

## Judges | When All Hell Breaks Loose

### Micah's Spiritual Playhouse (Epilogue One)

Judges 17  
11.17.19

*Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> 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." <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.*

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

*<sup>7</sup> Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> The Levite agreed to live with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. <sup>12</sup> So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah. <sup>13</sup> Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest."*

We've been working through the Book of Judges – or to put it another way we've been witnessing the long, slow disintegration of a society that has forgotten God, lost their identity and purpose and pursued freedom by conforming to the standards and ideas of their unbelieving neighbors.

Last week, we focused on THAT one truth, that sin is what really destroys life and underneath every sin is a deeper and hidden motivation, i.e. UNBELIEF.

Whenever we stop trusting God and lose confidence in His promises: THAT'S WHEN SIN OCCURS. And that's why we're really helped in the spiritual life when we ask ourselves: "Hmmm, why did I do or say or think that sinful/destructive thing? What promise of God was I NOT believing in that moment?"

Today we look at the first of two epilogues in the Book of Judges. It has to do with worship – what happens when worship is NOT based on trust in God's promises but based INSTEAD on unbelief? And then NEXT week we'll see how a society's worship affects the social fabric of that society.

Let's jump right in and see:

- 1) The ABSURDITY of making gods
- 2) The BEAUTY of "enoughness"
- 3) The CAPTIVITY that is freedom

In this first epilogue we meet a man named Micah ("who is like YHWH?") He's stolen a large sum (1100 pieces of silver) from his own mother. She pronounces a curse on the thief and he gets nervous that there's magic power in the curse and he confesses.

She withdraws the curse by pronouncing a blessing: "Blessed be my son by YHWH" (a family in covenant with the God of Abraham – right?) His mother boldly declares that she'll dedicate the whole 1100 pieces of silver to YHWH. So she does: she gives 200 pieces (did you catch that? Kinda weird!)

Then she employs a silversmith to fashion this 200 pieces of silver into a group of idols dedicated to YHWH who HATES idols (the first three of the Ten Commandments have to do with false representations of God) and to dedicate idols to God: THAT'S weird too!

Micah ("who is like YHWH?") makes a shrine and adds a few more idols and an ephod (which has to do with divination or fortune-telling) all things that YHWH detests... Then he makes his son a priest in his little spiritual playhouse and THEN...Micah strikes it RICH!

He runs into a Levite! This was the priestly tribe and this guy is apparently unemployed and he's IN TOWN FROM BETHLEHEM (why did he live in Bethlehem? Not a Levitical City – kinda weird!)

Micah sees his chance to have a real priest in a real shrine and Micah offers him a sweet deal and BANG! It all comes together – "This must be God's will for my life!" (Last verse: "Now I know that YHWH will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as a priest!")

Now this was a family lying to itself. Dostoyevsky said "A man who lies to himself and believes his own lies, becomes unable to recognize truth, either in himself or in anyone else, and he ends up losing respect for himself and for others. When he has no respect for anyone, he can no

longer love, and in him, he yields to his impulses, indulges in the lowest form of pleasure, and behaves in the end like an animal in satisfying his vices. And it all comes from lying — to others and to yourself.” (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*)

And this family AND THIS WHOLE CULTURE is lying to itself AND you see it in its worship. Let me highlight three ways their worship is an exercise in absurdity and self-deception:

First, it’s “pick-and-choose-worship”. They’re relating to God (YHWH) NOT based on what He has revealed about Himself...but based on what they like about what He has revealed. They refer to Him by His revealed COVENANT Name... they know something about the Levites being the priestly tribe about dedicating things to the Lord...BUT they choose to ignore all the very, VERY MANY commands this God makes AGAINST MAKING IDOLS.

And see, when we do this, when we make a “Stepford god” a “Frankenstein god” who never contradicts us or calls us to do what we don’t want to do or to NOT DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO – that god we make is really only a projection of our selves. It’s self-worship.

That god can’t save you because he IS you.

Second, and similar to it – they tell themselves they’re doing over and above what God requires but really they’re doing OTHER than He requires. It’s like my old illustration: you go out of town for six months and leave your yard in the hands of a landscaper with instructions to mow it once a week.

When you return the grass is four feet high and there are fluorescent notices plastered all over your house and the landscaper’s there pointing out how he’s planted prize-winning roses all around the perimeter of the house, “Don’t you love ‘em?!”

Again, we may think we’re making God happy because I made a pilgrimage or built a shrine or adhere to a certain diet (or any of a million things people do because THEY find the thing MEANINGFUL) but what about the revealed WILL of God?... “Yeah...but my heart isn’t really INTO that...”

