

Psalm 83

The song of the last days (3)

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The re-establishment of Israel as a nation in the midst of Arab nations has provoked a strong response from them. In this the last part of this short series drawing on events in the book of Judges, their militant words and actions are shown to be foretold in Psalm 83. Consequently the situation is developing where only Divine intervention will be able to rescue the nation.

THERE WOULD be little point in comparing modern Jewish history with the events of the Judges alluded to in Psalm 83 before there was a nation in the Land to be reckoned with. So a suitable starting point would be the establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948, born out of persecution in Europe that defies description and bureaucratic dithering that amounted to one of the most shameful episodes in Britain's recent history. Israel was a nation about to be cast onto the world stage as a foundling circled by wolves.

As part of the declaration of Independence in 1948, it was stated that the imperatives for the need for a Jewish homeland were primarily to ensure the Jews' survival as a race, and to enable them to return to the land of their spiritual roots. Both of these ideas are picked up in Psalm 83 as reasons for the destruction of the nation.

This accounts for the intransigence of the hard-line Arab nations. The very existence of a Zionist entity in the location of Palestine is a challenge to the foundations of Islam. Superimpose claims such as Israel makes to a historical right to this area, and the challenge becomes a confrontation and a re-enactment of the oldest unsettled disputes in history: the quarrels of Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob, for the upper hand.

Arab attitudes towards Israel, 1948 to 1967

The main protagonists of this period were Abdul Nasser and Yasser Arafat. Their bellicose utterances spurred much indiscriminate shelling, mining and assorted terrorist activities aimed at damaging the Jewish economy.

Arab leaders generally made no secret of their intentions about the State of Israel:

"The only way which the Arab states must go is to draw Israel up by her roots. Why should we not sacrifice ten million out of fifty million Arabs so that we may live in greatness and honour?" (King Saud in a statement

made in Riyadh soon after his accession to the throne);

"The Arabs will not be satisfied with the implementation of United Nations resolutions. We shall only have complete satisfaction when Israel is finally blotted out from the map of the Middle East. The Arabs will find no rest until this cancer has been removed from their heart" (Mohammad Salah-ad-Din, 1952).

An event that captured the attention of the world was the annexation of the Suez Canal that precipitated the Suez Crisis in 1956. This affair was just one of a series of combined Arab moves to choke Israel economically; no ship was allowed to carry goods destined for Israel, no aircraft bound for Israel was allowed to overfly Arab airspace, individuals with Israeli visas were barred access to Arab countries, and so on.

In 1955 Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser imported arms from the Soviet bloc to build his arsenal for the confrontation with Israel. He announced it on 31 August 1955:

"Egypt has decided to dispatch her heroes, the disciples of pharaoh and the sons of Islam and they will cleanse the Land of Israel . . . There will be no peace on Israel's border because we demand vengeance, and vengeance is Israel's death".

Under the terms of this deal, Czechoslovakia sold Egypt 200 tanks, 150 artillery pieces, 120 MiG jet fighters, fifty jet bombers, twenty transport planes, fifteen minesweepers, two destroyers, two submarines, hundreds of vehicles and thousands

of modern rifles and machine guns. Although the arms were to be delivered promptly, Egypt paid for them over the span of twelve years with shipments of cotton to the Soviet bloc. This volume of arms was unlike any the Middle East had ever seen, and it was coupled with the sale of 100 tanks, 100 MiG fighters and hundreds of other items to Syria, as well as the provision of Soviet and Czechoslovakian trainers and assistance personnel. This sudden change in local balance of power pressured Israel to act quickly, and acted as a catalyst to the Suez Canal Crisis.¹ So Siserah got his chariots this time as well!

Amongst a handful of women who have ascended to the rank of stateswomen, Golda Meir (1898-1978) was politically active at the time. An astute politician who worked tirelessly for Israel, she was to be given the title "A mother in Israel", drawn directly from Deborah. However, it must be stated that, although she was to be promoted eventually to prime minister in 1969, she was not well clued in military strategy, and blamed herself for the 1973 Yom Kippur War losses.

