

Micah's Religious Pluralism

Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Judges 17:1-5

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We return another time to our passage of Scripture in Judges chapter 17. I see some of you have a sheet still. If you don't, you can turn in your Bible to Judges. It is the seventh book in the Bible. And turn to chapter 17. I will read, again, those first five verses and we will look another time at what these verses have to say for us in our day. Not only what they said centuries ago, but how they apply in our lives today.

There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, "The 1,100 pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and also spoke it in my ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD." And he restored the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, "I dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image. Now therefore I will restore it to you." So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took 200 pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image. And it was in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest.¹

As we have looked at this narrative over the last several weeks, we have noticed some things about Micah that we can conclude from what we have written here. Micah lived in the little community of Ephraim. Ephraim, it tells us in chapter one of Judges, they refused to expel all of the Canaanites in the land. God had instructed them to do that. Destroy them all. Destroy their idols. Destroy their altars.

"Get rid of every incidence of their lives. Remove it. If you don't they will slowly work on you and you will become increasingly like them, an abomination to me."

Well, Ephraim did not expel the Canaanites from their territory. Micah lived in that territory. So about him lived the Canaanites. And we can see from the passage that what God warned the children of Israel came to pass in the life of Micah. He became increasingly like the Canaanites instead of the Israelites whom God brought out of Egypt.

¹ Judges 17:1-5.

We see him with idols. His mother makes two of them for him. He has other idols in his house. He has turned his house into a shrine for all of the idols that he had. He made an ephod and we described the ephod that the priest would wear over their chest. It had religious significance to the high priest and God had described it for the high priest of Israel. He made one like it for his priest, his son. Can you imagine that, ordaining his own priest, having his son become the leader of his religion? And throughout all of these actions we see how he just blatantly disobeyed God's law on ever occasion. He made idols. God said, "Don't make idols." He made idols that he thought would help him and encourage him in his worship of God and God said, "Don't do that. Don't make any image of me whether it is of an animal or the heavenly beings. Don't make anything to represent me. And he described the tabernacle, how they would build it, where he would come and meet with them and they would worship him at the tabernacle. Micah made his own tabernacle. He made himself a shrine in his own house. God had designed a royal priesthood, priests who would serve God on behalf of the people and work in as an intermediary between the people and God and would offer the sacrifices that the people would bring and he would offer them unto God on their behalf. Micah ordains his own priest.

In every respect we see what Micah did was design his own religion. He brought together a group of gods from about him, house hold gods similar to what the Canaanites had. The Canaanites had literally thousands of gods. They had a god for virtually everything in life. There was a god for it, a god for the sun and a god for the moon, a god for wheat, a god for cattle, a god for bearing children. They had thousands of gods.

Micah emulated the Canaanites about him and designed a religion of his own. He would have a little bit of God and a whole lot of idols. And, thus, he had a religion, a religion of his own making, of his own design.

What we see here is a vivid description of what in our day we called religious pluralism. Religious pluralism simply means no one god fully describes all of the total reality of life. No one god can do that. So, thus, you have many gods and you worship many gods, a plurality of gods thinking that in some fashion you will latch on to enough of the right gods to bring about some kind of resolution for the problem of sin which we all know we have.

Many today think that religious pluralism started around the 1960s. It began centuries ago. Centuries ago people believed in many gods and worshipped many gods. And they disregarded the God who created all things and who said and revealed himself to his people and said, "I am God. There is no other God beside me. I am not one of many gods. I am not the highest of many gods. I alone am God. There is no other."

Soon after Adam and Eve sinned they began worshipping a multitude of gods. And through the centuries that pattern has filled men's hearts all over the globe thinking that somehow they can rid themselves of their sense of sin within their lives and their being,,

that somehow surely with all of these gods I will find some kind of peace and satisfaction.

It describes for us very clearly Micah's unbelief in God. His unbelief drove him to deny and reject God and to abandon him and in his place have multitudes of gods. His unbelief drove him to disobedience and his disobedience we can describe and define as a religious pluralism. Multitudes of gods, multitudes of realities, one for you, one for your neighbor, one for the people over in Africa, one for the people in Europe. Everybody having their own god.

