

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #23

Judges 17:1-13

I believe we are living in a day in which most of God's people, including ministers and congregations, are not interested in actually understanding or obeying God's Word. Most people who claim they are a Christian are living life their way and doing what is right in their own eyes.

One of the symptoms of such a society is that men raised up by God to actually communicate God's truth are disappearing. Men of God, who were known for carefully expounding God's Word and carefully teaching God's doctrines are far and few between. All of this leaves people in a condition in which they are trying to figure life out for themselves. There is no authority base for what they believe and do except for themselves.

When you come to Judges 17-21, you come to a point of time when the great judges are gone. This is basically an interval period of time between the judges and the kings. In fact, the key phrase that shows up in these chapters is "In those days there was no king in Israel" and everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

Any resemblance of godly leadership was gone. There are no more Gideon's, no more Jephthah's and no more Samson's. God has stopped raising up His men and He lets His own people go on and drift into "la-la land" and make a total mess out of everything.

In these final chapters of the book of Judges we see the utter spiritual decay of Israel in their home life, religious life, civil life and personal moral life. What you are about to witness is a spiritual, social and sexual perversion that dominates God's own people. Home lives were a mess and worship was totally and completely distorted. It has been well observed that God has established three major institutions: government, the home and worship. When people move away from God's Word in any of these areas they all fall apart.

Everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes and there was a complete departure from the Word of God. They had no proper doctrine, they had no proper leader, they had no desire to understand and obey God's Word. There was total confusion in Israel and God's people had so departed from the Word of God that the nation was morally and spiritually bankrupt. What we see here is this:

WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE LOSE THEIR FOCUS ON UNDERSTANDING AND OBEYING GOD'S WORD, GOD WILL SOVEREIGNLY PERMIT THAT SOCIETY TO COMPLETELY DETERIORATE, AND IT WILL BE INITIALLY EVIDENCED BY DETERIORATION IN THE HOME AND IN WORSHIP.

God's people decided to worship God on their terms. They were not interested in the Word of God and God starts causing the world of His own people to completely cave in.

Now in this passage we are about to meet a very strange family; it is the family of Micah. The irony of the name Micah is that his name means "who is like Jehovah" and he is certainly not a reflection of Jehovah. Micah's family was bizarre and the point of this is to show us all what the family of God had become when it drifts away from God's Word.

God's people decided to worship God on their own terms; not His terms, and God sovereignly caused the collapse of the entire nation. There are two downward spiral parts to this:

SPIRAL DOWNWARD PART #1 – When people do what is right in their own eyes, there will be a lack of what is morally and biblically right in the home . **17:1-6**

God's Word was so neglected that dads and moms and children who claimed to know God just did what was wrong in their own home and made things up as they went. **In this section, Micah admits he stole money from his mother and his mother praises him and promotes idolatrous worship.** This is how religiously skewed things had become. Here was supposedly the home of believers and there is no resemblance of biblical righteousness at all.

Micah is a real piece of work. He was a man who lived in the hill country of Ephraim. As we said, the name Micah means “who is like Jehovah.” **The problem was not in his godly name, but in his godless behavior.** Apparently the family of Micah was very wealthy.

Micah had stolen 1100 pieces of silver from his mother. This is a lot of money. Now we have seen the number 1100 pieces of silver before. That was the amount that each of the five Philistine lords agreed to pay Delilah if she could get Samson to tell her the source of his strength (16:5). The value of 1100 pieces of silver may be seen by the fact that when a priest is hired for ten pieces of silver a year (17:10), he accepted it as a good wage. This is 110 times the amount of the average salary. This is a major crime of embezzlement. In a world in which an annual salary is 30,000 this is the equivalent of stealing 3.3 million dollars. This was not a loan; Micah stole that money. What kind of kid would steal 3.3 million dollars from his own mother? Certainly not a child interested in obeying God and walking with God in ways that please Him.

According to **verse 2**, Micah heard his mother utter a curse against the person who did it. So there was some form of religious bent to this home because this mother is praying and pronouncing curses on people. Micah came under some sort of deranged scared conviction, and he went to his mother and admitted that he was the one who stole the money from her.

Actually what Micah will do is confess that he took the money and then he will give it back. What he will not do is acknowledge his sin before God and make biblical restitution that was required under O.T. Law, which demanded a one fifth additional restitution payment (Lev. 6:2-5). He will not offer a sin or guilt offering. So in all reality, you have Micah doing what he wants to do, not what God wants him to do.

According to **verse 2**, when her son confessed to his mother, instead of her being totally appalled by what he had done she “blessed” her son by the name of the LORD. This woman sounds like Casey Anthony's mother. Instead of saying you have been guilty and we need to get this right with God, she tries to undo the curse by pronouncing a blessing.

