

“ME, MYSELF AND MICAH”:
*THE CHURCH’S COVENANTAL
COMPROMISE AND CONFUSION*
JUDGES 17-18
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Outline

- I. Micah and His Mother (17:1-6)**
 - a. Micah steals and dishonors his mother (17:2)
 - b. Micah’s mother devotes the restored money to YHWH (17:3)
 - i. They make an idol (“graven image”) (17:4)
 - ii. Although she devotes 1,100 pieces of silver, only 200 pieces are used. Where’s the rest of the loot?
 - c. Micah had a shrine (17:5)
 - i. He places idol in shrine.
 - ii. He makes an ephod for divine guidance
 - iii. He ordains his son for a priest
 - d. Author’s commentary (17:6)

- II. Micah and His “Father” Levite Jonathan (17:1-13; 18:30-31)**
 - a. A Levite from Judah serves Micah (He is “doubly-blessed” as far as heritage in Israel)
 - i. “Be a priest for me” (17:10a)
 - ii. “Be a father to me” (17:10a)
 - iii. An opportunistic priest devoted to money (17:10b-11)
 - b. Micah’s idolatry is “legit” in his own estimation (17:12-13)

Themes: Confusion, Embarrassment in the covenant, a mirror for Israel; a parody for Israel.

Spiritual degeneration, superstitious darkness and foolish apostasy characterize Israel from clergy to laity in the times of the judges. Israel continues to do what is right in her own eyes and there is much theological confusion and covenantal compromise in the land.

Micah in Judges 17-18 represents the *idolatry and individualism* that can run rampant in the Church without proper leadership and accountability.

Levite Jonathan (18:30) is a picture of how the ordained clergy in the Church can be bought with a price sometimes, forsaking God’s Word and their true calling. The Levite is a picture of how every generation of teachers and preachers (for that was essential what Levites were in the Old Covenant redemptive era, see Malachi 2:19, esp. 2:7) can forsake

their true calling and seek what's best for them and not for God and His people (cf. Ezekiel 37; 1 Peter 5:1-6).

Both the laity and the clergy in the Church at this time in redemptive-history are eat up with **selfishness and individualism** that naturally (sinfully naturally) leads to gross idolatry.

There are no remarkable or admirable characters in Judges 17-18; only self-serving, individualistic, and opportunistic idolatrous people! Things are ugly in Israel at this time; Israel is practically Canaanized!

Judges chapters 17-21 is formally an epilogue in the way that it is literarily given to us after the Judges Cycles. However, we should keep in mind that although the chapters serve as an epilogue, the events are part of the background to the Judges story. The events recorded take place during the entire time of the Judges and most likely through the time of Samson.

One's first reaction to the last few chapters of Judges is: "***What do I do with this?***" In studying for this sermon, I was struck by the fact that this was probably the hardest text I had ever interpreted and prepared to preach from in my career!

Very few sermons are EVER preached on these chapters by Bible-believing and Bible-loving Christians. As Professor Davis writes: "Their hearts whisper softly and tenderly that there is no need to wrestle with such Scripture when they can be meditating on Philippians (Davis, pg. 198).

You can imagine why: If most evangelicals look to the Old Testament for merely examples of how to live the Christian life, then they would be hard-pressed to find good examples in these last chapters! ***There is no one who does good; no not one!*** Perhaps some are greatly frightened by the total depravity that they see clearly revealed in these Scriptures! ☺

In Judges 17-18 just about everything is turned upside down; just about all that should be right side up is "topsy-turvy" in the Church! Even a mother who knows in her mind YHWH by name (17:1-3) and has named her son "Who is like YHWH?" (meaning of the name Micah) can give her son what **he wants** rather than correctly instructing him in the ways of YHWH.

In the last few chapters of Judges we have no Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverers who are raised up by God to deliver Israel from her enemies; we have no Israelites calling upon the Name of YHWH; we have no enemies from outside posing a threat to the people of God, but now the threat to the people of God, the enemy is within the people's hearts. Israel has a great problem with indwelling sin and it has enslaved them (see Romans 7:6-25).

Another thing that is missing is the author's inspired commentary. The author does not comment but only records what happened. For instance in the first sixteen chapters we have the author tell us certain things about Israel's actions and God's judgment. Israel does evil; God hands them over; Israel cries out; God delivers them, etc.

The author tells us why God allowed the nations to remain (3:1 ff)- -but now he ceases his commentary (by the way, the author is quite likely Samuel, who also probably wrote the story of Ruth).

These chapters are to show you how bad Israel had become and how far away from God that many of them were, but the author does not comment, he only describes the situation.

However the author does give us hints, although not commentary. We should always pay attention to not only the content but the form in which a passage is written; particularly here should be focus not only on content, but also the form or the way the story is told. The author gives us certain hints to let us know what he thinks of things.

