

A HISTORY OF ANTI-CHRIST PART III

— ANCIENT ISRAEL THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY



The anti-Christ spirit that disheartened the Israelite scouts who spied out the Promised Land (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) inflamed the hearts of the people as well. They began to murmur and to accuse Moses and Aaron of leading them to their deaths:

And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept that night.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!" or "Would God we had died in this wilderness!" And, "Why has YHWH brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

And they said to one another, "Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt." (Numbers 14:1-4)

It is nothing short of amazing that the entire congregation—all the people, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb—lost heart and desired to return to Egypt rather than face the prospect of taking the Promised Land. This, in spite of the many miracles that had sustained them in their journey to this point. This demonstrates the seductive nature of anti-Christ, and how an entire nation can be beguiled away from God's promises and protection through loss of faith. Although they accused Moses and Aaron of leading them astray, their accusation re-

ally struck at God Himself. So much did they reject God that the entire camp called for Joshua and Caleb to be stoned after they implored them to trust YHWH. Had it not been for Moses' intervention, God would have destroyed the entire nation and begun again with Moses. But He relented upon Moses' plea for the people, and swore that none but Joshua and Caleb would enter into the Promised Land.

And YHWH spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmurs against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say to them, 'As truly as I live, says YHWH, as you have spoken in My ears, so I will do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness, and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, without doubt you shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

"But your little ones, which you said should be a prey, them I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear

your whoredoms, until your carcasses are wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which you searched the land—even forty days; each day for a year—shall you bear your iniquities. Even forty years, and you shall know my breach of promise.

"I YHWH have said, 'I will surely do it to all this evil congregation that are gathered together against me; in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.'" (Numbers 14:26-35)

Upon hearing the words of YHWH conveyed to them by Moses, and witnessing the destruction by the plague of the unfaithful spies, the people cried out in repentance. But the anti-Christ spirit among them took another tack to destroy them:

And they rose up early in the morning, and got them up into the top of the mountain, saying, "Look, we are here, and will go up to the place which YHWH has promised, for we have sinned."

And Moses said, "Why now do you transgress the commandment of YHWH? But it shall not prosper. Do not go up, for YHWH is not among you, that you be not killed before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword, because you are turned away from YHWH; therefore YHWH will not be with you."

But they presumed to go up to the hill top. Nevertheless the ark of the covenant of YHWH, and Moses, did not leave the camp.

Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and crushed them, even unto Hormah. (Numbers 14:40-45)

The anti-Christ spirit is so deceptive as to make God's people think they are doing right when, in truth, they are acting presumptuously. No doubt these men thought they were obeying YHWH by acting on His original command. But they were now acting in disobedience, all the while hoping that YHWH would rescind His declaration to make them wander in the wilderness for forty years.

The lesson to be learned here is that, regardless of what God says, we must submit to it, even if it seems hard for us to bear. We cannot go against His Word even if we think we are serving Him in doing so.

This deceptive spirit is alive in today's churches that presume to serve God by means of their own reasoning according to how they think God thinks, rather than by obedience to His written Word. But just as God used the anti-Christ, ungodly Amalekites and Canaanites to destroy the rebellious Israelites in their presumption, so He will use the anti-Christ elements of today's world to destroy those who call themselves by the name of "Christian" while continuing to offer strange fire to Him. It is the presumptuousness of today's major movements within Christianity—the Purpose-Driven, Emergent, and myriad other false movements—that are leading the people to disobey God, thinking they are doing Him service. It is the feel-good mentality of the religious anti-Christ spirit that is deceiving the vast majority of "the congregation" today just as it did in Moses' time.

It was after this that Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On exhibited their anti-Christ spirit in challenging Moses' authority, as we delineated in Part 2. Yet even after God destroyed these rebels in such a spectacular fashion, the Israelites continued to be infected by the anti-Christ spirit:

But the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of YHWH."

And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of YHWH appeared.

And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation.

And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, "Get yourself up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment."

And they fell upon their faces, and Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer, and put fire in it from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from YHWH; the plague has begun."

And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation, and, behold, the plague had begun among the people. And he put on incense, and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah. (Numbers 16:41-49)

Again God showed Himself mighty in His wrath, yet merciful in accepting Aaron's atonement.

