**What On Earth Is God Doing? Satan’s Conflict With God**

***Lesson Three***

***THE CONFLICT***

***FROM THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN***

***THROUGH THE FALL OF JUDAH***

**The Conquest and Distribution of Canaan**

When it was time for Israel to cross the Jordan River to invade Canaan, God’s work on behalf of the nation became evident again. First, Egypt, which had been controlling Canaan, let go of that control even though she had the resources to continue it. Second, God miraculously stopped the waters of the Jordan River and dried its bed so that Israel could cross over to Canaan (Josh. 3). Third, God appeared in special form to Joshua, Israel’s new leader, to give instructions for the conquest of the land and to remind Joshua that victory depended on God.

**Josh. 5:13-15 *13 Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” 14 He said, “No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, “What has my lord to say to his servant?” 15 The captain of the LORD’S host said to Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.***

When God gave Israel its first great victory at Jericho (Josh. 6), Satan attacked. God had commanded the Israelites not to keep anything from Jericho for themselves (Josh. 6:17-19). One man disobeyed. As a result, Israel was defeated soundly when it attacked the next city, Ai. God countered Satan’s move to start general disobedience in the nation by ordering the guilty man and his family stoned to death (Josh. 7).

Satan’s next attack caught Israel off guard. He was determined to preserve some of the depraved Canaanites so that Israel would be exposed to their degeneracy. The people of the city of Gibeon deceived Israel into believing that they were not Canaanites. Without consulting God first, Israel made a covenant not to destroy the Gibeonites. Thus these pagan people were permitted to remain in the midst of Israel (Josh. 9).

God gave Israel great victories over the southern and northern confederacies of Canaanite city-states (Josh. 10; 11:1-15). Although Israel controlled Canaan, there still were areas and cities within it occupied by Canaanites. It was the responsibility of individual Israelite tribes to clear these out of the portions of land distributed to them.

When the land was distributed, God gave the Levites cities throughout the land. These cities were to be centers of instruction in the Law (Josh. 21:1-42). This was God’s way of safeguarding the nation of the Redeemer from apostasy.

Before he died, Joshua warned Israel of the consequences of keeping or breaking the Law, and he exhorted them to keep themselves separate from the pagans and their practices and to serve God (Josh. 23 – 24). These things were necessary for Israel’s survival so that the Redeemer could come.

**The Period of the Judges**

After Joshua died there was no outstanding, godly man available to lead Israel, and the nation had no centralized government. Satan saw this as an opportune time to press the attack vigorously. As a result, Israel’s history was characterized by apostasy and anarchy for the next 350 years. The nation broke God’s Law while every man “did that which was right in his own eyes” (Jud. 21:25).

Satan used three kinds of Israelite disobedience to create this tragic situation.

1. The people did not rid the land of all the Canaanites as God had commanded (Jud. 1:1 – 25).
2. The Israelites began to adopt the Canaanites’ worship of Baal and Ashtaroth (Jud. 2:6 – 3:4).
3. God’s people married Canaanites in direct violation of God’s orders (Jud. 3:5-6; Dt. 7:1-5).

As a result of this apostasy, Israelites began to practice gross perversions. Dishonesty, thievery, situation ethics, priests leading idolatrous worship for the sake of money and position, homosexuality, sexual abuse of women to the point of death, and a determination to protect sexual perverts form judgment were the order of the day (Jud. 17 – 20).

During this period of Israel’s history, the apostasy never did become nationwide at any one time. Instead, it was sporadic, breaking out in separate areas at different times. No doubt Satan hoped that each beginning of apostasy would spread nationwide, but God stopped it each time before it grew to large proportions. Every time apostasy began, God raised up a foreign power to oppress the apostates until they would repent and turn to Him. Upon their repentance God raised up an Israelite deliverer to drive out the oppressor. This cycle of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance was repeated numerous times throughout the period of the judges (Jud. 3:7 – 16:31). Thus, although Satan’s kingdom did its devilish work repeatedly, God preserved the nation by preventing the apostasy from beginning nationwide.

**Samuel’s Ministry**

In order to end Israel’s repeated excursions into apostasy during the period of the Judges, God raised up a strong, godly leader for the whole nation. The leader’s name was Samuel (1 Sam. 1-3).

Samuel began to minister during days of national crisis. The Philistines had defeated Israel and stolen the Ark of the Covenant, and the high priest had died. The nation was in a turmoil. Samuel took control of the situation by calling the nation together and directing the people to repent of their apostasy, put away their false gods, and return to God. All this the people did. As a result, God delivered Israel from all oppressors as long Samuel lived (1 Sam. 4:1 – 7:14).

