

FIGHTING AGAINST GOD

A Devotional Meditation on Chukat (Decree)

Numbers 19:1-22:1; Judges 11:1-33

1 Samuel 20:27-32; Jeremiah 21:1-10; Acts 5:27-40; Hebrews 4:1-13

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Why is it that the greatest opposition to God's plans and purposes comes from within the family of God? For example, mainstream American denominations had trouble accepting the Jesus Movement of the 1970s, even though it brought life and hope to a young generation desperately seeking truth. At the turn of the 20th century, the church took issue with the Pentecostal awakening highlighted by the Azusa Street Revival, even though the power of the Holy Spirit was demonstrated in changed lives and love that broke through racial barriers. In the same way, "respectable" church folk questioned whether God could be involved in the "undignified" open air preaching of the First and Second Great Awakenings. Yet, the Christian nature of the United States was birthed in those moves of God.



Photo by Orest Ukrainsky, New Lisbon, New Jersey, August 20, 2014, [via Flickr](#).

Two centuries before the First Great Awakening, the Reformation brought division, war, and persecution among Christians in Europe. At first, it was the Church of Rome opposing reforms like translation of God's Word into the languages of the common people, and then it was the Protestants who persecuted Puritans, Anabaptists, and others who deviated from their new orthodoxy.

This trend began long before the religious establishment of the First Century opposed Yeshua of Nazareth, and tried to suppress His followers. They did so even though some Jewish leaders like Rabbi Gamaliel recognized God's hand in Yeshua's Kingdom message and offered wise counsel like this:

So now I tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if this plan or undertaking is of men, it will come to an end; but if it is of God, you will not be able to stop them. You might even be found fighting against God.

Acts 5:38-39 TLV

That advice from a prominent Jewish scholar echoed the godly counsel given throughout the history of Israel. Jeremiah spoke similar counsel to King Zedekiah by telling him to surrender to the Babylonians because that was God's provision for life in the midst of judgment. Jonathan, son of King Saul, offered similar counsel by his actions on behalf of the future King David. Sadly, even though Saul knew that God would transfer the kingdom to David, he still tried to stop God's plan. In the time of the Judges, when God called Jephthah to be the deliverer of Israel east of the Jordan, he first had to overcome the hostility of Jephthah's brothers. Scripture says:

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was son of a prostitute, while Gilead was Jephthah's father. But Gilead's wife bore him sons, and when the wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You won't inherit in our father's house, for you are a son of another woman."

Judges 11:1-2 TLV

It wasn't Jephthah's fault that his father had a lapse of judgment and produced a son out of wedlock. Nevertheless, his half-brothers used that to disqualify him from whatever inheritance his father might have set aside for him. They removed him from the family altogether, until the king of Ammon invaded and threatened their inheritance. That's when they needed a mighty warrior like Jephthah to be their deliverer.

There's nothing like an external threat to heal a feud among brothers. Jephthah's brothers pleaded with him not only to lead the Gileadites against the Ammonites, but also to become their chief. Thus, God's unlikely and far-from-perfect candidate stepped into the position he had been born to fill.

The Ammonites, along with the Moabites and Edomites, were branches of the Covenant family of Abraham. Ammon and Moab were descended from Abraham's nephew Lot, and Edom was the nation of Abraham's grandson Esau. Even though they were not descended from the primary line of God's Covenant people, He still reserved for them an inheritance in what is now the Kingdom of Jordan. The legacy of those ancient peoples lives on in Jordan to this day – particularly in obstruction to the full restoration and final redemption of all Israel.

In ancient times, God prohibited Israel from taking land belonging to their cousins, even though those lands fell within the territory God promised to Abraham and his seed. That's why the Israelites asked to pass through Edom on the way to the conquest of Canaan. When Edom refused, they went around both Edom and Moab and asked the Amorite King Sihon for passage through his territory. He and his neighbor, King Og, responded by going to war against Israel, and were utterly defeated. That's how Israel came to possess the land of Gilead – some of which had belonged to the Ammonites and Moabites until Og and Sihon had taken it from them.

This ancient dispute over inheritance of the land inspired Ammon, Moab, and Edom to fight many wars against Israel. Those wars continue to the present day, according to Jewish teaching. The sages identify Edom with Rome, and by extension with Western Civilization, which grew out of Greco-Roman Civilization. That's a plausible explanation for the spiritual roots of the world's war against the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

We expect external enemies to fight against God's purposes. They can't win, of course. No weapon can prosper against God's redemptive plans, or against those He has called to carry out His plans. However, weapons wielded from inside the camp are a different matter.

Consider, for instance, that the reason Israel had to ask permission to go through Edom's territory was because they had rebelled against God's directives a generation earlier. He told Israel to go up and take Canaan, but the people deemed the task too hard. That's why God had them wander in the desert for 40 years. He continued to provide for

them, but manna in the desert and water from the rock weren't the same as the rest He had promised in the land of their inheritance.

What did those ancient Hebrews expect? Maybe they didn't know for sure, but they did know they didn't like what God was doing, nor the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The result was an endless series of complaints and division as successive waves of rebels made their desert experience more unpleasant than it had to be.

How are we different? Where would we be now if Yeshua's followers from the nations hadn't pulled away from our Jewish cousins in the faith? Where would we be if one generation after another hadn't found reason to divide over an offense, or a doctrinal interpretation? Maybe the full restoration and final redemption of Israel and the nations would have happened already. We can't know for sure, but what we can know, if we have discerning eyes, ears, and hearts, is how our Redeemer is bringing together the scattered and divided parts of His Covenant Family. It doesn't look like church as we've known it, nor like synagogue as our Jewish brethren have known it. It's difficult and uncomfortable, but it seems to be the great move of God in our day. If we're not sure, it might be good to be quiet and observe. Otherwise, we might be found fighting against God.