Yet it never occurred to the Israelites that their spiritual enemy was forcing their hand in causing them to rebel against God. His plan to utterly destroy God's chosen people in order to prevent God's promise from being fulfilled was hidden to them. It's possible that Moses alone understood the spiritual battle taking place, since he had interceded on Israel's behalf with the plea that God's promise to His people would be looked upon by their enemies as evidence of

God's inability to accomplish His purpose.

The peoples' ignorance and fear continued to plague them as, time and again, they provoked God. Even after God's supernatural power was again evidenced through the budding of Aaron's rod to prove the Levites as the chosen priesthood, the people succumbed to fear:

And YHWH said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and You shall quite take away their murmurings from me, so that they do not die."

And Moses did so. As YHWH commanded him, so he did.

And the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever comes anything near to the tabernacle of YHWH will die; will we be consumed with dying?" (Numbers 17:10-13)

After all that YHWH had brought them through, the Israelites continued to act in unbelief and fear.

Is it any different with God's people today? How often have we accused God of plotting against us? How often have we blamed Him for our troubles? "Why me, God?" is a familiar lament of so many who claim to be His children. Fear and faith cannot abide together. We must cling to one or the other. And although circumstances may be difficult—even perilous—they are meant to test our faith and to help us grow in grace. Death cannot part us from our Savior if we remain in the faith:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written, "For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present,

nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

Let us take a lesson from the Israelites' unfaithfulness and fear. Let us not look upon them as foolish as long as we continue in unbelief ourselves.

God's enemy seeks to discourage His people from trusting Him. Every time we succumb to faithlessness we succumb to the anti-Christ spirit working against the purposes of God.

FROM KADESH TO MOAB

Throughout Israel's forty-year banishment in the wilderness they continually tested God's love and patience. Their first recorded stop at Kadish, where Miriam died, saw them again accusing God and Moses of leading them to their deaths:

And there was no water for the congregation. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses, and spoke, saying, "Would God that we had died when our brethren died before YHWH! And why have you brought the congregation of YHWH into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us in to this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink." (Numbers 20:2-5)

Again, the Israelites lamented the loss of Egypt. And, again, they present for us today an example of our own conflicted natures: that of the flesh and of the spirit. We want to revel in our position of salvation, but often desire the sins from which we have been delivered. Perhaps we don't have as many material possessions today because we willingly gave up striving in an ungodly, and even sinful, manner to have them. Perhaps our trials to bring us to perfection have cost us our health or our popularity, or some other precious element that appeals to the flesh. Do we ac-

cuse God of trying to destroy us, as if He doesn't love us? Or do we lament our former life in which we had so much more enjoyment (but less joy, if we will be truthful)?

The believer's life in this world is our wilderness journey. We are bound for the Promised Land, but in the meantime we must endure the rigors that come with following Jesus Christ:

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'The servant is not greater than his lord.' If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.

"But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent me." (John 15:18-21)

"These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Dearly beloved, I implore you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly desires, which war against the soul, having your conduct honest among the Gentiles so that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they will see, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11-12)

Fleshly desires are not only those that tend toward sexual sin, but anything contrary to God's will.

Were the leeks and garlic of Egypt evil? Of course not.

Was the desire of the Israelites to return to Egypt in order to have them evil? Absolutely.

What do you desire that would require you to return to your old life to have it?

We must continually be on our guard against subtle temptations to give in to our sin nature. Even Moses failed and, in doing so, cost himself the pleasure of entering into the Promised Land with the people in due time:

And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod, and gather the assembly together, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes. And it shall give forth its water, and you shall bring forth to them water out of the rock. So you shall give the congregation and their beasts drink.

And Moses took the rod from before YHWH, as He commanded him.

And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels! Must we fetch you water out of this rock?"

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he struck the rock twice. And the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

And YHWH spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." (Numbers 20:7-12)

What unbelief did Moses exhibit? He certainly believed that water would flow from the rock. But unbelief takes many forms. Moses' unbelief was manifested in his disobedience as to how he was to bring forth the water. God told him to speak to the rock, but instead he struck the rock not once, but twice.