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges; but they were corrupt. Satan used this corruption to prompt the Israelites to request a king from Samuel. Israel wanted a monarchy with a human king instead of a theocracy with God as King. Samuel protested this sinful decision and warned the people that eventually they would regret having a human king. But the Israelites insisted on having their way (1 Sam. 7:15 – 8:22). Therefore, God directed Samuel to anoint and present Saul as the first king (1 Sam. 9 – 10).

Before he retired, Samuel rebuked Israel for her sin and warned her to serve and fear God with all her heart so as not to be consumed (1 Sam. 12). Samuel had been God’s “man of the hour” to help preserve the existence of the Redeemer’s nation during a very threatening time.

**Saul’s Apostasy**

Satan had a purpose for prompting Israel to ask for a king. While Israel had been without a central government, he had found it impossible to get the whole nation to go apostate at one time. Now that Israel had a king, a central government would be formed. This situation would provide a better opportunity for perverting the entire nation at once. If the king would go apostate, surely the nation would follow suit.

Satan began the attack with first king. After Saul had been king two years, he began to disobey God and show poor judgment (1 Sam. 13 – 15). When rebuked for his sins, he excused his actions with a self-justifying spirit. Because of these sins and attitudes, God withdrew His Spirit from Saul and gave it to David, whom God had instructed Samuel to anoint as the new king (1 Sam. 16:1-14).

Saul came under satanic influence:

**1 Sam. 16:14 *“Now the Spirit of the LORD departed Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.”***

He developed three tragic traits: abnormal self-interest, insane jealousy, and full apostasy (1 Sam. 16:14 – 28:2; 29 – 30). When the Philistines came to fight Israel, God refused to respond to Saul’s appeal for directions. As a result, Saul appealed to a member of Satan’s kingdom, a spiritist (1 Sam. 28:3-25). Because of Saul’s apostasy, he and his sons died in battle and Israel became under Philistine control (1 Sam. 31). Thus, through death and defeat, God ended this new threat of apostasy.

**The Davidic Covenant**

After David united the kingdom; captured and made Jerusalem the national, political capital and worship center; and put an end to Philistine domination of Israel (2 Sam. 1 – 6), he desired to build a permanent house for God in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:1-2). It was to be called the Temple.

In response to David’s desire, God established a special covenant with him (2 Sam. 7:12-16). In this covenant the Lord made the following promises concerning David:

*First, he was to have a posterity. The covenant explicitly states that he would have a son and that David’s house would be established forever. This clearly has reference to David’s physical descendants, for David’s line would always be the royal line. Secondly, David’s throne was to be established forever. Thirdly, David’s kingdom was also to be established forever. This has reference to the earthly, political kingdom over Israel.*

Later divine revelation and historical events revealed what God meant by “forever.” He did not mean that the kingdom of Israel would continue as a political entity in Canaan with a descendant of David as king *without interruption* through the end of history. What He did mean was this: The line of David would continue to exist throughout the rest of history.

Thus, when it would be time for God to establish the theocratic form of His kingdom in the world toward the end of history, a physical descendant of David would be available to set up David’s kingdom of Israel in Canaan, to rule that kingdom with David’s authority, and to govern the whole world for God.

These promises made the Davidic covenant very significant for the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. They meant Israel never would be annihilated totally at any time in history, and that Israel always would have available to her a legitimate heir to the throne and the potential of becoming an earthly, political kingdom again. Later revelation to the prophets indicated that the Redeemer would be a descendant of David and that the promises of the Davidic covenant would find their fulfillment in Him. In light of all this, it became imperative to Satan that David’s royal line be destroyed.

**David’s Troubles**

God used David to bring Israel to her ancient golden age (2 Sam. 8; 10). With David and Israel enjoying many triumphs, it was time for Satan to strike again. Since the nation and the royal line were his targets, the best place to begin was with the king himself. David committed adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11).

God caused David to be miserable until he finally sobbed out repentance (Ps. 51). Once David repented, God graciously forgave. However, because David and Israel were to play such key roles in the coming of the Redeemer, it was essential that lessons be taught concerning the consequences of such sins. Thus God brought severe troubles to David and the nation (2 Sam. 12 – 20). This was His way of preventing David’s perverted actions from spreading throughout the nation.

