

Judges 17 - Confusion in the Home; Confusion in the Ministry

III. Depravity in Israel thereby necessitating the need for a King (Judges 17:1—21:25)

(1) Spiritual apostasy (Judges 17:1—18:31)

(A) Micah corrupts religion (17:1-13)

Confusion in the Land

The events described in Judges 17-21 apparently took place earlier in the period of the Judges, most likely prior to the 40-year rule of the Philistines. The movements of the tribe of Dan would have been difficult, and the war against Benjamin in the forthcoming chapters impossible, if the Philistines had been in charge at that time.

The writer apparently departed from historical chronology and put these events together as an "appendix" to the book to dramatize just how wicked and confused the people had become.

In three major areas of life, there was rampant confusion: in the home, the ministry, and the national social order.

God has established three institutions in society: the home, human government, and the worshiping community—Israel under the Old Covenant and the Church under the New Covenant. The first of these, in both time and significance, is the home, because the home is the basis for society. When God wedded Adam to Eve in the garden, He laid the foundation for the social institutions humanity would build. When that foundation crumbles, society begins to fall apart. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps 11:3)

The pattern of apostasy in ancient Israel shows a clear pattern: Spiritual Compromise → Moral Corruption → Civil Catastrophe

Judges 17

III. Depravity in Israel thereby necessitating the need for a King (Judges 17:1—21:25)

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(A) Micah corrupts religion (17:1-13)

1 Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah.

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1 A man named Micah lived in the mountainous region of the territory of Ephraim.

1 And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

- The name Micah means "Who is like God?" but this man certainly didn't live to honor the Lord

— It is ironic that a man named Micah should establish an apostate shrine with an unlawful priesthood; he was from the territory where the Tabernacle was located, but it obviously did not have any influence on his spiritual life

— He had a family (v5), although nothing is said about his wife; and we get the impression that his mother lived with him and that she was wealthy

— Somebody had stolen 1,100 shekels of silver from his mother, and she pronounced a curse on the thief, not knowing that she was cursing her own son

— These 1,100 silver shekels should not be confused with the 1,100 silver shekels that each of the Philistine rulers gave Delilah, 16:5,18

2 And he said to his mother, "The 1,100 *pieces* of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse and also spoke *it* in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; **I took it.**" And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD."

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."

2 He told his mother, "Do you remember those 1,100 silver coins that were stolen from you and about which you uttered a curse when I could hear it? Well, I have the silver. I took it." So she replied, "May my son be blessed by the LORD."

2 And 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.

- The power of a curse was taken seriously in the pagan world at the time, and the curse of a parent was considered the most potent of all curses

- "...I took it" - actually, he stole it, but he avoided using the stronger term

- After his confession, the mother joyfully reversed the curse by blessing her son

— It was the fear of the curse, not the fear of the Lord, that motivated the son to confess his crime and restore the money. There was no remorse on his part; he returned the money only as a result of fearing the curse, and realizing the curse was conditional.

— As a reward for such "honesty," his mother sought to neutralize her curse with a blessing.

3 He then returned the 1,100 *pieces* of silver to his mother, and his mother said, "I wholly consecrate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a carved image and a cast metal image; so now I will return them to you."

3 He then returned the eleven hundred *pieces* of silver to his mother, 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."

3 Her son gave back the 1,100 silver coins to his mother, and she said, "I'm totally giving this silver—from my hand to the LORD—so my son can make a carved image and a cast image. So I'm returning it to you."

3 And 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.

- Her subsequent consecration of the silver to the Lord to make a carved image was in disobedience to Ex 20:4, and reflects the idolatrous Canaanite influence on the Israelites during this period

- The phrase "a carved image and a cast idol" suggests two objects of false worship, an image carved out of stone or wood, and a cast idol made out of melted metal poured into a mold

— Some scholars think the phrase refer to only one molded image, perhaps a wooden idol overlaid with silver which Micah's mother had made and placed in the house. However, in 18:18, the objects are clearly distinct.

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 carved image and a cast metal image, and they were in the house of Micah.

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.

4 When he had returned the silver to his mother, his mother took 200 of the silver coins and handed them over to a silversmith. He crafted them into a carved image and into a cast image, and they were set up in Micah's house.

4 Yet 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.

- In gratitude for the return of her money, she dedicated part of the silver to the Lord and made an idol out of it. Micah's mother paid a silversmith 200 silver shekels—equal to several thousand dollars—to make those objects of worship.