What you will see in a moment is that the reason why she does not curse her son for what he did is because she herself is a thief. I know of a mother who stole things all her life and when her child grew up, he got in serious trouble for stealing things. Like mother, like son.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said that Vance Havner used to say, “We shouldn’t worry over the fact that the government won’t allow children to have Bibles in school. They’ll get a free Bible when they get to prison” (*Be Available*, p. 155).

Now in this episode Micah is in violation of four of the famous Ten Commandments.

Commandment number one says none are to make or worship any God except the true God.

Commandment number five says that children are to honor their parents.

Commandment number eight says you shall not steal.

Commandment number ten says you shall not covet.

Micah has dishonored his mother and has stolen from his mother, and his mother is so far removed from understanding God’s Word she pronounces a blessing on him for dishonoring her and stealing from her.

This family was so indifferent to God that there was no conviction to obey God’s Word in anything. **God’s Word was not their authority; what was right in their own eyes became their authority.**

I am convinced that one of the saddest signs of our degrading times is that parents have lost their ability to communicate what is morally and biblically right to their children. There is a lack of biblical communication and discipline. Some fathers and mothers are afraid to look their children in the face and say you are sinning. It is true that no mother or father can live life for their child, but they can certainly tell them what is biblically right and wrong.

I have talked with many a school teacher who will tell you that if they try to correct a child and tell them what is right, they will get in serious trouble with the parents. There is a place for mothers and fathers to tell their children you are in sin. You have done wrong. You have done evil and you need to make it right. But when you live in a society where anything is tolerated, very few parents have the integrity or the nerve to tell their children anything. Only parents who understand the importance of the authority of God’s Word are in a position to say this is right and this is wrong.

If a child steals money from a mother or grandmother, I guarantee you God will track them down and they will pay in a big-time way.

According to **verse 3**, Micah returned the money to his mother and his mother decided to dedicate the money to God by making it into an idol. This mother, who is supposed to have some spiritual wits to her, has become very twisted in her mind and doctrine. **She not only does not discipline or challenge her child to do what is right before God, she blesses him and leads him into idolatry.**

She takes the stolen money back and utters some pseudo-pious prayer to God. She probably bows her head and says she is dedicating this all to God. Notice carefully she says “**I wholly dedicate the silver.**” **She gives the impression that she is dedicating all 1100 pieces of silver to the Lord.**

However, according to **verse 4**, when Micah gave the pieces of silver back to his mother his mother took 200 pieces of silver, not the 1100 she said; and she made an idol out of it and returned the idol to Micah, and she pocketed 900 pieces of silver. She has lied before God and she has lied to her son.

When a mother loses her proper focus on God's Word, she can lose her ability to take a true righteous stand with her own children. Mothers, you need to understand God's Word and take a stand for God's Word. This mother was so distorted in her stand for God's Word that she actually was partially responsible for her son not doing what was right. She was partially responsible for her son not worshipping God. She was promoting idolatry.

So in **verse 5**, we find Micah with an idolatrous shrine in his own home, which is another violation of God's Word, because worship was to be in a place designated by God (Deut. 12:4, 14; 16:1-7).

What is so odd is that God's designated place of worship was Shiloh, which was only a short distance from Micah's house. Shiloh was located in the hill country of Ephraim. So what this means is that **Micah's idolatry is not about not having access to God's place of worship, it is about blatant disobedience to God's inspired Word.**

Not only that, but he made one of his own sons a priest. He decided to form his own priesthood. This priest was not called by God and was not gifted by God at all. This priest was made a priest by Micah. He appointed one of his own sons to be a leader, and this whole thing was wrong.

So Micah steals, he is an idol worshipper, he makes his own false place of worship and appoints his own false priest. As Gary Inrig said "Micah was guilty of self-made religion and a home-made god" (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 272). Do you see how evil things had become with God's own people? **They had completely lost their way because they had lost their focus on God's Word.**

I cannot help but think of a church I know of that was run by a family and the family determined who the pastor was, and it turned out to be one of their relatives. The man did not study, the man could not preach, but he was related and they made him their pastor. They made their appointment. Even to this day that church has a deadness to it just like a spiritual cemetery. This kind of thing still goes on today. Preachers appointed by men not gifted by God.

SPIRAL DOWNWARD PART #2 – When people do what is right in their own eyes there will be a lack of what is morally and biblically right in worship. **17:7-13**

God's Word was so neglected in Micah's family that they invented their own system of worship. In **verse 7**, we are introduced to a young Levite who was from Bethlehem in Judah. We do not learn his name here, but the fact that he is from Bethlehem in Judah is repeated three times (**v. 7, 8, 9**). In fact, two times it is stated that this priest "departed from Bethlehem...to stay wherever he might find a place" (**v. 8, 9**). This young Levite is out looking for a job. He is looking for some promotion.