Rather than tell the people that YHWH had told him to give them water from the rock he chastised them and made it appear as if he, himself, were performing a miracle.

Could this have been self-pride? It certainly appears so.

And self-pride is an example of serious unbelief. It is the sin of Satan. It is the sin of anti-Christ manifested even through God's greatest prophet.

This is another example of a godly man doing God's work in his own flesh. The consequences affected not only Moses, but Aaron as well, since Aaron shared in Moses' ministry.

How we must guard against succumbing to that same anti-Christ spirit that plagues us all as long as we remain in the flesh.

It serves no real purpose to detail every single instance of the anti-Christ spirit raising its head during Israel's journey in the wilderness. That journey is a history of continual contention against God's plan of redemption. As long as things went according to the people's perception of good they were relatively compliant; when things got difficult they murmured against Moses and sought to return to Egypt and to worship false Gods. Even as God sustained them with manna and kept their clothing from deteriorating for the entire forty years of their wilderness journey, the people continued to complain. Even victory after victory over their enemies, impelled by the anti-Christ spirit to destroy them along their way, did not quell the Israelites' discontent.

In the midst of their victories the anti-Christ spirit seduced many to engage in idolatry:

And Israel camped in Shittim, and the people began to commit fornication with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods.

And Israel joined itself to Baal Peor: and the anger of YHWH was kindled against Israel. (Numbers 25:1-3)

Astonishingly, it was Balaam whom anti-Christ used to lure the Israelites into idolatry with the Midianites. Balaam, though a Midianite, was a prophet of YHWH who had previously obeyed YHWH in refusing to curse Israel at the behest of Balak, king of Moab (Numbers

22:1-24:25). Yet even then he vacillated, trying again and again to see if YHWH would honor his sorceries. Eventually he was held responsible for Israel's idolatry with Moab and Midian, and was slain (Numbers 31:8).

Clearly, had God's hand not been on Israel it would have gone the way of all nations—into total idolatry. That is the human condition. Without the guiding hand of God upon one's life one is going to go after false gods—gods that are made in the image of man.

At the same time Israel was wandering in the desert—approximately 1400 BC—the first of today's "great world religions," Hinduism, was beginning to take root. The *Rig Veda*, believed to be the oldest living religious literature of the world¹ was being composed.

The *Rig Veda* is a collection of over one thousand hymns to a pantheon of deities—the vedic deities—that evolved into Hinduism within the Indian culture on the sub-continent of Asia. It was composed by Aryans that migrated to India and settled in the Punjab region.² These were most likely descendants of Noah's son Japheth.

Prior to the rise of Hinduism the nations—apart from Israel—had succumbed to the anti-Christ spirit through localized religious systems that gradually erased the memory of the true God and Creator, YHWH, from the minds of the people. Today a large portion of humanity still adheres to local superstitions, but the vast majority belongs to one of five major religious systems: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (named in order of their development). Older than all these, of course, is the original Faith first vested in Adam, then in order in Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and culminating in the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The pure Faith of YHWH is adherence to God's Word without regard to human tradition and religious understanding. It transcends even Christianity which comprises many and varied philosophies which, though

centered on the person of Jesus, depart from biblical faith according to the teachings of particular Christian institutions called churches.

Judaism began its slide into apostasy even during the time of Moses through those who followed his detractors and sought to subvert God's plan for Israel. Through the blending of the Hebrew Scriptures with the ancient mystery religion of Egypt these anti-Christ's subverted the faith of many in Israel. They developed a rabbinic system of religion that outwardly espoused the Law of Moses, but inwardly contrived to use it to bring the people into submission to their religious rule for personal gain. Over the centuries this developed into the Kabbalah—a mystery religion based on Jewish tradition blended with the ancient mysteries of Egypt and Babylon. When Jesus came, this is what He had to contend with.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

As Israel approached the Promised Land, it was time for Moses to die. Although his one indiscretion kept him from entering the land with Israel, his faithfulness in leading them for forty years was rewarded by his being able to climb a mountain and see the land from afar. Anti-Christ—Satan—had failed to destroy Israel or to dissuade the nation from its purpose. His anger was so great that he sought Moses' body, most likely so he could desecrate it in some manner. But God's archangel, Michael, fought with Satan and prevailed, calling upon YHWH to rebuke him (Jude 1:9).