So the question is – “how can I get my heart to desire what God desires?” (1 Cor 7.19) – more on that in a moment.

Last way we make worship an exercise in absurdity and self-deception: we try to domesticate God i.e. we somehow convince ourselves that, “I got me a Levite! Now God will have to prosper me!” (13)

Whenever we succumb to this impulse (and it’s VERY strong especially in a consumeristic culture) this impulse that says, “If I do THIS then God will have to do that” – cause-and effect

religion, transaction, karma... And somehow we get it into our heads that because I did this or DO THIS, God owes me health or protection or blessing (in the way I define). We're really seeking to domesticate the "Untamable God" and THAT is the essence of idolatry (to put God in a package I can carry around and control.)

So, how does the charming story of Micah and his spiritual playhouse – how does it play out? Well, in the next chapter the Tribe of Dan – doesn't really like the parcel of land God gave them so like Micah's wandering Levite "they go a wanderin'" and they choose some land that's outside the Promised Land.

They send in spies "to spy out the land" (sound familiar?) – in other words they're doing what Micah did on a grand scale – it's a counterfeit Exodus.

And these 600 warriors from the tribe of Dan is passing by Micah's spiritual playhouse... and they decide they WANT THOSE SILVER IDOLS... and they want that Levite. So they make him a better offer and he leaves the playhouse and becomes the priest in a huge FAKE SHRINE – NOT in Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant was – it's alternative religion.

Micah goes after them and says, "Hey! What are you doing? Those are my idols and that's MY LEVITE! And I want 'em back!"

And the Danite warriors say, "Boy! Go back home before we get mad."

So Micah the thief gets thieved – the Hidden God can be heard faintly laughing between the lines. (Psa 2.4)

And somehow...in God's beautiful providence, the way He governs even when He appears to be absent, somehow in this sad epilogue about a man named "Who is like YHWH?" who then treats YHWH like He's like any of the gods...a man who steals from his own mother...who curses him and then blesses him...who devotes everything to the LORD (but it's really less than 20%) the thief who is thieved...the man who controlled God and was guaranteed to prosper (or so he thought!) – the Tribe of Dan who reverses the Exodus and slaughters a peaceful people...somehow in this dark epilogue... God is whispering to us.

He is there in this priest from Bethlehem... a whisper of One who would come to be born in "Bêt-Lehem" the House of Bread and would become for us, the Priest we really need – who came NOT looking for a better job offer, but came to do the Father's will and who would give His own self from the House of Bread – the Bread come down from Heaven.

In this absurd story about idols – reading between the lines we hear a whisper of the Only One who could really "image" God – in today's "declaration of faith" we read that "He is the IMAGE

of the invisible God” – it’s the Greek word, “eikon” as if He is the only authorized visible representation of God Himself God made physical...not in silver but in our humanity.

And this God-Man, Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, He takes the curse that Micah’s mother pronounced; He takes the Curse that God Himself pronounced and that rightly falls on ALL thieves and ALL LAW-BREAKERS like you... and me... And Jesus Christ, the Great High priest carries that Curse...He bears it for everyone who believes Him...He turns it to blessing!

And in the end...he answers Micah’s longing for prosperity, “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have Jesus Christ as priest.” (13)

It’s not that He guarantees us health and wealth but an infinitely greater prosperity: He promises to remake us and to remake everything that is broken/ruined by sin. He promises not only to give us the blessings of God...but to give us God Himself.

The God who is hiding in this dark episode – in Jesus Christ, this True and Living God comes out of hiding and gives Himself to us, adopts us, cherishes us and secures us. He becomes our “enoughness” that NO ONE can take from us like Micah had his priest and idols taken from him.

See to trust this wild, untamed God who is imaged in Jesus Christ – it looks like CAPTIVITY but it’s actually freedom. Micah thought he could be free by controlling God (having his own shrine he could manage) but IT’S REALLY AS WE LOSE CONTROL that we find true freedom.

This whole section is bringing us to the very bottom of the downward spiral (next week we’ll hit it) and it’s there to show us in a raw, unvarnished way, how our self-deceived attempts at freedom REALLY ONLY END IN ABSURD RIDICULOUSNESS.

“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.” But, you see, there is a King (who came out of Israel) who is also the great Artist and HE has power to give us new eyes...so that WHAT is right in HIS EYES actually becomes right in our eyes. In trusting Him, we begin to be liberated/free to desire what He desires... and what He desires is always the Good, True and Beautiful.

His is the captivity that is freedom indeed. Every other attempt to be free ends in some form of absurdity and self-deception but “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8.36) free to become the True You as God intends.

Come under His reign; believe Him and get free.