Satan attacked again by prompting David to take a military census of the nation (1 Chr. 21). Evidently this numbering was sin because David was motivated by pride and a sense of reliance upon Israel’s strength instead of upon God. God struck at the source of pride and reliance by destroying 70,000 of Israel’s men in a pestilence. The pestilence stopped when David repented and offered a sacrifice to God. This God ended this satanic sin in the king and nation and reminded them of the source of their strength.

**Solomon’s Apostasy**

Due to the legendary wisdom that God have him, Solomon brought Israel to her peak of glory and luxury after David died. One of his greatest accomplishments was building the Temple (1 Ki. 5 – 6). When the temple was dedicated, the glory of God came to it as a sign of God’s special presence there (1 Ki. 8). God covenanted with Solomon to bless Israel greatly as long as she remained faithful to Him, and to drive her out of the land and reject the Temple if the nation were to go apostate (1 Ki. 9:1-9).

Satan still wanted to plunge the whole nation into apostasy and get rid of David’s royal line. So once again he began his attack with the king. His philosophy was this: As goes the king, so goes the nation. Solomon built a large chariot and horse force in direct disobedience to God (Dt. 17:15-16). Again, contrary to God’s command (Dt. 17:17), he married many wives. Altogether he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. (1 Ki. 11:3). Many of these were foreign, idolatrous women whom he married for political expediency. Here again he violated the divine command that Israelites were not to marry foreigners (1 Ki. 11:1-2). These women pressured Solomon to build worship places for their gods in Israel and to worship their idols with them (1 Ki. 11:4-8). Thus the king became apostate. His practice diluted the influence of the Temple and confused the Israelites concerning the difference between God and the false gods.

Because of Solomon’s apostasy, God promised to take most of the kingdom away from his son, and He raised up enemies against Solomon in the latter part of his reign. (1 Ki. 11:9-40). To one of these enemies, Jeroboam, God promised to give the ten northern tribes to rule (1 Ki. 11:29-39). This was God’s way of attempting to isolate the larger part of the nation from the source of apostasy in Judah and to teach the line of David and Judah the folly of apostasy. The coming of the Redeemer was more important than the unity of the nation. In order to prevent God from doing this, Satan used Solomon to try to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam escaped (1 Ki. 11:40).

**The Division of the Kingdom**

Through the folly of Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, the ten northern tribes revolted and set up their own government with Jeroboam as king (1 Ki. 12:1-24). Thus the united kingdom divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south.

*The Decline and Fall of the Northern Kingdom*

Satan was not content to have apostasy exist just in the southern kingdom. He used fear as his instrument for introducing apostasy to the northern kingdom. Jeroboam feared that, if his people were to continue to worship at the Temple in Judah, eventually they would give back their allegiance to Rehoboam. To prevent this Jeroboam erected two idols and established a counterfeit priesthood and false religious system for the northern kingdom. He himself led the northern Israelites in this apostate worship (1 Ki. 12:25-33). Because Jeroboam persisted in the apostasy, God promised to smite the northern kingdom and send it into captivity beyond the Euphrates River (1 Ki. 13:1-14:16).

Although the northern kingdom adopted apostasy later than Judah, it pursued its most gross forms more persistently than Judah. The northern kingdom had a total of nineteen kings during its history. Every one of these kings was apostate in character and action. The worst king was Ahab, whose wife was the devilish Phoenician princess named Jezebel (1 Ki. 21:25-26; 16:31). Under Jezebel’s influence, Ahab built a temple to Baal in the capital city, made Baal worship the official religion of the kingdom, imported and supported 850 prophets of Baal and Astarte, murdered most of God’s prophets, and abolished the worship of God.

God countered the apostasy by sending several prophets and different forms of judgment to the northern kingdom as warnings to repent. The prophets declared that, if Israel would not repent, God would raise up a foreign power to smite her and to carry her into captivity (Hos. 11:5; Amos 6:14; 9:8-10).

In spite of the many warnings and judgments, the people of Israel refused to repent. So God raised up Assyria to be His instrument for chastening His apostate people.

**Isa. 10:5-6 5 *“Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger, And the staff in whose hands is My indignation. 6 I send it against a godless nation, And commission it against the people of My fury, To capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.”***

Assyria invaded the northern kingdom in 734 and 732 B.C., took control of Galilee and the land east of Jordan, carried into captivity Israelites from those regions, and made a vassal of the Israelite king. (2 Ki. 15:29). After the northern kingdom rebelled and made an alliance with Egypt, the Assyrians came again in 725 B.C. and besieged the capital city, Samaria, until it surrendered in 722 B.C. The Israelites were carried captive to the regions of Persia. This ended the northern kingdom. Because of its persistent apostasy, it lasted little more than two centuries.

