

Micah the Idolater

Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Judges 17:1-5

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Let's read from our Scriptures that I have handed out to you this morning, the very first section, Judges chapter 17 verses one through five.

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

This short passage of Scripture introduces to us a man by the name of Micah living during the time recorded in the book of Judges. The book of Judges describes for us that time in Israel's history shortly after they had entered into the Promised Land. Joshua had brought them victory. They began to occupy their new land and it now remained for each tribe to overcome and defeat the remaining enemies within their territory.

Sadly they did not accomplish that. They turned against God and the book of Judges describes for us those sad events and it records for us the unbelief of the children of Israel. They did not believe God would protect them, would enable them to drive out the

¹ Judges 17:1-5.

enemies within their territories. Further, they believed a lie. They believed the enemy is stronger than God. And they believed the gods of the people who inhabited the Promised Land more than they believed and trusted in God.

It caused them to turn against God and to abandon him and to leave him. And I have recorded for you here that passage of Scripture that describes that. We find that in Judges chapter two verses 10 through 15. And we won't take the time to read it again this morning, but it describes those repetitive occasions when they turned away from God and abandoned him and God enabled the enemies to come in and suppress them and oppress them.

This story of Micah gives us a picture of a man and his family during these times. Scholars tell us that this account actually took place very early on in the book of Judges. It occurred during the time recorded in Judges chapter one and chapter two and it describes for us this man and his family as they lived out in their own personal lives the realities of what the writer of Judges described, true of all of Israel. And it gives us a glimpse into individuals making it more alive to us than thinking of it on a whole nation scale.

These verses describe for us Micah also living in unbelief. He lived with the children of Ephraim. And we read in chapter one verse 29 that the children of Ephraim did not drive out the enemies within their territory. And the Canaanites still lived there. And the influence of those Canaanites remaining within the land had a serious effect upon Micah. For Micah turned away from God as described in chapter two of all of the children of Israel. Micah turned and abandoned God and clung instead to the gods that he saw about him that the Canaanites worshipped.

So we find on an individual scale what the book of Judges describes true of the whole nation of Israel. Micah doubted God. He believed a lie of the Canaanites about him and he turned and abandoned God. The net effect in the life of Micah and his family they became idolaters. They became idol worshippers. And we find in this description, the text that we read just a moment ago, how this all came to pass.

It says that Micah had built a house of gods, a shrine. And in his house or in this house of gods that he had built he had many gods. His mother contributed two of them in the name of the God of heaven and earth. She took some of the money that Micah had stolen from her and had returned back to her. She took some of that money and made two idols to place in the house of Micah's gods. It joined several other idols present in that house for Micah had also made an ephod.

We don't wear ephods in our day. But in that day an ephod was kind of like a placard. It was kind of rectangular in size. It would fit on the front of a man's body of fine quality linens. Sometimes they would put jewels and precious stones in them. God instructed the children of Israel to make an ephod for the high priest. He instructed that as a part of his law that he gave in the book of Exodus as they left Egypt and headed towards the Promised Land. That ephod carried 12 precious stones, one stone for each of the 12 tribes

of Israel. It also contained two unusual stones and we don't know much about them. But it contained what they called the Urim and the Thummim, a means which God provided for the high priest to be able to determine God's will for the people. And the priest wore that ephod, that placard about his breast and his chest and it fastened with ties in the back and about the neck.

Micah made an ephod to mimic the true ephod thinking that if he had an ephod on hand it would grant him some kind of entrance with God, some means by which he could determine God's plan and purpose for him and his family. In addition to that, he had what they called household gods, another term for it is called the teraphim. We don't know how many these comprised, but multiple gods. These idols they fashioned to represent their ancestors, people they knew and loved, family. Supposedly these teraphim would enable a person to access the dead represented by the idol in hopes of gaining some kind of council and advice. They also believed that these gods would provide for them prosperity. A highly superstitious worship involved the worship of these household gods.

That describes for us in very clear detail what happened throughout all of Israel as they turned to idols and to worshipping the gods of the Canaanites about them. It describes for us an idol worshipper, one who had manufactured and designed his own religion. He had come up with ideas of his own, took a few things from the Canaanites about him, took the work of a silversmith and put it all together and created his own religion.

