

THREE MEN ... WHO BECAME FOOLISH

Genesis 25:29-34, Judges 16:7; 17:10

It is always depressing to see the fall of a giant. This applies to stately trees in the redwood forests, renowned sports figures incapacitated either by accident or sickness, or a person famous for religious achievement. The higher a climber ascends on a mountain, the greater the distance he might fall. The death of a soldier in combat is always a tragedy, but when a commanding general dies, his replacement is hard to find. The Bible records the disasters that befell three men whose success could have been sensational. Unfortunately they sacrificed their usefulness on altars of personal desire.

Esau - Who Fell for a Tasty Meal... How Foolish
 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint . . . And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright. (Gen. 25:29-34)

Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (Heb. 12:16-17)

Esau was an impulsive man who blamed others for his own mistakes; he possessed little if any respect for his parents. A birthright was a privilege bestowed upon the first born son in a family; he received twice

as much inheritance as did any other child. Wealth was assessed in terms of land and cattle, and since Isaac was rich, Esau was entitled to a considerable fortune. No one can deny that Jacob, the scheming brother, was deceitful, but nothing could excuse the conduct of the man who was a slave to appetite. Neither could he be forgiven for his disregard of God's commandments. Rejecting what he had been taught, Esau grieved his parents by marrying women whom did not belong to his race: "And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah" (Gen. 26:34-35). The wayward son ignored the counsel of Jehovah and his parents and sacrificed fidelity on an altar of personal pleasure.

Jacob was aware of his brother's liking for lentil soup, and ruthlessly exploited Esau's appetite. It seems ludicrous that the hungry man should believe he was dying. To prepare his own meal would only have necessitated a short amount of time, and had he considered his options, could have gone to his home where food awaited his arrival. He was a skilled hunter and meat of one kind or another could easily have been obtained. Overwhelmed by an inordinate desire for Jacob's soup, Esau threw caution to the winds and agreed to forfeit his most cherished possession. He was a very stubborn man who later increased the number of his heathen spouses and was unconcerned that God had forbidden such actions.

It is interesting to remember how Elisha requested a double portion of Elijah's spirit and was informed this was not given to undeserving

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people. And Elijah said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so" (2 Kings 2:10). The prophet's servant was expected to be faithful to the end of the journey when his request would be granted. God continues to bless His children with special power through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The Savior said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" (John 7:37-39). When Christ is enthroned in the human heart, hindrances are removed and the outflow of divine energy continues uninterrupted. This is the birthright of every Christian, but unfortunately, many compromising believers lose their spiritual inheritance.

It must have been a devastating experience when Esau tried to regain what had been lost. His tears revealed the anguish of his soul. The favorite meal had cost more than he could afford to pay. He remained a very wealthy man, but is remembered only as a glutton. What he might have become may never be known. All possibilities of a glorious future were destroyed when he sold his birthright. Throughout his life the man was haunted by memories that would not depart. He was a giant destroyed by stupidity.

Samson - Who Fell for a Taunting Maid... How Fatal
And it came to pass, when she [Delilah] pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; That he [Samson] told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Naz-
ante unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. (Judg. 16:16-17)

Samson, for at least a part of his life, was one of the greatest of God's spiritual giants. He came to Israel during one of the most depressing periods in Hebrew history. When there appeared to be no hope for the enslaved nation, God sent an angel to Manoah and his wife to inform them of the forthcoming birth of their first child. The electrifying announcement delighted the chosen couple who realized Jehovah was aware of their problems.

The Philistine overlords had been merciless; they invaded the land during the time of harvest, confiscating crops and destroying everything they could find. When disaster overwhelmed the nation, people believed death was preferable to servitude. God's promise to Manoah and his wife proved that God had not forgotten His children: "And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol" (Judg. 13:24-25).

The story of Samson's association with pagan women makes unpleasant reading, which is difficult to appreciate. The ancient author stated that although God overruled Samson's folly, the courtship was detrimental. Manoah and his wife believed intimacy with pagans was wrong, and tried to prevent the impending marriage. Their efforts were futile, for lust had gripped the soul of their son. When sexual

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indiscretions dominated Samson, he went from one woman to another, and finally became a slave of his passion.