*The Decline and Fall of the Southern Kingdom*

Rehoboam and most of his successors followed the poor example of Solomon and plunged the kingdom of Judah deeper into apostasy. Throughout its history the southern kingdom had a total of nineteen kings and one queen. Of these twenty rulers, only seven were godly.

While Satan was working to prevent the Redeemer from coming by pushing Judah deeper into apostasy, he also worked to accomplish the same goal by trying to annihilate the royal line of David. His instrument of attack was Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the notorious duo of the northern kingdom. Athaliah married into the royal house of Judah (2 Ki. 8:16-18). After her husband and son died, she seized the throne of Judah and made herself queen. To secure her position as ruler, she ordered the extermination of every royal person descended from David:

**2 Ki. 11:1 “*When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she rose and destroyed all the royal offspring.”***

God countered this satanic attempt to destroy the line of the Redeemer by preserving one of David’s royal descendants. The infant Joash was hidden in the Temple for six years by the high priest and his wife (2 Chr. 22:11-12). At the right time Joash was crowned king, and Athaliah was slain (2 Ki. 11:4-16).

God counteracted the growth of apostasy in Judah by prompting several revivals through godly kings. The greatest revival took place under Hezekiah. Because of the return to God, the Lord kept His promise, delivered by Moses centuries earlier, to protect His people from harm. In 701 B.C. a huge Assyrian army invaded Judah. When it threatened to besiege Jerusalem, God killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night, thereby forcing the remainder of the army to return home (2 Ki. 18:9-19:37).

Because of the occasional revivals, Judah lasted longer than the northern kingdom. However, in spite of these revivals, the most persistent trend of Judah was into apostasy. Once again God raised up prophets and various forms of judgment to warn His people to repent, but once again the people refused to heed them. Apostasy reached its lowest depth during the long rein of Manasseh, Judah’s most wicked king (2 Ki. 21:1-18). Manasseh led his kingdom into more perverted practices than those of the Canaanites. The apostasy of his reign became so gross that God’s judgment of Judah was made irrevocable. Even a later revival under Josiah could not cancel it out (2 Ki. 23:26-27; 24:3-4).

***2 Ki. 23:26-27 26 However the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. 27 The LORD said, “I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’ “***

***24: 3-4 3 Surely at the command of the LORD it came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4 and also for the innocent blood which he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the LORD would not forgive.***

After Assyria fulfilled God’s purpose for her – the chastening of the northern kingdom of Israel – she continually declined in power. Because God no longer needed her for His service, she was crushed completely by the Medes and Babylonians by 605 B.C. With Judah’s cup of apostasy rising to the full mark, it was time for God to raise up a new foreign power to be His instrument of chastening. That new power was Babylon.

After he crushed Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince of Babylon, led his armies into Judah in 605 B.C. and claimed treasures and hostages in Jerusalem. The Prophet Daniel and his friends were among the hostages carried captive to Babylon (2 Ki. 24:1; Dan. 1:1-6). Thus the Babylonian Captivity of the Jewish people began.

In 597 B.C. the Babylonian armies returned to Jerusalem, stripped the Temple, and took the royal treasuries of Judah. The king of Judah, other political and cultural leaders, and Ezekiel the prophet were carried captive in this second deportation of Jewish people to Babylon (2 Ki. 24:8-16).

After Ezekiel arrived in Babylon, God somehow caused him to witness the withdrawal of His glory from the Temple and city of Jerusalem (Ezek. 8 – 11). This was a very significant event in the war between the kingdom of God and kingdom of Satan. It signified the withdrawal of God’s protective presence from the midst of His people because of their persistent apostasy. Now the way was open for the Babylonians to destroy the Temple and Jerusalem.

Due to the rebellion of their puppet Judean king, the Babylonians returned to Jerusalem. In 586 B.C. they entered the city, slaughtered many Jews, destroyed the Temple, left the city in ruins, and carried most of the remaining Jewish people captive to Babylon (2 Ki. 25:1-11). This the kingdom of Judah came to an end after an existence of nearly 350 years (931-586 B.C.).

One thing should be noted about the fall of Israel and Judah. Because of His holiness, God did permit many of His people to be slaughtered for their apostasy. However, He did not permit the nation to be annihilated totally. He preserved a remnant. The punishment of His people was intended to cure them of their apostasy so that the Redeemer could come.