

By Holly Effiom

Introduction

I was looking at an old map of Israel in my Bible¹ recently, as part of my study of Ezekiel 35, with regard to the prophecy against mount Seir. Jerusalem is always easy to locate, but I noticed that Gaza was south, along the Mediterranean coast, of Israel's capital, and a town called Raphia, even further south of Gaza. I wondered if this *Raphia* was one and the same as the *Rafah* under discussion today, with regard to Israel's impending attack against the Palestinian people, in its *hunt for Hamas*.

I searched Raphia, via the internet, and discovered the Battle of Raphia, which took place on June 22, 217 BC, near modern Rafah². The only thing this battle had to do with Israel was its relative location. It was one of the multiple battles between the kings of the North and South³, prophesied throughout Daniel 11.

Well, what is so interesting, is that in searching the maps to learn where Idumea or Edom was located – for mount Seir, the subject of the Ezekiel 35 prophecy, was the capital of Idumea – it appeared that ancient Idumea was a strip or band of land that neighbored Judea, and encompassed Gaza, and ran all the way east, to the Salt Sea.

Ezekiel 35:5 rehearses an event in the children of Israel's history, in which their brother, Edom (the children of Esau), attacked them when they were vulnerable, "...in the time of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end..." While Jacob and Esau made peace in Genesis 33:8-16, the children of Esau never forgave the offense and made peace; and God never forgot the revenge they exacted upon the children of Israel when they were vulnerable.

Now, I have said, on more than one occasion, I believe, the book of Ezekiel functions as a bridge for the faithful navigating historical events after the fall and destruction of the temple at Jerusalem through the apocalyptic end of Gentile times. While Daniel provides a high-level view into the future, and a timeline of events, Ezekiel provides us the view from *the ground*, using what we have read about the children of Israel, Egypt, Tyre, and Edom as a type of "shorthand" for the attitudes and behavior that will be witnessed during and through to the Gentile end times.

The day that I watched the news regarding the planned attack on Rafah, God brought to mind Numbers 14:39-45 – a wilderness story that describes another time when the children of Israel were acting in disobedience to God's word. And I thought, Has Israel become like *Edom*? Is this what the Israeli Prime Minister's administration is trying to do *now*? Are they using the excuse of Hamas to attack a vulnerable people, the Palestinians, to expand their nation's borders to what Numbers 34 describes... *now*?

It is important to remember Joshua 23 and 24, God had completed that work and divided to each tribe their portion; and, He gave warning to the children of Israel against backsliding.

¹ English, E. Schuyler, Litt D (Editorial Committee of the New Edition), (1998). The New Scofield Study Bible, Authorized King James Version. Oxford University Press, Inc.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Raphia

³ See Daniel 7:6; 8:22. When Alexander the Great died without an heir, the kingdom was divided among 4 kingdoms – Macedonia, Syria (king of the North), Egypt (king of the South), and Asia Minor.

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Kadesh-Barnea

Moses had done his job in getting the children of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness (physical and spiritual), and to the border of the land of Canaan. And it wasn't like this particular *family road trip* was a picnic just getting to the wilderness of Paran – there were the complainers; and folks that insisted on talking about the *good-ol'-days* in Egypt (even though they were *slaves* there) whenever the journey became too hard. And by *hard*, I mean, only having *manna* to eat for days on end, they were *demanding* that Moses give them meat to eat! These people had Moses begging God to *kill* him, it was so stressful. The topper was the *bigotry* of Moses' *own* siblings – the *prophetess* and *priest* of Israel – when Moses, after all of his faithfulness to God and hard work and *service* to the children of Israel, had the nerve to marry a *Black woman!* Numbers 12

Does this sound *familiar*?

Is the Bible the story of a dysfunctional *family road trip*? The characters in this story include those that can never have enough and always think they deserve *more*, even while standing in the midst of plenty. It includes those who continue to look back, insisting the greatest is in the *past*, demanding that the world be how it *used to be* (*Make America Great Again!*), instead of seeing the possibilities and opportunities in what lays before them. And, this story includes *leaders* frustrated by the length of the journey, and annoyed by the personalities of fellow passengers, and *hating* on those they were created to serve – those through whom the possibilities and opportunities of the future are presented, those that are *different*.

The pattern is too similar to be coincidental. Right when the journey is nearly at an end, the attacks become personal, visceral, about what it has always been about, “*I believe, I should have all the blessings, to myself, all the time, and everywhere, because you are not me – you don't look like me, don't sound like me, or don't believe like me. And, I'm special because...*”

There are others on this bus, too – those who aren't complaining about the discomforts; those who thank God for *not* being hungry or *slaves* in Egypt any longer; those who are trusting God to deliver them to that *better* destination He had promised. And it is *these* ones that will *have* the blessings of God because they *believe* Him.

Don't think the ones who have *torn their drawers* with God don't know this, too.

Prior to entering the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to send in a *leader* from each tribe to go, surreptitiously, and spy out the land and return with a report. Numbers 13:1-3. They returned with a report *alright*.

Ten of the spies stirred up the congregation to *fear* with their reports, such that they *caused* the people to *believe* the words of liars, instead of the *word of God!* Only two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, spoke the truth – they were *outnumbered* by the liars – but the people *chose* to believe the words of the liars, despite *all* the miracles in Egypt they had seen God *do!* Numbers 14:1-10

Notice *this* pattern! It sounds a lot like social media today, doesn't it? It's like a megaphone was placed in the hands of liars with an *agenda*, and they have drowned out *pure* truth, the *word of God!*

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So, God commanded that that disobedient generation *not* enter the promised land they *despised*. They were to wander the wilderness for 40 years, until they all, except their children, died off!

And, *how* did these people respond? They woke up early the following morning, and prepared themselves for battle, to enter and fight for the land that God had promised, saying, We made a *mistake*.

“And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? But it shall not prosper.

“Go not up, for the Lord is not among you, that ye be not smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore the Lord will not be with you.

“But they *presumed* to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the Lord and Moses, departed not out of the camp.” Numbers 14:41-44

Conclusion

This is the scripture that came to me while I watched the news of Israel’s plan to attack Rafah, and I thought, *God is not in this*.