Opinion divides as to who was the aggressor and who was the defender in the Six-Day War. It divides politically according to whether the opinion is held by Jew or Arab. After all, nobody wants to be labelled as the one who threw the first punch. However, for the Bible student, standing at arm's length from the politics, the answer presents no problems: the Arab nations rattled their sabres ominously for months, but the Jewish government took the initiative to attack before they were attacked.

Jeremy Bowen, in his book *The Six-Day War*, expresses his opinion that Israel picked the fight, knowing that at that time they stood a healthy chance of victory. Their whole strategy was to strike viciously and with overwhelming air power, in order to cripple the enemy and leave them undefended. This they did; within hours of the conflict much of Egypt's fighter aircraft were either smoking wrecks or unable to get airborne because of the tarmac-busting ordnance dropped on the runways. Shortly afterwards the Syrian, Jordanian and Iraqi air forces felt the same treatment. Jordan was deliberately kept ignorant of the dire situation by the then Premier Anwar Sadat of Egypt so that they were drawn into the conflict against their better judgement.

All in all the victory could be described as a storm from the heavens that rendered useless a great deal of the elegant hardware purchased at ruinous expense from Soviet bloc countries.

Once the air was secure the battering continued unchallenged from all quarters.

The war of attrition, 1967 to 1970

The period between the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur conflict was one of corrosive tit-for-tat actions; a hostile action by Egypt or her allies would be met with disproportionate Israeli response. As before, the agricultural and rural economy of the land was the softest target, and an almost constant threat of incoming mortar bombs or incursions made farming on the border kibbutzim difficult. This period also saw the infamous Munich massacre of Jewish Olympic athletes, multiple airline hijackings, and the terrorist organisation, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, or PLO, becoming a household name.

An enlightening comment was supplied by a journalist explaining Nasser's viewpoint:

"If the enemy succeeds in inflicting fifty thousand casualties in this campaign, we can go on fighting nevertheless, because we have manpower reserves. If we succeed in inflicting ten thousand casualties, he will unavoidably find himself compelled to stop fighting, because he has no manpower reserves" (Mohamed Hassanein Heikal).

Another statement that revealed Arab thinking was issued from the Khartoum summit of September 1967:

Egypt and Syria both desired a return of the land lost in the Six-Day War. However, the Khartoum Arab Summit issued the "Three Nos", resolving that there would be "no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with Israel".

The war of attrition ended with the death of the belligerent Nasser and his replacement by President Anwar al-Sadat, whose first project was to prepare for the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

Yom Kippur

Arab states, in particular Egypt, were smarting from the humiliation inflicted on them in 1967. The Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement War was calculated to repay the wound. The troop numbers alone are impressive: between them, Egypt, Syria and Jordan mustered over a million soldiers, against Israel's 415,000 strength—and this number must be understood as including

1. Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, published by Alfred A. Knopf (New York), 1976, p. 474. ISBN 0-394-28564-5.

reservists who were vital to the economic life of Israel and could not lightly be lost. The hardware advantage, too, makes daunting reading. But the biggest disadvantage to Israel was the element of unpreparedness. Poor intelligence meant that she relaxed her guard, and on one of the holiest days in their calendar too many active soldiers were off duty.

Although we would not expect God to work with such a ratio as He chose to with Gideon against the Midianites (bearing in mind the super-weapon of Gideon's faith that is never deployed in modern warfare), the factors above conspired to render Israel ripe for destruction. Caught in a pincer-movement of Syria in the north and Egypt in the southwest, and their fortifications such as those at the Bar-Lev line and the Golan heights rendered ineffectual within hours of the outbreak of hostilities, Israel was already being written off by military analysts as a force in the Middle East, given the odds against them. They were out-gunned, out-manoeuvred and outwitted. And yet the Israeli Defence Force managed not only to hold the line but also to gain territory in the north.

