

## Hiel the Bethelite

**Intro:** Sometimes in reading the Bible you come across what appear to be almost insignificant parenthetical details given. And you wonder, “Why was this information placed there?” This past week or so in our Bible reading we came across one of those insertions.

**In the prophet’s account of King Ahab in 1 King 16:34 the writer pauses in discussing his reign to report the following event that occurred while he was king:**

**In his days, Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundations with the loss of Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun. (1 Kings 16:34)**

**The prophet reports this event with only a single qualifying statement, “according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun”. But what is he speaking of? And why was it important for us to know this? What lesson did the prophet intend to bring to us by including this detail?**

**The background for this statement takes us back to the fall of Jericho many centuries before**

*Almost everyone remembers that Jericho was destroyed after the people of Israel marched around it seven days; but what is not often remembered is the solemn warning God gave in connection with this particular city: Then Joshua made them take an oath at that time, saying, “Cursed before the Lord is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his first-born he shall lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he shall set up its gates.” (Joshua 6:26)*

*God does not appear to be forbidding anyone to build a house on the site of this ancient city; but rather to reconstruct this city. Apparently the purpose of God’s order was to memorialize through its ruins His power in how it was destroyed and His justice in why it was destroyed. The penalty for defying God’s order was severe. Such a person was under the curse of God, a curse that would result in his family name being cut off from among men. For centuries no one dared defy this word from God..that is until the time of Ahab. And the attempt to rebuild and fortify Jericho would teach several important lessons to those who are perceptive to the words of God’s prophet.*

## **Lesson from the Experience of Hiel**

*It illustrates how people are emboldened to do greater evil because of wicked leadership and culture*

Hiel came from one of the most wicked places in the northern kingdom.

*He is called “the Bethelite”; and you may remember that it was here that Jereboam at the establishment of the northern kingdom placed a golden calf to be worshipped by the Israelites to prevent them from returning to the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.*

And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. (1 Kings 12:29)

He lived during one of the most wicked eras in Israel’s history. It was the time when the throne of Israel was occupied by wicked king Ahab and his wicked wife and idol worshipper, Jezebel. Note the prophet says, “In his days” Hiel did this.

What the prophet is showing us is what happens to people when they fall under the influence of wicked rulers and in a culture corrupted by false religion. They are emboldened to do what people of the past have thought unthinkable.

Would you have ever imagined in your childhood that we would see the open advocacy of moral evil we see in our society? If we could only go back in time just a hundred years we would be astounded at the difference between that world and our own. Would there have been the open advocacy of homosexual marriages? Would there have been the open advocacy of women’s rights to abortion? Would it have been socially acceptable for people to live together without marriage? Would it have been acceptable for people to use God’s name in vain in public? People today have been emboldened to do greater evil than before because of ungodly leadership in both the political realm as well as in the religious realm.

***Defiant sin against the Lord has a severe price***

It seems hardly possible that God’s proclamation written in the law could not have been known to this man. It surely must have become a cultural axiom that the rebuilding of Jericho would bring a curse upon oneself.

It is hard to imagine a man so selfish or so arrogant as to defy a declaration of God of this nature; but what a terrible price he paid for his defiance.

The prophet reports to us that God’s curse did indeed fall not only the builder but upon the children of the builder. Both his eldest son and his youngest son (and perhaps this was a Hebraism for all his children) were lost as the result of his actions.

Events like this must lie behind the NT warnings of the high price of low living.

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)*

We can ask, “How could a man have been so irresponsible to commit an act that might result in the destruction of his family?” Yet today the

same thing happens again and again. Parents with full knowledge neglect their duties before God to worship; surrender moral principle and in the process lose something even greater than the lives of their children! Sometimes they lose their souls! Hiel's experience remind us that every sin has its price; and it is never a good deal!

***Time does not erode the binding power of God's declarations!***

The time span from Jericho can be calculated with reasonable precision. We can with relative certainty date the Exodus at 1446 BC and the conquest of Jericho somewhere around 1406 BC. We can establish the reign of Ahab at 874-853 BC and it was during his reign that Heil committed his sin.

Almost six hundred years had passed since God had made his declaration. Did the passing of time invalidate the curse that He had spoken? I wonder if there were people in Ahab's day who looked back on the Laws of Moses and said, "The Bible (The Law) is out-dated, out-moded and irrelevant to "modern" life".

Yet Hiel was to learn that time does not erase the binding force of God's warnings.

We too need to soberly remember that God has also spoken similarly in his new covenant about the consequences of sin:

*and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)*

*People today may say, "Surely you don't believe in those scary threats of the Bible?" Time does not erode the binding power of God's curses. But this is not only true for God's curses but also His blessings.*

*"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. (Matthew 25:31)*

*In the same way that time does not erode the curses of God; neither does it erode the blessings of God. When he pronounces his favor upon someone who obeys Him we can be sure that that promise is true!*

*He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mark 16:16)*

Today the call is for an updated culturally relevant gospel. The new covenant of Jesus Christ needs no updating; and it will always be relevant.

**Conclusion: Every day we can see similar episodes in our lives where someone dares to defy the laws and warnings of God with similar results. Let's today let the experience of this man cause us to do three things:**

*Pray that we may have leaders that will encourage a culture of morality that discourages evil rather than emboldens men to practice it*  
*Let us beware of treating sin trivially and sacrificing important things for the sake of fame or momentary pleasure*  
*Let us reaffirm our faith in the validity of God's ancient revelation. The Bible is old; but it is not out of date. It will be the standard by which we'll one day be judged.*