines, David heard Goliath's challenge. He was filled with righteous anger at this giant taunting the armies of the living God, and told Saul that he would face Goliath.

Rejecting the armor that Saul placed upon him, David went to meet Goliath with only his staff and his sling:

And the Philistine came on and drew near to David, and the man that bore the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he scorned him because he was only a youth, and tanned and handsome.

And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air, and to the beasts of the field."

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield. But I come to you in the name of YHWH of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day YHWH will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And I will give the carcasses of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that YHWH saves not with sword and spear, for the battle is YHWH's, and He will give you into our hands."

And it happened, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took from it a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine in his forehead so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine, and slew him, but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath, and slew him, and cut off his head with it.

And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines until you come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath, and to Ekron. And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they plundered their tents. (1 Samuel 17:41-53)

David repelled the anti-Christ's new attempt to destroy Israel. But this also set in place the groundwork for Saul's bitterness to take root in his heart. At first Saul rewarded David for his successes in leading his army, even giving David his daughter Michal. When the army returned home after its campaign against the Philistines, the women came out from all the towns to meet Saul with singing and dancing. But their song displeased Saul:

And the women answered one another as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

And Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him. And he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thou-

sands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands. And what more can he have but the kingdom?"

And Saul kept his eye on David from that day and on. (1 Samuel 18:7-9)

Saul's words were prophetic. For David was chosen by God to inherit the kingdom of Israel. The anti-Christ spirit that God sent upon Saul stirred him up to kill David:

And it came to pass the next day, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house, and David played with his hand as at other times. And there was a javelin in Saul's hand, and Saul hurled the javelin, for he said, "I will strike David even to the wall with it."

And twice David escaped out of his presence. And Saul was afraid of David because YHWH was with him, and had left Saul. (1 Samuel 18:10-12)

Had anti-Christ been able to kill David by Saul's hand, God's prophecies of the Redeemer would have been seriously hindered if not completely thwarted. But God's hand was upon David to protect him by any means.

The more success David had in his army campaigns, the more Saul feared him and sought to kill him. He overplayed his hand on one occasion by telling his son Jonathan to kill David. Jonathan loved David and warned him to stay away. In David's absence Jonathan pleaded with Saul to spare David:

And Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good for you. For he put his life in his hand and slew the Philistine, and YHWH wrought a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?"

And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, "As YHWH lives, he shall not be slain."

And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan showed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as in times past. (1 Samuel 19:4-7)

But anti-Christ again tempted Saul to kill David, even against the oath that Saul swore before God:

And there was war again, and David went out and fought with the Philistines and slew them with a great slaughter, and they fled from him.

And the evil spirit from YHWH was upon Saul as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand, and David played with his hand. And Saul sought to strike David even to the wall with the javelin, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he struck the javelin into the wall. And David fled, and escaped that night.

Saul also sent messengers to David's house to watch him, and to slay him in the morning. And Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be slain."

So Michal let David down through a window, and he went and fled, and escaped. And Michal took an idol and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for its bolster, and covered it with a cloth. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick."

And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed so that I may kill him."

And when the messengers came in, behold, there was an idol in the bed, with a pillow of goat's hair for its bolster.

And Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me so, and sent my enemy away so that he escaped?"

And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go; why should I kill you?'"

So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth. (1 Samuel 19:8-18)

By breaking his oath to spare David, Saul became an anti-Christ himself. He no longer needed the evil spirit to goad him into killing David; it became an obsession within his own spirit. Yet God imposed His own Spirit upon Saul so that, even in his pursuit of David, he fell on his face and prophesied. Following this, the anti-Christ Saul commanded Doeg the Edomite to slay Ahimelech, the priest who gave David the show bread and Goliath's sword, ignorant of David's flight from Saul. Not only did he command the killing of Ahimelech, but he commanded that all 85 priests in Ahimelech's household, as well as all the men, women, children, and livestock of the priests' town, Nob, be put to the sword.

Here is a great lesson for us today. Because one retains the gift of prophecy does not mean that one is obedient to God, or is in God's favor. The gifts and callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29). Saul's calling as king was not ended; God was still preparing David to take his place. In the interim, Saul's anointing remained and, as he had in the past when his heart was right with God, he still prophesied even while breaking his oath with God to spare David's life.

There are many today who were at one time anointed by God to ministry, but have fallen away into damnable heresies. They still retain the gifts that God bestowed upon them, but they are God's enemies, and blasphemers against His Word. This is why all things must be tested by Scripture to see if they are true. We cannot trust the words or deeds of men no matter how miraculous they may appear, or how faithful the men were in the past..

In truth, these people have deluded even themselves to think that God is still with them, just as Saul thought that God had delivered David into his hands when David went to save the town of Keilah from the Philistines:

And it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he is shut in by entering into a town that has gates and bars."

And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

And David knew that Saul secretly practiced mischief against him, and he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here."

Then David said, O YHWH, God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O YHWH, God of Israel, I beseech you, tell Your servant." And YHWH said, "He will come down."

Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?"

And YHWH said, "They will deliver you up."

Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and left Keilah, and went wherever they could go. And it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, so he did not go there. (1 Samuel 23:7-13)

Once again, the anti-Christ was thwarted in trying to destroy God's plans.

Saul made it his lifelong passion to kill David, going from place to place in search of him. Yet David acted honorably in every encounter with Saul, even twice sparing Saul his life when David could easily have taken it. Each time, Saul swore he would not seek David's life, but each time, he broke that vow. The end for Saul came when he decided to pierce the veil of death and practice necromancy, demonstrating how far he had fallen from trusting God for his spiritual and temporal welfare. He turned to the anti-Christ for direction.

The anti-Christ spirit led Saul to fear greatly when the Philistines came to confront his army at Gilboa, driving him to seek the witch of Endor so he could enquire of the deceased Samuel what he should do. This was the final rebellious act of Saul, and sealed his death and that of his sons, thus ending his kingdom in Israel.

Just as Samuel prophesied to him, the next day Saul died on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines also killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua.

One might ask why the righteous Jonathan had to die. Why did God not spare him for his faithfulness? He had acknowledged that David would rule, and gladly acquiesced to be by David's side.

God's justice and rule of law is inviolable. As long as Jonathan lived, the crown could not be given to David. Legally, it must pass from father to son, or to the next male of kin. Jonathan will not lose his eternal reward, but he would have been in David's way - albeit unintentionally - if he had lived.

Throughout David's ordeal in eluding Saul, and in his exile, David wrote many of his psalms with which we are blessed today. His affliction was used by God to minister His Word to His people for all time. ❖