In the midst of this we can also catch a glimpse of the character of god. God has revealed himself as the exclusive God. No other god exist and, in fact, if you were really diligent in defining the term God you would understand that only one God could exist. You can't have more than one God. Only one. And he has revealed himself to us, the exclusive only true and living God.

We also understand God's sovereignty. He rules and governs all things. When Micah and the neighboring Ephraimites abandoned God and rejected him, he left them. And in time he came to work on behalf of their enemies to oppress them and suppress them as a judgment against them.

God in his mercy did not annihilate them which he could have done. In justice he could have destroyed all of the Ephraimites and all of the family of Micah for their sin and their disobedience. But in mercy he granted them time.

Now Scriptures do not reveal to us whether Micah and his family ultimately turned back to God. We don't know. But we do know that as we have studied the individual judges that there were times during those judges when the people did turn to God under the leadership of the judges. And it is possible that Micah and his family did turn back to God under those ruling judges. But it reminds us of God's mercy and of his grace. In grace he provides saviors for Israel that would draw them back to God.

This also gives to us an opportunity to see a small part of God's progressive revelation of his plan of salvation. The behavior of Micah and the Ephraimites does not describe normality. The normal came when God created all things and placed Adam and Eve in the garden and everything was very good. No presence of sin, no unbelief on the part of Adam and Eve, no disobedience. They walked with God. They had ability to know him, to understand him, to follow him, to fellowship with him. And God revealed himself to them and they knew God.

Then the serpent came and tempted Adam and Eve with a false notion about the God that they knew. That makes their sin so far greater because they knew God. They had an understanding of God. They fellowshiped with him. And when the serpent came and told them a story about God that differed from the way that God had revealed himself to them, that should have flashed all kinds of neon lights, as we would say in our day, in

their minds to say, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Something is wrong here. That is not the God I know."

But Adam and Eve chose to believe the serpent instead of believing the God who they knew. It immediately changed everything. It changed Adam and Eve. Once having and enjoying a fellowship with God they now had a corrupted notion of God because now they feared him. They didn't fear him before. They had no reason to fear him. They enjoyed him. They fellowshiped with him. Now because of their sin they had a corrupted view of God. Sin now became the abnormal.

God in his grace made a promise to them. "I will provide a Savior, the seed of the woman with supernatural ability to crush the heads of the serpent to his evil ways."

And through time God revealed more and more about this Savior and throughout the book of Judges we see that no mere human could serve as the real Savior. Oh, they brought some relief. They brought some victories. They brought some peace and some joy. But ultimately they would die. And they would lose the benefits and the victories of the judge. God was revealing to them that it would require a supernatural Savior to bring to them the victories that they really needed. And we see here in the life of Micah and his family and ultimately throughout the children of Israel the desperate result and consequence of sin. That which had such a small beginning in the garden in Eden had now expanded into a vast wickedness and depravity. And the natural bent of mankind seeks after depraved means and activities. That is abnormal. God didn't create Adam and Eve for that. God created Adam and Eve originally to seek after him which they did and to know him, which they did and to glorify him, which they did. When they sinned, they became abnormal.

You know, when you get used to something in life, we have a tendency to say, "Well, that is normal." We get used to it. That is just the way it is.

I want to remind you, my friends, sin is not normal. Sin is abnormal. The normal life that God designed for his creation, for mankind, was to seek after him, to know him, to walk in holiness after him. That is the normal. And God promised a champion who would come who would provide a means which by mankind could go back to the normal and experience victory over the abnormal.

We see it pictured in the life of Micah and his family. He tried to get back to the normal with a multitude of gods. God said, "Only me. Only me." And as the creator of all things he had invested in him the right and the authority to say, "Only me."

How does this fit for us? I mentioned earlier that we would take some thoughts and see how they fit our lives today. How does this narrative of events thousands of years ago have any bearing upon you and me? I will take a few moments and describe for you some of the ways in which it describes our day today. It describes our world. We live in a world that says that God is fine for you. It is fine for you, Helen, but that is not fine for me. That doesn't suit me. That doesn't fit me. The god that I need is the is god. And we

encounter that in our every day lives. And we hear people on radio and on television and we read about it in magazines and newspapers. It is not right for you to tell me that your God is the only God. That is not right. Ok for you, but that is not ok for me. My god is over here. And another one says my god is over here and mine is over here. And we have present in our world today a multitude of gods, multitudes of them.