Summary of author's hints in chapters 17-21: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6). This is the way the author is telling us something without specific and direct commentary. This is also repeated throughout the last few chapters of Judges (17-21; this is in fact the last verse in the entire book as well).

ESV Judges 18:1 In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in, for until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them.

ESV Judges 19:1 In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

And the important final verse or words of the *Book of Judges* are significantly:

ESV Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

A King to rule and reign over Israel was the hope that Moses had told the people.

Deuteronomy 17:14-20: "When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' ¹⁵ you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. ¹⁶ Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never return that way again.' ¹⁷ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. ¹⁸ "And when he sits

on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by¹ the Levitical priests.¹⁹ And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them,²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

The commentary that the author of Judges is making in 17:6, 18:1 (and other places in the final chapters of *Judges* is that if a king was presently ruling over Israel, then Micah would not be practicing his individualistic and idolatrous foolishness before God, contaminating and corrupting Israel's service and worship.

As Moses taught in Deuteronomy 17:18ff, even the king would be accountable to God's Word and his interpretation would be subject to the Levites! There were to be no "lone rangers" in the Church under age, and there are not to be any today who are not accountable to other godly men!

The Israelites were to look forward to a king who would lead them in righteousness. The king would rule according to God's Word and the people would be unified by his rule and reign over them. The people would be guided as a corporate people and held accountable for their doctrine and life concerning God and every aspect of their lives.

Israel needed more than deliverance from her enemies; Israel needed a king to guide them; an anointed king who would instruct the people in the Word of God and teach them to walk according to God's covenant statutes and laws. Israel needed positive instruction and guidance to prevent individualism and sinful practices of worship - -Israel need accountability to prevent individualism.

The only hope for Israel is in a king who will strongly rule over and guide the people according to God's Word (Judges 17:6; 18:1). Israel needs desperately a faithful king who will hold Israel accountable to God so that they can be the corporate people that God has called them to be. Israel needs deliverance from sinful individualism so that she can commune joyfully with God and live at peace in His presence.

At this time in redemptive-history, there is a great need for a King to rule and reign over the people and lead them into righteousness; a need for order and discipline to ensure pure worship.

And so our first reaction to Micah and his mother and their crass confusion and lawbreaking is: ***"What do we have here?" "Where is the king?" "Where is the accountability?"***

As we approach Micah and his mother and zoom in on their life and doctrine, let us consider what a *parody* is together; we should consider the genre or type of story Judges 17-21 is supposed to be for we as readers.

You've perhaps seen parodies on television: Parodies of types of people, stereotypes revealed of certain regional peoples or different cultures as well as parodies of political figures such as the President of the United States (you might remember or know of Chevy Chase as Gerald Ford back in the 70s, and/or "The Church Lady" in the 80s, or Will Ferrell as "George W." in the 90s?! These are parodies).

Parodies are usually exaggerated representations of peoples and their ways but they can be painfully truthful. In our passage in Judges you might say we have something like an inspired parody of Israel's behavior at the time. Now don't misunderstand, this passage itself in Holy and inspired Scripture is not an exaggeration, but for many in Israel it would have seemed that way.

This kind of inspired parody was meant literarily by God's Spirit to rebuke God's people and lead them to repentance (also, according to when the book was written and edited, it would also painfully explain the reason for the exile).

What is parody? A "**parody**" can also be called a "**spoof**"; in contemporary usage, a parody is a work created to mock, comment on, or poke fun at an original work, its subject, or author, or some other target, by means of humorous, satiric or ironic imitation (www.wikipedia.com). The author "comments on" the faith of Israel during the time of the judges.

Now if an inspired parody is in God's Word, then it would be fully true. Although like a parody in our own culture, it would be difficult to read and stomach for those who are being criticized and revealed for who they truly are *especially before the Living God*. This is why Scripture cuts us all so deep as we read and study it, and as the double-edged, living and active, Sword of God's Word gets to our thoughts and intentions of our hearts so that we might repent.

Example: As most of you know, I was born and bred in the Southern part of these United States. When I was a young boy, there was a parody of a family from the South on a comedy-variety show on television and my mother would get extremely upset and say: "***This is not how Southerners behave!***" Yet, as I grew older, although the parody was perhaps a bit unfair and stereotypical, there were many aspects that revealed the truth.

What is hard about parody for the person being lampooned is that they are subject to see a part of themselves that they do not like. This is the point of Micah and his mother in Judges 17.

What's going on in Micah's house? Here is a young man who steals from his mother breaking God's commandment. His mother curses him according to superstitious ancient Near Eastern thought.

