

Judges

Lesson 31

The lords who had made Delilah wealthy were dead. The Philistine elite was dead. The Philistine oppression of Israel was dead. Samson was dead. The hero of the story plunged himself into death. He was willing to give up his life to save the Israelite lives in the future. With the knowledge of his certain death, he was ready to gain the victory over the Philistines that had lorded over Israel for forty years.

(d) Samson's Last Rites (16:31)

Now we come to Samson's last rites. Verse 31. *"Then his brothers and all his father's household came down, took him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. Thus he had judged Israel twenty years."* (16:31)

Some will look at this verse and say that Samson had other brothers. But, we must remember that Mr. and Mrs. Manoah were barren. In other parts of the Scripture, being barren meant that Mrs. Manoah was almost past, or past, the ability to carry a child to birth. Samson was a miracle birth. Further, the use of brothers (or brethren) in Israel usually meant men who were descendants of Jacob and, more specifically, members of the tribe of Dan in this case. Then the tribe of Dan was split into divisions by families. In other words, Manoah's family came to retrieve Samson's body along with other Jews of the tribe of Dan. They buried Samson near the same place where the Spirit of the LORD first came upon him (Judges 13:25). In addition, they also buried Samson in the tomb of his father, Manoah. His mother could have been there too. But this tells us something. Manoah had died after Samson began his twenty years of judgment on the Philistines.

And so, the time of the called judges recorded in the book of Judges was over. Samuel was alive. He was an adult working in the Tabernacle complex with Eli. Samuel was about thirty-nine years old. The future King Saul was also alive. He was about twenty-seven years old. In three years, he will become king.

We have just finished chapter 16. With three years to go until Saul becomes king, the writer, in chapters 17 through 21, told us of all the evil that occurred in Israel. The writer will give us a review of the sway of Israel's downfall without a leader in the coming last chapters.

The six cycles of Israel's sin, where the LORD sent foreign nations to oppress and control Israel, were over. They ended with the last deed and the death of Samson. In total, over a three-hundred thirty-nine-year period, since Joshua died, Israel was taken over and ruled by a foreign nation for one-hundred and thirty-three years. With the help of the LORD and his appointed judges, Israel was able to oust those foreign nations from the land and be ruled by the judges for two hundred and six years. Here is an interesting point. When each judge died, and Israel began to sin again with the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, a sabbatical year occurred within the next eighteen months. If you will remember, Moses introduced the sabbatical year to be observed every seventh year when the Israelites entered the Promised Land. When Joshua took over as leader, the Israelite nation crossed the Jordan River, took Jericho first, blundered in taking the village of Ai, but then came back at Ai and took it. The camp moved to Shechem, where the blessings and the curses were announced as instructed by Moses, and the Law was read to the entire nation. All of that occurred in the first year. Although the nation could not allow the land to rest for a full year because Israel did not control all the Promised Land at that time, they would ultimately have all the Promised Land in their control by the end of the fifth year after hearing the Law. At that time, the men whose families were left on the east side of the Jordan River were allowed to return home, and all the rest of the camp was allowed to disband and go to their new homes on the east side of the Jordan River. The

land was full of bounty for the Israelites. They truly were eating from crops they did not plant. However, about eighteen months later, the sabbatical year arrived. It was the seventh year since the reading of the Law at Shechem. That year, the whole nation lived off what they collected the year before and did not plant or harvest at all. The land was allowed to rest and grow wild. All debts were forgiven among the people. And all bond-servants were released from their pledges. It was the first sabbatical year celebrated in full according to the instruction through Moses. Everyone also heard the Law read in that year. They heard again the Ten Commandments and all the rest of the supporting statutes, ordinances, as well as the Covenant from the LORD. What was the purpose of the Sabbatical Year? It was to make sure that every generation heard and knew the Law of the LORD and what He required. Looking back through the study presented in the book of Judges by our writer, it is easy to quickly see that when a judge died, the people began to sin, but the LORD did not wait too long for them to hear His Word read to them. He had designed the Sabbatical year for this purpose. The judge died on His will, in His timing, so that in each cycle of sin that began in Israel, within the next year and a half, the Sabbatical Year would occur, and the people would hear His Word and know that they were sinning against Him. Then, shortly after they heard the Word and did not respond, He sent a foreign nation to control Israel just as He promised He would do. With the death of Samson, the Philistines were ousted, but Samson did not continue to judge Israel as all the rest of the judges did following their victories. It was a new time. Did Israel have a judge? Yes. His name was Samuel. But because Samuel is our writer of this book, he did not name himself as a judge. We will learn that Samuel was the judge sent by the LORD after Samson in the book of 1st Samuel when the prophets named Gad and Nathan completed the recorded manuscript after Samuel's death. Samuel was still alive at the death of Samson. He saw all that happened with Samson. He also knew about the story of Ruth that took place during the last three cycles of Israel's sin. He recorded the story now in the book of Ruth at the end of the book of Judges, but it has now been separated into its own book. Samuel was about thirty-nine years old at the time of Samson's death, having served as an aid to the priest named Eli since he was four years old. Eli became the high priest twelve years before the death of Samson. When Eli became high priest, Samuel was twenty-seven years old and was still an apprentice to be a prophet. Samuel was not of the tribe of Levi. He was not a descendant of Aaron. He could never be a priest. Samuel was of the tribe of Ephraim. He was dedicated at birth by his parents to be a Nazirite. As a child, he served with Eli at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Nevertheless, Samuel saw all that transpired with Samson first hand, and he saw what was happening in Israel in the four years after Samson's death and before Saul was anointed as the first king of Israel. By age thirty-nine, Samuel had surely established himself as a prophet. He was nine years past the age where prophets would be recognized. Eli, the High Priest, recognized Samuel as a prophet. His story will be told in the book of 1st Samuel. You might ask the question, "if Samuel was alive during the life of Samson, why did we not hear about that in the book of Judges?" I have been laying the groundwork for that answer through our study of Joshua and Judges. In the Hebrew style, the same stories were told several times with new information or a different perspective added with each pass through the story. Such is the case with the story of Samson. Samuel told the story of what took place with Samson with one pass. Next, Samuel would make another pass through the story to tell us what took place in Israel during and after the life of Samson. Then he would make another pass through the story and the timeline to tell us what took place with the story of Ruth. Finally, in the book of 1st Samuel, he would make a pass through the story and timeline to tell his story. We will learn more about his story when we venture into our next study of the book of 1st Samuel. But for now, as we continue with the story Samuel gave us in the book of Judges, we will learn of all the deviance occurring in the Nation of Israel in the last days of Samson and after his death. In these last chapters in Judges, our writer, Samuel, the prophet, will present to us a review of the sway of Israel's downfall without a leader. Chapter 17.

