

## “The Religion of Micah”

What happens when a generation or society loses its values or morals? Well, there is a very strange story in the Old Testament that illustrates not only *how* that happens, but *what* happens when it does. It's recorded in the book of **Judges**. This is a very dark and bizarre period of time in the history of God's people. The story is tucked away beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter.

**Judges 17:1-6** “And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 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. 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. 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. 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. In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Now, the story doesn't stop there, but when you read merely that much, it really makes you stop and scratch your head. What in the world is going on here? You have a family who claims to serve the Lord, but in the process of serving the Lord, you have stealing, covetousness and, perhaps worst of all, idolatry. Here's a story of a young man, of the people of God, who really founded his own religion. He built a shrine in his house, full of idols.

There are a number of timely lessons that we can learn from the story of Micah. They are lessons that point to what is happening in *our* day and age in the hearts of men. And the key to the whole thing is found there in the last verse of our text. “*Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*”

The book of **Judges** describes a very dark era in the history of the nation of Israel. God's people had lost their way, and Samuel tells us why, in **Judges 17:6**, as we read in the text. Although no man had been appointed as king over the people, Israel DID have a king, and that is the Lord God. God wanted to be their king. But they had rejected the Lord as king, in that they had rejected the Lord's authority. They had set His law aside and were making moral and spiritual determinations based upon their own thinking and their own evaluations instead of listening to what God had said within His law. Every man became a law unto himself. You might say that it was a postmodern generation living back in that ancient day because the same philosophy that ruled that day rules this one. I am convinced that were the prophet Samuel to write a history of God's people today, as he did the pre-monarchical Jews back then, he might very well use the same words: “*Every man did that which was right in his own eyes,*” because that's what we're confronted with, day in and day out. That is to say, *what's right for you is right for you, and what's right for me is right for me, but there is no absolute standard of truth. There's no objective standard of truth, outside of each autonomous person, therefore, my truth is my truth and your truth is your truth. Don't try to make me live by your truth and I won't make you live by mine.* That postmodern philosophy has resulted in all kinds of moral and spiritual decay, confusion and anarchy today, just like it did back in the days of the Judges.

Samuel not only tells us that men were doing what was right in their own eyes; he illustrates for us the confusion that resulted from that philosophy. He does this by introducing us to the story of Micah. Micah was a thief, a dishonest man, a covetous man, and perhaps worst of all, Micah was an idolater. The Bible tells us in our text, that Micah had gone in and stolen eleven hundred shekels of silver from his mother. That was a lot of money. When she came to see that the money was missing, she was very upset about that, and she pronounced a curse upon whoever the thief was. She didn't know that her own son had stolen her money.

Well, when Micah found out that she had done that, he brought the money back and admitted what he had done. He didn't do that out of genuine contrition and repentance; he did that out of fear. He was worried about what his mother was going to do. So, he brings the money back and tells her that he was the thief. This is where the story gets very strange. You would think that, at the very least, she would be angry with him, she might scold him or resent him for what he did.

But, oh no. The Bible says that she blessed him. She blessed him! And she goes on to explain to him why she was so concerned about this money. You see, she had set it aside for a special purpose. She tells Micah that she had dedicated this money to the Lord God. That sounds good, doesn't it? Wouldn't we think that she must be a virtuous, upstanding woman of God, to set aside this large sum of money for God and His service? But, wait until you hear *how* she had dedicated that money to God.

Her intention was to take that money and have an idol made out of that silver. An idol! So she turns all of this over to Micah, they take this money down to the founder and they have this little idol made out of this silver. It's given to Micah and he takes it back to his house and puts it on his shelf gods. He has a house full of these teraphim, these gods. He has a shrine of idols that he is building, and he decides that he is going to appoint a priest to officiate over all of this, so he just appoints his own son to be the priest in his house of idols.

Now, whatever that is, it is absolute moral and spiritual confusion. I mean, when I read that story, I just simply scratch my head and think, *what in the world? What could these people have been thinking that would lead them to believe that they could construct an idolatrous shrine of idols and that somehow that would be attached to God and to the worship and service of Him, and that he would receive that?*

As strange as that may sound to us, it really shouldn't sound all that unfamiliar. Let me tell you, religion today is steeped in idolatry. When you look at religion today, and try to compare it to the word of God, you will see a great contrast. People today do all manner of things that you can't read in the New Testament, and they do it in the name of God. They do it in the name of serving Jesus Christ. All kinds of false worship and false doctrines and false religious notions and concepts that have no foundation in God's word; yet in all of this, people claim to be serving the Lord.

Folks, it's not that we don't have religion today; we're *drowning* in religion today. But we're drowning in FALSE religion. There is very little Bible truth. When you get right down to it, there is very little Bible authority cited for what people believe and practice in religion today. Why? For one reason, many are guided by their emotions, and they use that for their authority in religion. Their feelings, human tradition...all of these other things besides the word of God serve as their authority in religion, and it's no different than what was going on back in the days of the Judges. *"Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."*

Whenever you take the word of God and set it aside, whenever you say that it no longer is the absolute authority and standard for morality, spirituality, doctrine, worship and so forth...when the word of God fails to be the standard, what do you have? Whose word do you go by? What constitutes the authority? The only thing that we could possibly all rally around as the authority in religion is the revelation that God gave us, on Himself and of His will; that is, the word of God.