Sometime we get confused when we think about idols. What do they mean? What becomes an idol? Idols can be comprised of many different things. Idols can be a statue, a figurine, a symbol, an embodiment of a created physical item that fits another's imagination, an idea and concept of what God is like. And they try to worship God through that figure. Sometimes it takes a shape and form of another creature, like a human being or an animal. Sometimes it takes a shape of another part of God's creation like the stars, the sun and the moon. And the idolaters formed these idols with good purpose. At least they express good purpose.

"I want to worship God and I will worship him through these figures. It will help me have a more tangible feeling about God. It will encourage my worship. It will intensify my desires to obey and follow God if I have these things that I can see, much easier than worshipping a God I can't see."

Often times these idols also take the form and shape of someone's imagination. And sometimes an idol can be something of a mental image, as opposed to an actual physical image. Idols of the mind can include such things as affections, the desire for wealth and fame, prosperity, possessions, positions of fame. The number of things that can become an idol cover a wide spectrum of false deities.

In simple terms anything that causes us to worship it and takes the place of God who has revealed himself through creation and through his Word and through his Son Jesus

becomes an idol. And we become idol worshippers when we allow anything to come in the place that God alone should hold and occupy.

Micah became an idolater. He fashioned physical images which he worshipped. He expressed that he was trying to worship God through them, but God had made it very clear in his law that he gave to them as they came out of Egypt whom they should worship. We find it recorded for us in Exodus chapter 20 and I will just take a moment to read these verses, because God makes it very clear how he wanted his creatures, mankind, people like you and me to worship.

We read in Exodus chapter 20. I will begin reading in verse number one and I will read down through verse number six. It says this:

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."²

That word that says before me also means beside me. In other words, God isn't a god of many gods and maybe we designate him as the highest of all gods, but like all other gods. No. No other god beside me, he said. I am it. I am the exclusive god.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."³

God spoke very clearly how he wanted the children of Israel to worship him, worship him and him alone. Don't worship me by use of idols or carved images, regardless of what you might choose. Worship me and me alone. And don't attempt to worship me through an idol because if you do, I will judge you to the third and fourth generation of your offspring.

And it says here that such people who follow that practice actually hate him even though they try to disguise their actions as a way in which they worship God. Because in so doing they deny the existence of God as who he described himself, the only true and living God. Worship me and no one else.

Micah describes for us his story, shows to us how they pursued idolatry instead of worshipping God.

² Exodus 20:1-3.

³ Exodus 20:4-6.

God had manifested himself very clearly. He had revealed himself to them in the wilderness as they progressed towards the Promised Land. He had revealed himself in the initial victories that they experienced through Joshua's leadership as they entered into the Promised Land. God had revealed himself to them. He had revealed himself to them in his Word as we read here as the transcendent God.

"There is no one like me. You can't make an image that would in any fashion reveal me. The heavens and the earth cannot contain me. How could you put it all into one image or even a series of images?" And he warned them, "Worship me and me alone. Don't allow your own imagination, your own desires, your own will to prevent you from worshipping me and me alone."

God showed himself as he restrained judgment against Micah and the children of Israel on many occasions. He showed his mercy, because he said that he would bring judgment against those who fell into idol worship. And we have some of those verses recorded in the passage that I gave you from Deuteronomy chapter seven verses one through five, how they were to worship God and the judgment he would bring upon them if they failed to destroy the enemy and to drive them out including all of their gods and their altars of worship.

God wanted a people that would worship him and him alone. Micah failed. He became an idolater. In spite of God's revelation to him of his mercy and in spite of God describing himself as a transcendent God above all of creation, God showed himself as the sovereign God, no one else, but him. God showed his mercy in that he restrained judgment on Micah and his family and suffered long with them in spite of their sin and their rebellion against God.

This narrative gives to us a glimpse, again, into God's plan of redemption and how he progressively revealed it to his people throughout the centuries. For we see here how severely the children of Israel had declined from how God had originally created man in the garden. And originally he created Adam and Eve sinless, holy, upright, able to know God and to fellowship with him.

The serpent came into the Garden of Eden and tempted Adam and Eve to disobey and rebel against God. And they did. And God had warned them. He said, "The day in which you eat of that fruit, dying you will die." And they began to dying they would die. and we being to see over the process of time how the depravity and sinfulness and the wickedness of the human heart had progressed away from God and we find at this time during the period of the judges in the life of Micah and his family how they had progressed and declined away from God.

They failed to worship him. They abandoned him and sought after false gods.