This passage shows the declining spiritual climate of the times: First, several violations of the Law of Moses occurred: Micah violated the laws not to steal, to honor his mother, to have no other god, and to have no images. Second, while his mother dedicated the silver to

Jehovah, she did not donate the money to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Instead she gave it back to her thieving son to turn it into an idol. Third, the passage shows syncretism, a mixing of religious beliefs; money that was dedicated to Jehovah was used to make idols, which, in turn, may have been used as a means to worship Jehovah, hence revealing a practice of pseudo-Jehovah worship. Fourth, the making of the images shows that this event took place in the latter days of the Judges, since the people were still obedient during the earlier period of the elders and the following generation.

5 And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols, and consecrated one of his sons, so that he might become his priest.

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.

5 This man Micah had his own shrine, had crafted his own ephod and some household idols, and had installed one of his sons as a priest.

5 And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

- This was a domestic temple belonging to his household, and was not intended to serve the public at large

— Micah, like Gideon, set up a cult center in violation of Deut 12, which declared that Israel must only worship in the one place in the Land that God would choose, which, at this point, happened to be Shiloh

- These were not the only idols in Micah's aberrant shrine: he had an ephod (possibly as an object of worship; Cf. 8:24-27; or for a priest to wear) and some idols (*teraphim*; Cf. Gen. 31:17-50)

— An ephod was the symbol of the priesthood, obviously an imitation of the true priesthood

— The *teraphim* were household gods used for divining, which would be counterfeit Urim and Thummim

— In addition, he set up a priesthood, then installed one of his sons as his priest to conduct worship in this shrine (later Micah installed another priest, v12)

6 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

6 Back in those days, Israel didn't yet have a king, so each person did whatever seemed right in his own opinion.

6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

- The theme of the appendices of Judges...

- This point is made more than once in Judges 17-21, each time in a different context: here, it is in the context of proper worship
- There was no king in Israel to enforce the law of one central shrine and to remove counterfeit shrines; the result was, everyone did what they thought was right in the religious realm
- What is developing here is syncretistic Canaanization: a woman openly confesses devotion to Jehovah in cursing, blessing, and other occasions, but her actions go totally contrary to what that confession requires
- The son has an orthodox name, but commits the ultimate sin against that name, establishing a cult system in direct violation to the command not to worship other gods or idols
- The two never seem to recognize their inconsistency. This is the nature of syncretism. Both are very religious, but have become Canaanized.

Have you ever seen a family more spiritually and morally confused than this one? They managed to break almost all (7!) the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17) and yet not feel the least bit guilty before the Lord! In fact, they thought they were serving the Lord by the bizarre things they did! The son didn't honor his mother; instead, he stole from her and then lied about it. First, he coveted the silver, and then he took it (according to Col 3:5, covetousness is idolatry). Then he lied about the whole enterprise until the curse scared him into confessing. Thus he broke the fifth, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments; and he broke the first and second commandments by having a shrine of false gods in his home. According to Prov 30:8-9, when he stole the silver, he broke the third commandment and took the name of the Lord in vain.

Breaking seven of the Ten Commandments without leaving your own home is quite an achievement!

The man's mother broke the first two commandments by making an idol and encouraging her son to maintain a private "shrine" in his home.

According to Deut 12:1-14, there was to be but one place of worship in Israel, and the people were not permitted to have their own private shrines. Furthermore, Micah's mother didn't really deal with her son's sins; his character certainly didn't improve by the way she handled the matter. But she was a corrupt person herself, so what else could he expect?

Micah not only had a private shrine, but also he ordained his own son to serve as priest. Certainly Micah knew that the Lord had appointed the family of Aaron to be the only priests in Israel; and if anybody outside Aaron's family served as priests, they were to be killed (Num 3:10).

Because Micah and his family didn't submit to the authority of God's Word, their home was a place of religious and moral confusion. But their home was a good deal like many homes today where money is the god the family worships, where children steal from their parents and lie about what they do, where family honor is unknown, and where the true God is unwanted.

7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there.

7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there.

7 A young male descendant of Levi happened to be visiting there from Bethlehem in the territory of Judah.

7 And there was a young man out of Bethlehem-Judah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

- A young Levite named Jonathan (18:30) had been living in Bethlehem of Judah, which was not one of the cities assigned to the priests and Levites (Joshua 21; Num 35)

He was probably there because the people of Israel weren't supporting the tabernacle and its ministry with their tithes and offerings as God commanded them to do (Num 18:21-32; Deut 14:28-29; 26:12-15). Why live in one of the Levitical cities if you're going to starve? When God's people grow indifferent to spiritual things, one of the first evidences of their apathy is a decline in their giving to the work of the Lord; as a result, everybody suffers.