Thus, Israel's wilderness journey was completed, and they prepared for battle to conquer the land God had led them to for an everlasting inheritance.

ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

The next evidence of anti-Christ's influence among God's chosen nation after its journey in the wilderness came almost immediately upon its entrance into the Promised Land.

1 *World Religions From Ancient History to the Present*, Ed., Geoffrey Parrinder (New York: Facts on File, 1983), p. 193.

2 *Ibid.*

Even as God gave Jericho into Israel's hand in miraculous fashion, with hardly a battle fought, Achan, son of Carmi, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the plunder, all of which had been devoted to destruction along with the city and its inhabitants.

Satan knew God's manner of dealing with Israel's sins was to hold the entire nation accountable for even one man's rebellion. The anti-Christ spirit within Achan led him to disobey the command to destroy everything within Jericho, thus bringing God's wrath upon Israel, which caused defeat at Ai:

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing, and the anger of YHWH was kindled against the children of Israel.

And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and view the country."

And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said to him, Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and strike Ai. And do not make all the people to become weary there, for they are but few."

So of the people about three thousand men went up there, and they fled from the men of Ai.

And the men of Ai struck of them about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate even to Shebarim, and struck them in the going down. Therefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

And Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of YHWH until the evening—he and the elders of Israel—and put dust on their heads.

And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord GOD, why have You at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to

God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turns their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and will surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. And what will You do to Your great name?"

And YHWH said to Joshua, "Get yourself up! Why do you lie thus upon your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them, for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and deceived also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.

Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed. Neither will I be with you anymore, except you destroy the accursed from among you." (Joshua 7:1-12)

Some, using their human reasoning, would fault God for holding the entire nation accountable for one man's sin. But there is more to this than meets the eye. God knows the hearts of all men. And he knew Joshua's heart and how even he would succumb to the same anti-Christ spirit that caused Israel to accuse God of leading them to their destruction in the wilderness. For here he laments that it would have been better to have stayed on the other side of Jordan than to obey God in taking possession of the Promised Land. Thus, one man's sin exposed the sin latent in Moses' successor—the leader of the nation. This is why YHWH spoke harshly with Joshua, asking him why he was lying upon his face. Joshua should have known that any defeat of Israel would be the result of secret sin, and should have been on his way to deal with it, rather than lying on his face lamenting God's direction.

The more we walk with the Lord the more we ought to be able to see how events in our lives reveal the sins and failures within our character that we might not even be aware of. How often, though,

do we accuse God for our misfortune rather than search for the evil within that has caused us to fail.

But here we must have discernment to know when God is testing us as opposed to when He is chastising us. This takes serious contemplation upon our lives and how they measure up to His Word.

If we find God is dealing with sin in our lives then we must do as Joshua did: root it out and destroy it. Otherwise we will suffer one defeat after another.

God did not cause Israel to fail at Ai in order to destroy the nation, but to awaken it to its secret sin. Unfortunately, it cost the lives of otherwise innocent men. The consequences of sin often affect others besides the one sinning.

After faithfully dealing with Achan by putting him to death, Joshua led Israel to take Ai. All the kings west of the Jordan heard about it and were compelled to attack Israel. Anti-Christ, failing to destroy Israel to this point, sought to bring the united force of all the western cities in the Promised Land against Israel in one fell swoop (Joshua 9:1-2). Israel defeated them, then turned its campaign against the southern cities, then the northern cities, in that order. In all, Israel defeated thirty-one cities, keeping only the inhabitants of Gibeon as slaves, only because of Gibeon's ability to trick Joshua into granting it safety (Joshua 9:3-10:4).

Still, Israel was not able to conquer all the territory, as certain Canaanites remained in the land. This was probably due to Israel's lack of resolve to utterly destroy every aspect of pagan culture in order to purify the land completely. While the nation as a whole at the time was dedicated to conquest, there evidently were pockets of resistance that found the hedonism of the pagans in their midst appealing.

Yet Israel was able to settle in the Promised Land and to allot to each tribe its portion. The anti-Christ spirit had failed to prevent God from keeping this promise that was crucial to His plan of redemption.