**John 4:24 "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."**

So, this young man had some very strange ideas about religion, and in essence, he was setting up his own religion, and in so doing, was claiming to serve the Lord. You could go all the way back through religious history, through the history of so-called Christendom today, and you'll find where man after man, theologian after theologian has set up his own brand of religion and claims to be serving God in it. Essentially, that is what Micah had done. It would be a sermon in itself, were we to outline all the kinds of idolatry that you see practiced in religion today.

But that's not all that took place here. Samuel goes on with the story beginning in verse 7.

**Judges 17:7 "And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there."**

Do you remember who the Levites were? They were the priests of God's people, and the Levites who weren't priests were temple workers. For our purposes today, we'll say that they were the preachers of that day and time. So, Samuel tells us that this young man was out traversing the countryside, basically just looking to live, to make ends meet. He's looking for a job, gainful employment, if you will.

**Judges 17:8 "And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed."**

Well, we just met Micah, the thief and the idolater.

**Judges 17:9 "And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehemjudah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place."**

When Micah heard the word 'Levite,' he perked up. He recognized that the Levites were the priests of God's people, so he thinks *well, this is my lucky day; I've found a man, who if I can convince to come into my house, and be MY priest, that will legitimize all of this that I've set up. My religion will be validated.* That's the way a lot of people think today: If they can just get a preacher to go along with it, someone who is thought of as a man of God to sanction and validate what they believe and practice, then that ought to make it all right. So, when Micah hears that this man is a Levite, he wants to hire him to be his priest to put God's 'seal of approval' on the whole business. Micah approaches him with a proposition.

**Judges 17:10 "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 promises him a handsome salary, fine clothing and food, and to take care of him if he will just be his priest. And the Bible says that the Levite took the job.

What do we learn about this young man immediately? If he had any principles, he left them at the door. If he had any convictions before this point, he threw them out the window, because he's concerned

about one thing: making a living. He becomes a prophet for profit. A preacher looking for a paycheck. That's what it amounts to.

The Bible teaches that preachers are to be paid for the work of preaching the gospel. There's nothing wrong with paying a preacher. In fact, the Bible commands the church to pay the preacher who labors amongst them. There's certainly nothing wrong with a preacher feeling a sense of being accountable to the church that supports him in the preaching of the gospel. He needs to do what he agrees to do, and be honest and forthright, and keep whatever agreement he makes with those people who secure his work as an evangelist amongst them.

But, whenever you have a preacher who begins to look at preaching as merely a career or a job, and a church who looks at the preacher as somebody they "hire" to come and do their bidding, you have a recipe for trouble. That's exactly what this arrangement amounted to, between Micah and this young Levite. In fact, this young Levite met some men a little bit later, in the very next chapter, and they recognized the voice of this young man. At least, they recognized that he was of the Levites. They asked him what he was doing there. Look at his response.

**Judges 18:4 "And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest."**

Do you remember what Jesus said about a hireling?

**John 10:13 "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep."**

Folks, that's one of the things that's wrong, terribly wrong, in religion today. Preaching has merely become a profession. Preachers are after a paycheck. Preachers look at their job of preaching as just a career. As a result, they preach to get a crowd. They preach whatever is necessary to build up a great, big church. They preach whatever they think they have to preach to remain gainfully employed and popular. But a preacher is not true to his calling if that is his motivation.

**II Timothy 4:3-4 "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."**

What the world needs today are men who stand behind pulpits, who love Jesus, and who are not ashamed of the truth. Men who love the word of God. Men who realize that they will give an account for what they preach and for what they don't preach. Men who realize that eternal souls hang in the balance, and that it doesn't matter whether or not what he preaches is popular. He simply preaches the word of God. He is true to principle and true to his convictions. He's true to the word of God.

This young Levite was not. He sold out in order to get a paycheck. We learn more about that in **Judges 18**. We see more about exactly this philosophy that was ruling this time, and what it did to the people, spiritually and morally. Samuel introduces us to some men from the tribe of Dan, who come along and meet this young Levite. These men are out on a mission, and it's not a good mission. You see, the leaders of the tribe of Dan essentially said, *We don't like what we have*. They had inherited a territory. They had not gone and possessed their possession because of their own sin and their own neglect and cowardice. But they instead cast their eyes somewhere else, deciding that they were going to take what God had given to somebody else. They ended up going to the town of Laish and plundering that city.

But, before they got to Laish, they encountered this young Levite. When they find out who he is, and that he is now the priest in the house of Micah, they had a question to ask of him.

**Judges 18:5 “And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.”**

Now, as I said, they were not on a holy mission. They were on an immoral mission. They were going to go and plunder this defenseless city and take it over. Look at the Levite’s response.

**Judges 18:6 “And the priest said unto them, Go in peace: before the Lord is your way wherein ye go.”**

He told them to go right ahead, that God would bless them in their mission. He was telling them what they wanted to hear. He was like those spoken of later in the Bible, who spoke peace when there was no peace.

**Galatians 4:16 “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”**

You see, that’s the preacher’s job: to tell people what God has said--not what they want to hear. To tell people the truth of God’s word, and if a preacher won’t do that, then he’s not worth the salt that goes in his bread. This was a time of spiritual confusion, anarchy and apostasy. Why? Because men had rejected the standard of God’s law.

There was no king in Israel, Samuel said. And every man was doing what was right in his own eyes. In any subsequent generation, when men reject the word of God as the standard, then moral and spiritual confusion and apostasy will always be the result.