8 Then the man left the city, Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he would find a *place*; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah.

8 Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a *place*; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah.

8 The man had left his city Bethlehem in Judah to live wherever he could. As he traveled along, he eventually arrived at Micah's house in the mountainous region of Ephraim, looking for work.

8 And 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 journeyed.

- He was traveling from place to place, without a destination, looking for a place to serve
— This reveals the extent of apostasy in Israel at the time, leaving a Levite without visible means of support

— The Levites were to be the spiritual teachers of the others tribes and to receive sustenance from them, but this was evidently not happening

9 Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a *place*."

9 Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a *place*."

9 Micah asked him, "Where did you come from?"

He replied, "I'm a descendant of Levi from Bethlehem in Judah, and I'm going to stay temporarily wherever I can find a place."

9 And 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.

- Instead of seeking the mind of the Lord, he set out to find a place to live and work, even if it meant abandoning his calling as a servant of God

— The nation was at a low ebb spiritually and he could have done something to help bring the people back to God. He was only one man, but that's all God needs to begin a great work that can make a difference in the history of a nation.

— Instead of being available to God, Jonathan was agreeable only to men; and he eventually found himself a comfortable home and job with Micah

— If he was typical of God's servants in that period of history, then it's no wonder the nation of Israel was confused and corrupt. He had no appreciation for his high calling as a Levite, a chosen servant of God.

Levites were to:

(1) Assist the priests in their ministries (Num 3:6-13; 8:17-18)

(2) Teach the Law to the people (Neh 8:7-9; 2 Chr 17:7-9; 35:3)

(3) Be involved in the sacred music and the praises of Israel (1 Chr 23:28-32; Ezra 3:10)

Jonathan gave all that up for comfort and security in the home of an idolater. He was a hireling and not a true shepherd (Judges 18:4; John 10:12-13). He didn't serve the true and living God; he worked for Micah and his idols.

Jonathan wasn't a spokesperson for the Lord; he gave people just the message they wanted to hear (18:6). When he was offered a place involving more money, more people, and more prestige, he took it immediately and gave thanks for it (v19). And then he assisted his new employers in stealing his former employer's gods!

Whenever the church has a "hireling ministry," it can't enjoy the blessing of God. The church needs true and faithful shepherds who work for the Lord, not for personal gain, and who will stay with the flock to feed them and protect them. True shepherds don't see their work as a "career" and run off to a "better job" when the opportunity comes. They stay where God puts them and don't move until He sends them. True shepherds receive their calling and authority from God, not from people (Gal 1:6ff); and they honor the true God,

not the idols that people make. It must grieve the Lord today to see people worshipping the idols of ministerial "success," statistics, buildings, and reputation.

10 Micah then said to him, "Stay with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *pieces* of silver a year, a supply of clothing, and your sustenance." So the Levite went *in*.

10 Micah then said to him, "Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *pieces* of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance." So the Levite went *in*.

10 So Micah replied, "Come live with me! You can be a spiritual father to me, as well as a priest. I'll pay you ten silver coins a year, plus a priestly uniform and an income." So the descendant of Levi moved in.

10 And 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.

- Micah asked the Levite (Jonathan) to be his private priest

— Jonathan was a Levite, but not all Levites could be priests, only those who were direct descendants of Aaron, which he was not

11 The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons.

11 The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons.

11 The descendant of Levi agreed to live with the man, and the young man became like one of the family.

11 And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.

12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.

12 Micah set up the descendant of Levi in ministry, and the young man became his priest while he lived in Micah's house.

12 And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

- Micah ordained Jonathan (Ex 28:41; 29:9,31-34)

13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as a priest."

13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest."

13 As for Micah, he kept saying, "Now I know the LORD will make me rich, because I have a descendant of Levi for a priest!"

13 Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

- The sad part of the story is that Micah now thought he had the favor of God because a genuine Levitical priest was serving as his private chaplain, when in fact it was forbidden in the Law (Cf. Num 3:10)

— Micah practiced a false religion and worshiped false gods (with Jehovah thrown in for good measure), and all the while he rested on the false confidence that God was blessing him!

— Little did he realize that the day would come when his priest and his gods would be taken from him and nothing would be left of his religion

— The Levite, of course, was as much (or more) to blame for having accepted the position. These acts of disobedience to God's Law were typical of the Israelites in the time of the Judges.