

JUDGES SESSION #20

- we now begin a two-part *epilogue* to the book of Judges
- back at the beginning of this series we found that the first 2 chapters of Judges (the **prologue**) outlined some **principles** of God's dealings with man
 - ...for example, one of the main principles is: when people do what is right in their *own* eyes they do what is **wrong** in *God's* eyes, and suffer the consequences
- then the writer of Judges gave us some **stories** of various judges which **show these principles in operation**
- now at the end of the book we come to an **epilogue** which **underlines the truth of these principles**, emphasizing the theme again
- the epilogue consists of 2 sets of 2 stories each in which God reveals the **inner life** of the people of those days so that we might know the deeper reasons for their sin & failure
 - ...these stories about idolatry, immorality & lawlessness come at the end of the book but probably took place in the early years of the judges (maybe during Othniel's time)
- let's begin by looking at the first set of related stories:

A. **A Disgraceful Thief**

Judg 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.

1. **Mother's Character**

What do we learn about the **mother** here?

- she was **superstitious** – she put a **curse** on the stolen money
 - ...it was believed that a curse could be cancelled by a blessing being pronounced by the same person; therefore, her 'blessing' on the son when he returned the money cancelled this curse
- she may have **suspected** her son of stealing the money because she had pronounced the curse "in his ears"
- but she did **not correct her son** about his stealing

- she was **insincere** – although she says she had dedicated the whole amount to the Lord, when she got it back she only gave 18% for that purpose (she herself was a thief!)
- she was **disobedient** to God, or at least ignorant of His commands, when she made her carved image
- we have met some other mothers in Judges – women like Deborah, Jael, Samson’s mother – and this mother is a far cry from the character of those ladies!

2. Micah’s Character

What do we learn here about **Micah**?

- first, he was a **thief** who stole from his own mother
 - yes, he gave the money back, but apparently only because of his fear of the curse
- he too was **disobedient** to **God’s laws**
 - ...God’s **sanctuary** was to be at a specified place and Micah’s home was not it!
- the tabernacle was at **Shiloh** and Israel was to worship Him there
- Micah disregards this law and sets up a shrine at his own home even though Shiloh was only a short distance from his house!
- later, in 1 Samuel chapter 1, we see a tremendous contrast to Micah’s behavior when we read about Samuel’s father, Elkanah, who “went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh.”
- in Micah’s case, he had the carved image his mother purchased, an **ephod** (a replica of the special vest worn by the high priest and used in determining God’s will), plus household idols; this was all a **direct disobedience** of God’s clear rules – in fact, according to Deut. 13 he should have been put to death!
- to make matters worse, he also **made one of his sons to be priest**, when only those of Aaron’s family line had the right to be priests
- to emphasize what’s happening here, *vs. 6* injects the tragic theme of Judges again at this point
 - In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.
- Micah does ‘what is right in his own eyes’ in two significant ways:
 - 1) he makes his own idols
 - 2) he sets up his own shrine
- ...he reduces God to something he can control (the timeless essence of idolatry)
 - and instead of worshiping the living God he worships things that are simply extensions of himself
- and **we** can do much the same thing
 - even if we manage to avoid the idolatry of the ‘toys’ of our materialistic age we may still be like Micah by placing something or someone else in the central position of affection & attention in our lives, pushing God off to the side
- in his religious practice Micah pretended to be worshiping God but he does so in the way *Micah* wanted, not on God’s terms
 - evidently Micah decided it would be much more **convenient** to worship at home – why make that tedious journey to Shiloh every year, transporting your sacrifices etc. when you could just set up your own shrine right there at home with your own priest handy to do the necessary whenever you needed?

...but our worship of the great Creator Redeemer God must be done on the terms **He** sets, not on our terms – not on the basis of what is most convenient or pleasurable to us – we don't attend worship services primarily to feel good or enjoy ourselves or even get blessed; 'worship' was well defined by Wm. Temple:

“to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

- true worship is **GOD**-centered, not self-centered

- interestingly Micah's name, like the OT prophet of the same name, means “Who is like Jehovah?” – who can compare with Yahweh, the Incomparable?
 - but by his attitudes and actions Micah denies this reality built into his own name
- we are called “**Christians**” – the Christ-ones – but do our attitudes & actions match our name or make a mockery of it?

B. **A Disobedient Levite**

Judg 17:7-10

Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he *was* a Levite, and was staying there. ⁸The 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. ⁹And 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.”

¹⁰Micah 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.

What is wrong with this **Levite**?

a) he was **not eligible** for **priestly** functions (Levites *assisted* the priests but they themselves were *not* priests)

- in Num. 16, Korah (an ordinary Levite) was killed by God for wanting to take on priestly functions

b) he should not have been living in **Bethlehem**

...Bethlehem was **not** one of the 48 cities given to the Levites for them to live in (according to Joshua 21)

...he is evidently **not satisfied** with God's arrangements for his life

- he “departed from the city of Bethlehem...to stay wherever he could find a place”

Kitty Muggerridge wrote, “When **self-denial** goes out of fashion, **self-fulfillment** takes its place.”

- this Levite's wanderings bring him to Micah's home where Micah sees a golden opportunity to ‘**upgrade**’ – like a kid going from short pants to Levis!

- in Micah's case, he shifts from a home-grown priest (one of his sons) to a genuine Levite

- (by the way, when we see what the Levite's annual ‘salary’ is we realize that the money Micah had stolen from his mother was equal to 110 yrs wages – a real fortune!!)

- when these 2 men with no principles meet, they strike an unholy bargain
 - Micah gets a **priest** ... apparently in an effort to secure his religious future or gain God's blessing
 - and the Levite gets a **job**, a set of clothes, food in his stomach & a roof over his head

Judg 17:12-13

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!"

- all looks well, but only *temporarily* – the story isn't finished yet! Find out what happens in our next session.