He wants to upgrade his status. He is looking for some place to minister where no one will hold him accountable. He is not seeking the will of God; he is seeking his own will.

There are ministers who are just like that. They are opportunists. They are not interested in going where God wants them to go or doing what God wants them to do. They have their own agenda. One of the satanic traps in a society that is moving away from God's Word is that there is a rise of self-appointed religious ministers who are really not interested in expounding God's Word to give the glory to God, but they are interested in self-advancement and self-glory. They want big churches and big paychecks and big numbers and they will keep job searching until they find what they are after.

What ministers need to know is that self-promotion will always take you away from God and His Word and His will, and it will take one deep into sin. Any true minister should want to do God's will and expound God's Word in the place appointed by God regardless of numbers. But this Levite was out job hunting.

Now the Levites were not given any specific territory for an inheritance, but they were assigned various cities in which they could live. **Bethlehem was not one of the forty-eight assigned Levitical cities where the Levites were supposed to live according to Moses (Josh. 21; Num. 35).** So this Levite is staying where he is not supposed to be staying. He apparently was looking to find a better job somewhere else other than in the places God had appointed.

He wanted some nice cushy job where he didn't have to work hard and yet could make a good living. According to **verse 8**, this young priest came to the hill country of Ephraim and showed up at the house of Micah.

Now Levites were dedicated for priestly service; however, they were only permitted to serve in the priesthood if they were a descendant of Aaron, and if they weren't from the line of Aaron and tried to be a priest, they were supposed to be killed (Num. 3:10). According to **Judges 18:30**, this priest's name was Jonathan and he was from Moses' line (Gershom), not the line of Aaron. So in all reality he is not even supposed to be a priest. Furthermore, according to Numbers 4:3, 30, a priest from the Aaronic line was supposed to be at least thirty-years old and since this priest is called a "young man" it is doubtful he was thirty. Micah asked him where he was from and the priest told him and said he was traveling around just looking for a place to minister and live (**verse 9**).

So we have a Levite who lives in the wrong place, is not from the right family line and is probably not old enough to be a priest. He shows up at Micah's house and according to **verse 10**, Micah hires him to be his own priest. He will pay him ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes and everything else needed to maintain him; housing, food and expenses. Notice what Micah says in **verses 10-11**, this priest would become both a "father" and a "son" to Micah.

By the way, the amount that Micah offers this guy is actually far less than what God supplied for His priests (Deuteronomy 18:3-4, 8). But keep in mind the Judges context; people are not interested in obeying God's Word, they are all doing what is right in their own eyes.

Well this was just the kind of offer this young Levite was looking for and according to **verse 11**, he took the job. What young religious man wouldn't want to walk around and have people call him "father." This was a career move, but it will turn out to be a bad one. He should have checked his own spiritual background and he should have checked into Micah's background.

Many years ago, when I was pastoring another church, a church approached me about becoming their pastor. I knew nothing about the church, but I knew that Mr. Miles probably did. So I called him to consult with him about the church. He advised me to stay clear of it. He said this is one place that has "Ichabod" written all over it; the glory of God has departed (I Samuel 4:21). I have always been thankful that I stayed clear of that place because it would have been a dead end ministry.

It is a shame this young priest didn't do a little more homework, because this career ministry move will turn out to be a bad one.

According to **verse 12**, Micah had some dedication ceremony and made this Levite his priest; and his motive for doing this, according to **verse 13**, was so God would prosper him.

Now God will prosper those who turn to Him and turn to His Word. God will prosper those who want to obey His Word and deal with sin. But this is not the case here at all. This is about having a priest as some lucky charm. But Micah will soon learn God does not prosper him at all.

Do you see what is happening here in worship? This family is just making up its own stuff and calling it sacred worship. There is no serious emphasis on teaching God's Word. This is all a religious sham.

You have to ask yourself, what kind of child of God would steal from his mother? What kind of mother would lead her own child into idolatry? What kind of minister would be happy ministering in a place of idolatry? The answer to these questions is the kind of person who does not care about knowing God's Word or obeying God's Word.

There are people, who go to church every week and they appear to be very religious, and they do what is right in their own eyes and don't care if they ever know what God's Word actually says. There are people who go to church to see dancing girls and hear bands and don't care if they ever crack open a Bible. I just saw a mega-church leader stand up and tell interesting stories for one-half hour and never accurately expound one verse of Scripture. The people loved it. They call it worship. It is all a sham.

You take a family not interested in carefully knowing God's Word, you take a church not interested in carefully knowing God's Word and you will have no authority base for what you believe or do. You will lose a sharp sense of right and wrong. You will drift this way and that way and won't stand for anything. That is exactly what happened in the book of Judges when all people did that which was right in their own eyes.