Unlike the 1967 war, the psychological advantage of this war was firmly with the Arabs, leaving Israel feeling vulnerable and wounded. But of the military outcome there could be no doubt. Israeli forces, having broken the Syrian assault in the north, started pushing towards Damascus. The Egyptian expeditionary forces were left cut off in the Sinai Peninsula.

Post 1973 to 1990

"And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed" (Judg. 10:7-9).

For Ammon read Amman, the capital of modern Jordan. The Philistines we have already identified as typifying the Palestinians, dispossessed by the previous wars, and living in permanent refugee camps in Gaza. They are pawns in a cynical power game. From a tentative reading on in the book of Judges we should expect to see these nationalities coming to the fore to hector Israel, either separately or together.

"The intifada also dealt a heavy economic blow to Israel. The Bank of Israel estimated it cost the country \$650 million in lost exports, largely through successful Palestinian boycotts and the creation of local microindustries. The impact on the services sector, including the important Israeli tourist industry, was notably bad" (Wikipedia).

At first, Jordan absorbed huge numbers of refugees from the West Bank following the 1967 war. To add to the 700,000 who were already there in 1966, another 300,000 crossed to Jordan. Jordan tolerated the Palestinian militias (*fedayeen*) until 1970, before concerns for their own state security prompted them to expel the Palestinians in September of that year (Black September).

At this point there is a digression from what we might expect. Whilst the Palestinians have been and still are deeply antagonistic to Israel, Jordan has refrained from direct action of any kind. The late King Hussein's strategies were to maintain a cautious distance from striking against his neighbour, Israel, and instead to ally himself increasingly with Iraq under Saddam Hussein. King Hussein refused to participate in the Camp David peace process; instead, to the deep displeasure of President Jimmy Carter, he became the spokesman for some of the most radical disaffected Arab parties.

Clearly King Hussein had his own agenda; he ploughed his own furrow, cooperating with the United States when it suited his purposes but keeping a careful eye on domestic opinion in his own state. In this Jordan could not be said to have oppressed Israel. However, in its treatment of Palestinian refugees it certainly exacerbated the problems in the area.

And it was the Gulf War that brought Jordan firmly back into line with the Western Axis.

1990 onwards

The Gulf War marked a ratcheting up of the tensions emanating from the Middle East. It exposed America's hypocrisy in her dealings with Saddam Hussein and the cynical manoeuvring to obtain political advantage. In many ways it has polarised Arab opinion between an increasingly bitter and hard-line Islamic fundamentalist attitude and the dwindling number of states who are still willing to side with the "Zionist imperial aggressor" that is America.

The radical Islamic countries may lack military might, but they do have conviction, indeed conviction of the sort that can impel young men and

women to blow themselves to pieces in pursuit of their agenda. It is this conviction that Western leaders cannot comprehend, let alone assimilate into a reliable defensive strategy.

So the Allied powers are caught between a rock and a hard place. Having many Muslims indigenous to their populations, and many more free to travel to and fro through their borders, means that any perceived bias in their policy towards Israel can be punished in a particularly headline-grabbing way. However, to do nothing, particularly when unstable states such as Iran may reach for nuclear weapons, is equally unthinkable.

Another irony that has emerged from this morass is the Western insistence on the holy grail of democracy. This particular strategy has turned back upon them and delivered a cruel bite. Democratic procedures, instead of delivering rational and agreeable allies in the region, instead landed Hamas as a legitimate government:

“Hamas regards the territory of the present-day State of Israel—as well as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank—as an inalienable Islamic *waqf* or religious bequest, which can never be surrendered to non-Muslims” (Wikipedia).

And the calls for the destruction of Israel have not lost their stridence; if anything, they are more vehement with the passage of time, and emanate from implacable and dangerous foes:

“Iran’s new president [Ahmadinejad] has repeated a remark from a former ayatollah that Israel should be ‘wiped out from the map,’ insisting that a new series of attacks will destroy the Jewish state, and lashing out at Muslim countries and leaders that acknowledge Israel. Ahmadinejad is quoted as saying, ‘Anybody who recognises Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation’s fury’” (CNN).