God had made a promise to Adam and Eve in the garden, in Eden, that he would provide a champion, one who would come who the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. And this picture that we have from Judges we see the desperate need of a

Savior for they had declined into wickedness and sinfulness desperately in need of a Savior. During the time of the judges God did provide for them periodically judges, men and women who came and did help them overcome the oppression of their enemies. And of a short time they would experience victory under those judges, giving to the children of Israel a picture of the Savior who was to come and that God had promised, who would defeat the enemies of men.

And this picture from the life of Micah reminds us of how desperately they needed a true Savior, not just a human Savior who would have some power and ability, but they needed a true Savior, someone who could overcome their wickedness and their sinfulness. God had promised such a Savior.

You might logically ask yourself the question: What does all of this have to do with me? How does this fit me and my life today where I live? Oh, it has great correlation to our lives today. For, you see, our world has become wicked and depraved just like that world in which Micah and his family lived. And we find about us individuals living the life just like Micah lived. And we find within the professing Church of Jesus Christ today many individuals just like Micah who have designed a religion according to their own desires. Oh, they try like Micah and his mother. Oh, we re going to worship God and we re going to do it in this way and in so doing they completely violate God's Word. And we find people within the Church today following exactly the same pattern.

“Oh, I am going to worship God, but I am going to worship God in a way that I think I should worship God and the way that I want to worship God. And I am going to do it in this way and after this fashion. And God doesn't mind if I really pursue after wealth and riches and fame and prosperity and all of these things and concentrate my passions and my abilities and the pursuit of these things instead of spending time with him. God will understand.”

Oh, yes, God understands, all right. And he calls it what it is: idolatry, a false worship of God. God wants us to worship him and him alone and in our day and age we find that kind of passion and desire sadly lacking.

Unfortunately in our day we find the multitudes of people worshipping a god of their own design. They say it in terms like this. “The God that I worship, I like to think of him as...” And then they describe the god that they worship, having nothing to do with the God who has revealed himself in his Word and in creation and in his Son Jesus. And in every instance it bypasses Jesus. It rejects him. That is the Savior that God promised and that he sent. And the worship that we design of our own making, the God that we worship of our own imagination and will rejects Jesus.

So this passage fits our day very well, because this passage does describe our day even the professing Church of Jesus Christ and individuals who might attend those churches and who might even themselves profess like Micah, “Oh, I worship God, but I worship God in this way.”

It behooves us and therefore we must heed the warning of God, the warning of God throughout the book of Judges in which he warns the people to turn from their sin and to worship him and him alone in obedience and in faith. Therefore, you and I must turn from our sinful ways, from the ways in which we have come idol worshippers and the way in which we have made a god of our own design rather than worshipping the God who has revealed himself to us in his Word. We need to turn from those sinful ways and come and trust the Savior whom God provided for people like you and me, Jesus the Son. And cast our full trust and confidence upon him and what he fulfilled in his life, his death on the cross, his resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of the Father on behalf of people like you and me and claim it as done for you, trusting him and him alone. Nothing else in between.

Where has the Spirit of God opened your eyes today to see or perhaps where you have become an idol worshipper just like Micah? Oh, maybe you profess to be worshipping God, but you do it after your own design and you do it the way that you want to do it instead of worshipping God the way he instructed us to worship him.

If that describes you, my friend, then you fit the description of Micah and have become an idol worshipper just like he. How will you respond to that? You could just reject it and say, "I will keep doing what I have been doing. It seems to be working ok for me. I am... things are going along all right. I will just kind of keep doing everything the way I have done it for many years. It is too late for me to change now."

Oh, my friend, as long as you have breath it is not too late. Don't put off what God called us to do. God called us to worship him and him alone and to place our trust in his Savior, not one of my own design.

And so I urge you today and call upon you today that if the Spirit of God has opened your eyes to see that you have become a false worshipper, perhaps out of ignorance, but nonetheless, a false worshipper, then I call upon you to become a true worshipper and to worship God in the way in which he instructs us to worship him and to trust his Savior, his provision that he has made for people like you and me that we might experience that new life that he promised to all who would come in faith upon Jesus.

I close with just one verse which you probably all know taken from John three verse 16.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."⁴

I would call upon you today if you have not yet trusted upon him, to trust him today. And if you have trusted him in the past then renew that faith and trust and confidence upon the only Savior that God has provided for us, Jesus his Son.

Let's close our time together with prayer.

⁴ John 3:16.