Delilah must have been a very charming woman. Whether or not

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she loved the man she deceived is extremely doubtful. When the lords of the Philistines offered to reward her cooperation, her desire for money became irresistible: "And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him, that we may bind him to afflict him: and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver" (Judg. 16:5). There were five lords of the Philistines (see Josh. 13:3 and Judg. 3:3), and since each one offered to pay eleven hundred pieces of silver, her total compensation would have amounted to 5,500 pieces of silver, or more than eighteen times the money received by Judas when he betrayed Jesus. The price of a common slave was thirty pieces of silver; therefore for her infamous treachery, Delilah was given enough money to purchase eighteen slaves!

Her caresses were alluring; the warmth of her embrace thrilled Samson's soul. He lay contentedly in her arms, believing himself to be the most fortunate man in the world. Gently she stroked his beautiful hair, but all the while waited to destroy her victim: "Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee." Within the mind of the stumbling conqueror, the red lights of warning began to shine. Was she an enchantress, or was she teasing him? He smiled and said, "If they bind me with seven green withs that were never dried, then shall I be weak, and be as another man." The game was entertaining; he could afford to amuse her: "Now there were men lying in wait, abiding with her in the chamber. And she said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire. So his strength was not known" (Judg. 16:6-9).

Self-confidence and pride shone in the eyes of the mesmerized lover, and the game continued. Repeatedly, Samson played with fire and finally he was burned: "And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words ... That he told her all his heart. . . And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him., the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house" (Judg. 16:16-21).

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When Samson's hair began to grow again, a faint glimmer of hope shone in his darkened and dejected mind. Nevertheless, his broken body buried beneath the ruins of the Philistine palace reminded everyone of a bewitched hero.

The Levite - Who Fell for Tempting Money... How Faithless
And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. And the man departed out of the city from Beth-lehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. (Judg. 17:7-8)

This is an intriguing passage for it speaks of a man of whom little is known. He had lived in Bethlehem of Judah, and served as a Levite in the tabernacle. Yet, for some unexplained reason, he quit his job to become a religious nomad. That simple fact excites the imagination. Levites ministered within the house of God at Shiloh. Bethlehem was not a Levitical place of residence, but evidently some of the priests liked the city and preferred to live there. It would be interesting to know why this man left his work.

I. Was he displeased with his employment, and did he believe he could do better elsewhere? Even tall houses fall when their foundations are eaten by termites. Levites were a separated family of special people.

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Was this man's interest elsewhere? How could he proceed with his duties when it was impossible to practice what he had been taught? Had he become tired of performing mediocre tasks? David expressed wiser ideas when he wrote, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand [elsewhere]. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10).

2. Had he committed some error and become unfit for his tasks and unpopular with his colleagues? Levites were subject to many religious restrictions, and this unnamed man might have transgressed. He could have been very stubborn and rather than admit his mistakes, decided to seek a new occupation. Humility is admirable in the sight of God; but unfortunately, some leaders become so proud they are objectionable. Outstanding athletes are not always good team players; they are uncooperative with others. Paul reminded Christians they were members of the body of Christ, that unless they helped each other, the work of the Savior would be hindered. Perhaps the ancient Levite was not a team player!

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3. Was the man a loner - an ambitious individual, the type of man who prefers to be a local chief than second in an empire? Perhaps he was unable to see any chance of promotion in his religious employment and decided to seek fame and fortune elsewhere. Thus, when he arrived at the house of Micah and was offered lucrative employment, he gladly became a household priest. His new sponsor said, "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" (Judg. 18:10). This was a wonderful opportunity to fulfill his own dreams. He was to become a priest - and not just a serving Levite. He would be chief at his profession; there was no competition! Unfortunately, he yielded to the temptation and lost all he possessed.

Micah, the new employer, had made his own idols and the man from Bethlehem in Judah began to offer incense on strange altars. He had yet to learn that all that glitters is not gold. When the emissaries of the tribe of Dan offered a better job, he accepted, and thereafter became obsolete. "And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh" (Judg. 18:30-31).

The Levite came from Bethlehem in Judah, but apparently he went nowhere! His story should be a warning to all whose ambition threatens their usefulness. Evidently, the Levite chased bubbles, which burst within his grasp. They who leave Bethlehem to search for fame and fortune build their hopes on shifting sand.

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