Pertinent to our theme, he is also reported to have said that the “new wave of confrontations generated in Palestine and the growing turmoil in the Islamic world would in no time wipe Israel away”.

When we read Jewish weblogs that rant against the Arab powers as a remanifestation of Nazism, the temptation is to dismiss it as sheer posturing. However, reporting on the same Arab leader of Iran, CNN commented:

“Last week, he also expressed doubt about the killing by the Nazis of six million Jews during World War II, but Wednesday was the first occasion when he said in public that the Holocaust was a myth. ‘They have invented a myth that Jews were massacred and place this above God, religions and the prophets,’

Ahmadinejad said in a speech to thousands of people in the Iranian city of Zahedan, according to a report on Wednesday from Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting” (14 Dec. 2005). One feels that this is not the last we have heard from this man.²

What next? As stressed earlier, the two episodes selected from Judges are firm ground within the context of Psalm 83; much of the rest is conjecture. But post 1990 has seen such a division between powers aligned to the Jewish presence in the Middle East and powers whose stated purpose was and still is its absolute destruction that inevitably there will exist a situation where no Arab power will countenance the “powers of Satan”, that is, the USA and her allies, being allowed to interfere at all in the region. The second war against Saddam Hussein showed the breathless shuttle diplomacy required to cobble together any form of coalition, and the subsequent debacle demonstrated the fragility of the result.

Inevitably, with the current trends, Western powers will be reduced to impotent bluster, leaving the Arab alliance free to finish the quarrel that started back at the dawn of human history. If the time frame of Judges is to be followed it could be a long, weary period, which will suck the nation of Israel, and the rest of the world with them, down into a deepening morass of strife, terrorism and conflict.

(In 1999, the late Hamas cofounder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin mentioned the year 2027 as a possible date for the “disappearance” of Israel. Source: Wikipedia, quoting other sources.)

But eventually, as world opinion hardens into intractability, the end-game will commence, and nothing and no one will be there to intervene on Israel’s behalf. They will have to take their plea to a much higher authority in world dominions:

“Keep not Thou silence, O God: hold not Thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, Thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate Thee have lifted up the head. They have

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2. Ahmadinejad has continued to be vocal in his opposition to Israel and to those countries, especially America, whom he sees as supporters of Israel. Speaking at a UN conference on ‘Racism’ in April 2009, he described Israel as a “totally racist régime”. This and other similar comments caused the European delegates to walk out. In September 2009 he addressed the UN General Assembly. Again, several delegations, led by France and including Britain, walked out in protest at his indirect reference to Israel as the “Zionist régime”, which he accused of “inhumane policies in Palestine”. —E.D.M.

taken crafty counsel against Thy people, and consulted against Thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against Thee" (Ps. 83:1-5).

And thus, appealed to with a sincere heart and for the defence of His holy Name, God will act decisively and finally on behalf of His faithless witnesses:

"O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; so persecute them with Thy tempest, and make them afraid with Thy storm. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek Thy name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: that men may know that Thou, Whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth" (vv. 13-18).

Will it be with storm, earthquake, wind and fury? If the previous patterns of Judges are to be believed, yes it will. The deserts and hillsides of God's precious land will be filled with the ruined wrecks of the "chariots of iron" that have for so

long been the currency of oppression around the globe.

And in those days shall come to pass the words of Zechariah the prophet:

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (8:23).

Postscript

The psalm book that the Irish peat bog yielded up³ was no coincidence. Just as the Dead Sea Scrolls emerged from their hiding place in a timely entrance to counteract the educated cynicism of 'Biblical scholars'; just as the archaeological remains of Biblical cities have been uncovered in order to refute the statements of the opinionated stuffed gowns of erudite sceptics that these places never existed; so God in His wisdom has sought to draw our attention to the perilous plight of Israel by this fragment—so relevant, so well-preserved, and, like the rest of Scriptural text, so alive!

(Concluded)

3. See [Part 1, Sept 2009, p. 274](#).