One of the religions in the Far East alone has thousands of them just like the Canaanites. They can't even number them all. We live in a world that we can describe just like the world of Micah. Religious pluralism.

Another theological term for it is called polytheism, many gods, many gods. Everybody has their own god, a god of your own design. And sadly we even see some of that thinking infiltrating the Church of Jesus Christ today where we hear men in positions of leadership, in what we call Christianity telling the same things. We have a unique relationship and what you have is ok. God will understand. When all things come to consummation, he will understand that you worship your idol sincerely. And since you worship your god sincerely, even though it was a false god, he will credit that to your account.

My dear friends, that absolutely contradicts what God has said in his Word. "You shall have no other god beside me. You shall not make any image of me. You shall not bow down and worship that image. I alone am God."

And he sent a personal representative who would perform on his behalf for us and provide salvation for people like you and like me to find the reconciliation back to normal, back to God. He sent his Son Jesus Christ.

This narrative of Micah gives to us a little glimpse into the description not only of our world, not only of many aspects of the Christian world but we can make it even a little more personal it describes you and me, because you and I have the same temptations that the serpent gave to Adam and Eve in the garden, that same serpent comes to us to tempt us away from God into trusting ourselves and trusting our own goodness and trusting our own efforts and trusting our own religious designs as sufficient to please God.

I would remind you again. God said, "I alone am God. There is no other god besides me. Worship me and me alone."

And he sent his Son to provide the means for us to have reconciliation, to have redemption from our sin, to restore us back to normal through faith in Jesus Christ.

And this story of the life of Micah helps focus our attention on what you and I face. And it provides for us a reminder of what we really need. We don't need a thousand gods. We don't need to somehow come up with the right answer. We simply need to trust Christ, the one whom God prepared and progressively revealed throughout history and throughout Scripture would come. We can look back and know that he has come. And

we can trust him and find in faith in Christ redemption from the evil that resides within all of us. We can find through faith in Christ reconciliation back to the Father.

When Adam and Eve sinned he set all of mankind at odds against God, children of wrath, children under the condemnation and judgment of God because of our sin. Through faith in Christ we can find reconciliation back to God. And by the presence of Christ living within us, which happens when we trust him, he comes to live within us making us new creatures. Old things pass away. Everything becomes new. He begins to restore us back to normal. And those of us who have trusted Christ in our lives, sometimes we follow the bunny trails, don't we, and we get off... we get to the side and we forget to trust Christ. And it is in him alone that we find our peace. And this can remind us, his children, to trust him still and to trust him alone still, enabling us to resist the temptations and the taunts of the evil one who would disrupt us and cause us to follow false doctrine.

Well, because we are like Micah and like the children of Ephraim, yielding to the temptations of developing our own god, we must turn instead to trust the one provision that God has made for us to reconcile us back to himself, Jesus Christ his Son. And those of us who have trusted him need to trust him still, must trust him to the end, yielding only to him, rejecting the temptations which caused Adam and Eve to sin, trusting only in him.

Where has the Spirit of God spoken to you today with this narrative from Micah? Does Micah describe you today, that you have tried to have a little bit of God over here and a little bit of myself over here and the god of my design here and the things I want here and placing my faith and confidence in something that I design myself? If so, I would remind you, my friends, that that goes against God's teaching. He wants you to come to him and to him alone through Jesus his Son. That is the only way. There is no other way.

Perhaps today the Spirit of God identified in your life where you have yielded to some of the temptations of the evil around us and have given in to the thoughts and the temptations. Well, maybe I have been a little harsh. Maybe there is some good in other things.

No, my friends, there isn't. There is only one God and there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. How will you respond to that? Will you go on in your merry way and say, "Well, that was interesting. I think I will just continue doing what I have been doing. It has worked so far."

Don't confuse mercy with acceptance and approval. God has been merciful. God was merciful to them. Come to Christ and trust him.

What changes will it require? It will require you trusting in God and God alone and his provision for you in Jesus Christ. Well, I pray that this reminder from the life of Micah thousands of years ago will remind us of the dangers that we see all about us every day and that they will remind us that we need to reject those and trust God and God alone through his Son Jesus Christ.

I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see that, to see your true need, to see your true condition before him, that you really need him and find him sufficient for all of life.

Let's close with a word of prayer.