

12. A god that gets ripped off

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We have seen an ugly repetition of history of Israel again and again in the Book of Judges. It starts with Israel in the place of blessing from God. They are serving Him. Then there is a departure from God and they do evil. They follow their own way. Then they are ended up in slavery of foreign nations. In their slavery they cry out to God for deliverance. Then they turn to Him and repent. Then God raises up judges to deliver them. Then Israel comes back to the place of blessing and becomes a nation that serves God. Just when everything is back in order, they lapse into sin and turn from Him again. Israel went through seven apostasies.

Some biblical scholars believe that the events described in chapters 17-21 took place earlier in the period of the Judges. Because during the occupation by the Philistines the people of Israel couldn't possess any of metallic weapons.

Every nation in the history of the mankind goes down in this order:

1) Spiritual apostasy 2) Moral decay 3) Political collapse

Deterioration begins from individual's heart and in the church, then to the home, and finally to the nation. That is the way a nation falls. And America is at the third stage.

A. MICAH'S IDOLATRY

Judges 17:1-6 Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 2 And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears--here is the silver with me; I took it." And his mother said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, my son!" 3 So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you." 4 Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah. 5 The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. 6 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

As I said it before, God has established three institutions in society:
Home, church and the government

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. That is why the devil attack against families so much. He knows that once the families crumble under his attack because of lack of obedience to God's Word. The rest will crumble in a matter of time.

The name Micah means "Who is like Jehovah?" but the man certainly didn't live up to his name to honor the Lord. He had a family, although nothing is said about his wife. We get the impression that his mommy lived with him and that she was wealthy. The "extended family" was normal in Israel.

“carve” their own concept of God and assume that this is the God of the Bible. It takes effort and obedient heart to understand and accept Him and His ways.

When they claim that the loving God would accept them with their sins and just forgive them and go on as business as usual, what they said is a half correct. They choose to see the side of God’s love and mercy and grace, but they try very hard to ignore the side of His holiness and righteousness that He wouldn’t put up or wink at men’s sin.

Micah did everything he could to set up a rival religion in Israel. All of this came from Micah and not from God. This was a completely man-originated and man-centered religion. Therefore the purpose of the shrine, the beautiful ephod, the attractive idols, and the established priesthood was to serve and please man, not God. This pattern of man-pleasing religion is common with many religions and churches today.

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. Television provides all the “images” the family will ever want to “worship,” and few worry about “wrath of God.”

V6 shows what kind of mindsets the people of Israel had. It is almost identical as what is happening in America today.

B. WORSHIPING SOMETHING IN HIS OWN WAY

Judges 17:7-13 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. 8 The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. 9 And Micah said to him, “Where do you come from?” So he said to him, “I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay.” 10 Micah said to him, “Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance.” So the Levite went in. 11 Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. 12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, “Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!”

A young Levite had been living in Bethlehem of Judah, which was not one of the cities assigned to the priests and Levites. 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. 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.

This young Levite wanted to do what was right in his own eyes and went about offering himself as a “priest for hire,” wherever he could 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.

This Levite was a hireling and not a true shepherd. He didn't serve the true and living God. He worked for Micah and his idols. The Levite wasn't a spokesperson for the Lord. He gave people just the message the people wanted to hear. Oh, how many pastors in America just do the same kind of awful things in the name of Christ.

Whenever the church has a "hireling," 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. It must grieve the Lord today to see people worshiping the idols of ministerial "success," statistics, buildings and reputation.

In today's "consumer society," self-appointed preachers, apostles and prophets have no problem getting a following and peddling their religious wares to a church that acts more like a Hollywood fan club than a holy people of God. And to make it worse, these hirelings will call what's happening "the blessing of God." The young Levites and Micahs will always find each other because they need each other. It is a matter of supply and demand.

