

Learning from the Sins of the Past

By Al Felder

“⁶Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. ⁷Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. ⁸Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. ⁹Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. ¹⁰Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. ¹¹Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (1 Corinthians 10:6-11)

In 1905 a philosopher from Madrid, Spain by the name of George Santayana coined the phrase, “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.” Indeed, we find that we as humans are very forgetful. We often forget the events of the past that helped shaped things and make them what they are today. Most importantly, we forget important spiritual matters that not only have an impact on this life, but more importantly the life to come.

Due to man’s tendency to allow important facts and events slip from his mind, God has given us His word whereby we can have a true account of certain events. The lives of those whom we read about within the word of God serve a very important purpose. They serve as an example for us today. An example by which we can learn, and benefit from, so that we may serve God more effectively.

Today we would like to benefit from this information. We are going to consider some events that happened during the Old Testament. These events could have spared some heart ache if Israel of old would have retained them in her memory and learned from them. For just a little while we would like to consider the idea of “Learning from the Sins of the Past.”

In Judges 17-21 we find a series of events that are recorded in the Bible. At first glance we may wonder what the significance of these events is, but by the time we conclude our lesson I hope their purpose will be clearly seen. The events recorded in these chapters’ covers a span of 50 years from 1340 B.C. to 1290 B.C.

“¹And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. ²And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son. ³And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. ⁴Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah. ⁵And the man Micah had a house of gods

and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. ⁶In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. ⁷And there was a young man out of Bethlehem Judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. ⁸And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehem Judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he sojourned. ⁹And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem Judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place. ¹⁰And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in. ¹¹And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons. ¹²And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. ¹³Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.” (Judges 17)

As we begin to consider these events recorded in scripture, we find the story of a thieving son, an idolatrous mother, and a priest for hire. As we are first introduced to Micah, we are told that he was the one who had stolen eleven hundred shekels of silver from his mother. By today’s standards, a shekel of silver is worth \$5.50. That would give a value of \$6,050 that Micah had stolen from his mother. This is still a lot of money today, but it is believed that a shekel would have been even more valuable at this time.

There are a couple of things that we notice about Micah. First of all, he did not honor his parents. In one act, Micah broke two of the Ten Commandments. He stole, and he did not honor his mother. Within the Ten Commandments the first four commands deal with man’s relationship to God, and the last six deal with man’s relationship with one another. The first command dealing with man’s relationship with one another is the command to honor one’s parents.

In order for the home, the Church, or society to be what it should, children need to be taught to honor their parents. *“¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. ²Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise.”* (Ephesians 6:1, 2) We find that the same command is given under the New Covenant, but as we consider its original placement within the Ten Commandments I believe that we can easily see how foundational this relationship between parent and child is to the rest of human relationships. If a child does not respect his parents, then he will not respect anyone else and there will be a breakdown in the home, in the Church, and in the society.

Second, Micah’s confession did not come from fear of breaking God’s command, it came from fear of the curse his mother had placed upon the silver. This is completely unlike the prodigal son whom we read about in the New Testament. *“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”* (Luke 15:21) We must realize that when we sin we offend God. Our actions may bring harm to someone else, and they may even be intended for that purpose, but when we commit a deed in

violation to God's commands our actions are really against Him. When we sin, we sin against God.

Instead of reprimanding her son as she should have done, Micah's mother overlooked his sin. In fact, not only did she overlook it, she encouraged him to commit another sin. Micah's mother desired for him to make a graven image out of the silver. One of the main points that can be taken from this story is that it shows the beginning of idolatry in Israel.

Micah had his house of gods, he made an ephod and teraphim, and he made one of his sons his priest. Yet, Micah was still an insecure man as we will see. His man made religion was lacking a certain validity. He needed someone's approval to make everything legit.

Well, a Levite priest from Judah comes along. The man's name was Jonathan as we are later told. Jonathan was the grandson of Moses, but he was not a man of God as was his grandfather. Jonathan was looking for a place, and Micah was willing to make him an offer. Micah offered Jonathan ten shekels of silver a year, clothes, and all of the food and supplies he needed.

Jonathan was a priest for hire. *"³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."* (2 Timothy 4:3, 4) He was a man whose allegiance was not to the Lord. Instead he was available to the top bidder as we will see in a little bit.

It is sad that this is often the type of person that people will seek today. They want someone who will put a rubber stamp of approval on their actions. Micah believed that all was well, and that God would bless him because he had a Levite priest.

Jesus spoke of the true nature of hirelings during His earthly ministry. *"But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep."* (John 10:12) You see, a hireling is not going to warn you of danger. All of his words will be seasoned with flattery and praise. He will make you think that all is well just as long as you keep the check coming.

A true man of God and a true friend, for that matter, will not sit idly by as danger approaches. The most important thing is our eternal destination. That being the case, we need people in our life that will tell us when we are wrong. We need people that will tell us when there is sin in our life so that we may correct it and get back on the right path. A hireling will not warn people of danger.

Well, as our story continues. We find in chapter 18 that the tribe of Dan is looking for a place to call home. Their problem was that they didn't have faith in God. He had given them an inheritance, but they did not believe that they would be able to remove the inhabitants from the land. You see, they trusted in their own might and not God's.