Chapter 17

III. A Review of the Sway of Israel's Downfall Without a Leader (17:1-21:25)

A. A Nation's Defiance of the Law

1. The Tragic Influence of a Graven Image

a) Mother's Missing Money Returned (17:1-3a)

The lessons of the six cycles of sin that led to Israel's downfall without a leader were not learned in the three-hundred and thirty-nine years since the death of Joshua. The people were still a nation in defiance of the Law of the LORD. They still had this draw to worship false gods. The sway of that draw was great. We come now to the tragic influence of a graven image. First, we see the mother's missing money returned. Chapter 17 and verse 1. *"Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah.² He said to his mother, 'The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.' And his mother said, 'Blessed be my son by the LORD.'³ He then returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother..."* (17:1-3a)

Samuel was an Ephraimite, and this story began in his own tribal area. He was the judge after Samson's death. Even though it was not explicitly stated, the rest of the storyline in the Book of Judges was on Samuel's watch. He was an eyewitness to it all.

This introductory passage tells us that the mother of Micah thought that her *"eleven hundred pieces of silver"* had been stolen. These would have been shekels, and in chapter 16, we discussed the value of this sum of money. We might even say that it was possibly her whole life's savings. It was well more than many years' wages at that time. The fact was, it did go missing. To the mother, it was stolen. To the son, he took it. Did he steal it? We do not know. It was quite possible that Micah took the money to hide it from the collection of taxes that had taken place during the Philistine oppression. If she did not have it in her possession, she could not give it to the Philistines when they came around each year to collect. We do not know the reason Micah took the money, but when he heard that his mother thought it was stolen, he admitted that he had it and returned it to her. She blessed him for giving it back to her.

b) Mother's Missing Money Dedicated (17:3b)

The story between Micah and his mother was all well and good until the writer told us what the mother decided to do with the silver. I call this the mother's missing money dedicated. Verse 3b.

"... and his mother said, 'I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you.' (17:3b)

It is hard to believe that this mother wanted to dedicate the money to the LORD Jehovah and at the same time have a graven image created for her son to use at his house. She was going to have the images made. She was going to take them to her son once they were made. Surely, she knew about the LORD. Surely, she trusted in the LORD. What was going on here? Did Micah worship false gods? Was she trying to give a gift to her son that would make him happy, even though she did not believe in false gods? We do not know the answer to those questions. But, we can assume rightly that she was willing to give a gift to Micah that she might not wish to use for her own benefit in her worship of the LORD Jehovah. We often do that, you know. We often participate in sinful things that others are doing that we would never do on our own home court. That must be the case here with this mother and her son. While she probably did not worship false gods, if worshiping a false god made her son happy, she was willing to participate in anything that would bring him happiness. Let me tell you this before we get there in the story. Her decision to participate in evil will have ramifications on many people in the future after the images are made. And so, it is true

today. Many times, Christians participate at the edge of something evil and actually jumpstart and feed the evil that will come on many people.

c) Mother's Missing Money Transformed (17:4)

And so, we see the mother's missing money transformed into graven images. Verse 4. *"So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah."* (17:4)

And, as promised, the writer tells us that these graven images were placed in Micah's house for him to use and worship.

d) Mother's Missing Money Enshrined (17:5-6)

Not only did the graven images make it to Micah's house for him to use and worship, but Micah made them into a shrine. We see the mother's missing money enshrined next. Verse 5. *"And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest. "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes."* (17:5-6)