2Tim 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

The sad part of the story is that Micah now thought he had the favor of God because a genuine levitical priest was serving at his private shrine. Micah practiced a false religion and worshiped false gods – with a little bit of Jehovah God thrown in for good measure, and all the while he rested on the false confidence that God was blessing him! Little did he know that the day would come when his priest and his gods would be taken from him and nothing would be left of his religion.

C. A PROBLEM WITH FOLLOWING GOD'S WAY?

Judges 18:1-6 In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. 2 So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. 3 While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here?" 4 He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." 5 So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." 6 And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the Lord be with you on your way."

Instead of submitting to God's will, people want what somebody else has and they'll do almost anything to get it. The corruption that's in this world is fed by "evil desires". Whether it's producing pornography, selling dope or promoting gambling, money-hungry people cater to human desires and end up making money and destroying lives.

Thanks to the power of modern media, especially television, the advertising industry creates in people appetites for all sorts of exciting products, services and experiences. So, people go out and spend money they don't have on things they don't need to impress people who don't really care.

If the tribe of Dan had really wanted God's counsel, they could have consulted with the high priest in Shiloh. But they were actually rejecting God's counsel by refusing to remain in the land He had assigned to them.

V6 shows what a spiritually confused time this was in Israel. Since somebody else is paying the priest, the Danites' spies on a sinful mission asked a sinful Levite if their mission would be successful. Then the sinful Levite sent the sinning men on their way with a false God's blessing.

Judges 18:7-13 So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone. 8 Then the spies came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, "What is your report?" 9 So they said, "Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good. Would you do nothing? Do not hesitate to go, and enter to possess the land. 10 When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth." 11 And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. 12 Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There it is, west of Kirjath Jearim.) 13 And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.

The five spies had traveled 100 miles north from their encampment at Zorah to Laish, a town inhabited by the Sidonians, about thirty miles east of the Mediterranean Sea.

D. PROTECTING A GOD WHICH CANNOT PROTECT MEN

Judges 18:14-26 Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." 15 So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man--to the house of Micah--and greeted him. 16 The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who were of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. 17 Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men who were armed with weapons of war. 18 When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" 19 And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" 20 So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people. 21 Then they turned

and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them. 22 When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. 23 And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?" 24 So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?' " 25 And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!" 26 Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

This was a strange combination of low morality and strong religious feeling. During the Los Angeles riots in the 1990's, a reporter came across three looters leaving a store. He asked them what they took, and the first two gave him a mouthful of profanity. But the third man said, "I got some Gospel music. I love Jesus!"

The Levite did not care about Micah, only for the pay and status that he might get by being the priest for a whole tribe instead of a mere family.

This is a pathetic irony. Micah had to rescue his own gods. Obviously, his gods should be able to care for themselves. We wonder if Micah saw the foolishness of this.

Hideyoshi, a Japanese warlord who ruled over Japan in the late 1500s, commissioned a gigantic statue of Buddha for a shrine in Kyoto. It took 50,000 men five years to build, but the work had scarcely been completed when the earthquake of 1596 brought the roof of the shrine crashing down and wrecked the statue. In a rage Hideyoshi shot an arrow at the fallen Buddha. "I put you here at great expense," he shouted, "and you can't even look after your own temple."

We each either worship a god of our own making or we worship the true God who made us. But the gods we make are always less than we are. Idol worship is just another way of worshipping self.

Judges 18:27-31 So they took the things Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. 28 There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. 29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish. 30 Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

The city of Dan will become the most prominent northern city in Israel. The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" will become an expression meaning, "from the north to the south of Israel" indicating all of Israel.

personal idolatry became the idolatry of an entire tribe, setting up a rival center of worship to the house of God in Shiloh.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Whenever the church has a “hireling,” it can’t enjoy the blessing of God. The church needs true and faithful shepherds who work for the Lord, not for personal gain.

2) We each either worship a god of our own making or we worship the true God who made us. But the gods we make are always less than we are. Idol worship is just another way of worshipping self.