If they only would have had the attitude of the Apostle Paul. *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* (2 Corinthians 12:9) There is no denying that we face many trials and adversities in life. There are often many heart rending, gut wrenching circumstances that we face. Nowhere in God’s word do the scriptures ever deny this reality of life. Instead, the Bible tells us that the Christian may at times suffer these things unjustly at the hands of wicked men.

Whenever we have such challenges in our life, let us always look to the Lord. Time and again throughout the Bible, God’s people suffered the greatest calamity when they failed to depend upon Him like the Apostle Paul. They often looked to their own might, the might of others nations, or their wealth. In the end, they failed miserably when they trusted in anything other than God, and we will too.

As the tribe of Dan looked for a place to call home they came across Micah and his rubber stamped religion. They eventually found them a place to call home and they made an offer to the priest. Jonathan was glad, the Bible states. He took the graven image, the ephod, and the teraphim and followed the tribe of Dan.

At the end of these two chapters we have the beginning of idolatry in Israel. *“And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manesseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.”* (Judges 18:30) The Bible tells us that this idolatry continued in the land all the way to the time of the captivity.

The last three chapters of Judges tell one of the most disturbing stories in the Bible. These chapters tell of the immorality that existed in the land at this time. A Levite took a wife from Bethlehem Judah. She left to play the harlot, and he went to retrieve her. The man got his wife, and began to return home again.

As they traveled they stopped for the night in Gibeah, which belonged to Benjamin. The events that follow are an exact parallel to the events of Sodom and Gomorrah. The men of the city came desiring to have their way with the man. His host refused to let them commit such iniquity and instead offered his daughter and the man’s wife. They took the man’s wife and abused her till she was dead.

The man took his dead wife, returned home, and sent parts of her body to all the tribes of Israel. The tribes gathered together to hear the account of what had happened, and they decided to take action against this wickedness. The Bible tells us that all of the tribes gathered together against Benjamin. *“Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel.”* (Judges 20:13) At first, they requested that the men responsible for this wickedness be handed over, but the tribe of Benjamin would not do as they asked.

Listen, overlooking sin or sweeping it under the rug, so to speak, is not the thing to do. *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”* (Proverbs 28:13) There is absolutely no hope for those who refuse to own up to their sins and change their behavior. There are no acceptable excuses for this as far as God is concerned, and those who do such will not prosper. Only by admitting our sins and changing our behavior can we have mercy.

Once Benjamin refused the request of the other tribes, the battle was on. God instructed the tribe of Judah to lead the way, and in the first battle 22,000 men were killed from Judah. This caused the tribes of Israel to lose heart, so they asked God’s instruction again and He told them to go up to battle. This time 18,000 men were lost.

It took the loss of 40,000 men for Israel, and in particular Judah, to see that they had some things that needed fixing. *“Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the Lord, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.”* (Judges 20:26) Once they got the message, they sought to make things right with the Lord before heading back out to battle.

Once they had done this, the battle resumed. This time the Lord gave them victory over Benjamin and by the time it was over, only 600 men remained out of the entire tribe. A plan was later developed to get wives for these men so that the tribe could continue, but before we learn of that a very important question was asked of God by Israel. *“²And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; ³And said, O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?”* (Judges 21:2, 3) There are two points that I find interesting about this passage of scripture.

First of all, I believe that the attitude of Israel toward Benjamin is worthy of our consideration. Even though a great iniquity had been committed and it had to be dealt with, it brought no joy to Israel that one of the tribes was almost wiped out. I believe that this is a very important point that we must consider today.

What is the proper attitude for us to have towards our brothers and sisters in Christ? *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* (Ephesians 4:32) What a powerful verse of scripture! It is easy to have wrong attitudes towards people in the heat of the moment. There can be arguments, disagreements, personality conflicts, and even situations that involve grievous sins. However, in none of those instances, no matter how much we may have been hurt, do we have the right to say good riddance to a member of the body of Christ and be happy that they are cast off.

Who among us can ever say that we have had more done to us than what we have done to Christ? On a daily basis we offend the One who shed His blood for us. We often fail to follow in His ways, and each sin we commit only added to His suffering on our behalf. Yet, it is

because of Christ that God forgives us. The Bible makes it clear time and time again that God has absolutely no pleasure in the wicked perishing. Sometimes, however, we let our emotions run away and when we should feel sorrow at the loss of a member of the body of Christ, we say good riddance.

Second, one tribe stood to be lost this day because of immorality and the lesson was not retained by Israel. In fact, there is something very interesting in these chapters. The two wicked tribes in these stories are Judah and Benjamin. The wickedness of Judah is seen in the idolatry of the Levite priest Jonathan whose line continued its idolatry in Israel until the day of captivity, the unfaithful wife of the Levite priest, and the culling of the 40,000 by God. The wickedness of Benjamin is seen in the immoral actions of the men at Gibeah that led to the death of all but 600 men.

Fast forward 600 years to 722 B.C. Israel was facing a situation where not one, but ten tribes were about to be wiped out. Assyria was coming, bringing God's judgment against them for their idolatry and immorality. They were led off into captivity and never heard from again. Judah and Benjamin would later be carried off by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., but they were allowed to return to the land and remained there until the time of Christ.

The central point of these last few chapters of Judges is twofold. History can and often does repeat itself and the wicked can repent and the righteous can fall. Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.