Micah in fear of an ancient Near Eastern curse returns his mother's great sum of money and tells his mother proudly that he had taken it; then she blesses him. Micah returns the

money NOT because he has repented, but because of his superstitious understanding in the ancient Near East of someone uttering a verbal curse against those who sinned against them. This kind of curse in ancient Near Easter “pop culture” would have caused “bad things” to happen to “good people”- *-supposedly!*

The mother tells Micah that she will give her returned money to YHWH, and she will make an idol or a graven image that is covered in metal. When she gives to the LORD she strangely holds back much of the money, and makes a simple idol rather than spending a lot of money on a more extravagant one.

A son stealing from his mother as superstitious and unbiblical beliefs are ruling a home, and a mother is teaching her son, even supporting financially her son in an idolatrous endeavor- -here are “good old fashioned church folks” in ancient Israel!

Micah had been collecting idols for awhile apparently. According to verse 5, Micah did not first make a shrine at that point, but had one at the present time. The idol that his mom funded was just another idol added to his collection. This Micah kid is like some young person who collects comics, baseball trading cards, or ‘Star Wars’ memorabilia. Except he is an idolater and collects idols rather than toys (although there can definitely be idolatry in collecting toy stuff, too ☺).

Although it would seem from Micah’s perspective, and although it is right in his own eyes to pursue his religious pursuits in his own way, he is actually under a curse.

According to Moses:

ESV Deuteronomy 27:15 "'Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.'

ls,P, n.m. idol, image -- *idol*, as likeness of man or animal; of metal; of wood.

hk'Sem; n.f. molten metal, or image

hk'êSem;W ls,P, - Judges 17:3

ESV Exodus 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image (pesel), 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.

Micah and his mother are very religious on the surface; ***their appearance would have been one of religious dedication and devotion; they have a zeal- -but without knowledge; they both have an appearance of godliness but deny its power*** (2 Timothy 3:5ff; Romans 10:2-3). Both Micah and his mother were under God’s curse, although outwardly they seemed to love and serve YHWH.

I think two things are interesting to note: (1) It is interesting how people who are unregenerate still enjoy being religious. I often have wondered why folks who do not believe in God and His Word would bother going to church. But their hope is in their performance, their religious works, their games, their outward devoted deception that God sees right through- -but we don't always see (cf. Matthew 6:1 ff).

And notice the way they call upon YHWH and serve other gods even though they should know that they cannot serve two masters; they will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

But we don't want to miss how they live according to the world's way of doing religion and even have superstitious tendencies while stilling calling God by his correct covenantal name. Perhaps this is like folks today who like to use the Name of Jesus as their Lord while also finding room to religiously co-exist with other worldviews and religions.

(2) It is important to note the length his mother will go to please her son and not to teach him the correct way of living according to the Word of God. I have seen examples of parents who so desire in their individualistic and idolatrous insecurity to get the attention and perceived love and devotion of their children, that they will give them anything that money can buy if only they can win their affection.

Isn't this what Micah's mother is doing? Micah has grown up asking for a new "this": **"Got it, son!"** Micah wants "that": **"Here you are son!"** And Micah gets what he wants! Now Micah wants some idols to worship God and has built a shrine- -and Mama will grant that, too!

Oh, money can buy a lot of things, including idols for our children, but it cannot buy and purchase souls and minds that are informed and guided by God's Word. In response to what God has done for us, only prayer, faithfulness and God's grace can grant these more important things to our children- -but that's too hard for most sinners (it's just easier to give children what they want than to discipline them according to God's Word!).

Fathers and Mothers: giving your son or daughter what he or she wants is NOT the way of good parenting. This mother probably wanted to "befriend" her son by giving him money to add to his idol collection. But her job was not friendship- -first- -but catechism according to God's Word.

Do not forsake all of the gracious means of God's Word, Sacraments and prayers that God has granted you as parents, only to wonder later why your children have become idolaters!

And when they become idolaters remember that if they stay in the visible Church, they can potentially wreak havoc on entire congregations if there is no discipline or accountability.

What a family and what a sobering inspired parody for the Church of Jesus Christ! I imagine if the Israelites had seen this family on an Ancient Near Eastern television station in syndication, that they too would have cried: ***“That’s not the way Israelites behave- -is it?!”***

Individualism. It is seductive and can run rampant in any age of the Church. Men and women doing what is right in their own eyes, even when it comes to the very serious business of running Christ’s Church and worshipping God. I guess there are times in history when good men must leave congregations and even denominations due to error and false teaching.

But we must be wise and cautious that we are not merely wanting to start a congregation or denomination to do what is right in our own eyes- - to worship God in our “own way” without proper accountability. Many good denominations have been started like the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America because the former denominations and congregations had become contaminated by false teaching and idolatry (this is not individualism).

But with individualism we can be tempted to leave a congregation and start over and form our own. We can be tempted to write our own dogmas and confessions according to our own individual desires. We must beware of the constant sinful threat of individualism.

Also, we must beware of individualism as members of the Church. God has made us a body, an organism that his should be organized under godly leaders and undershepherds who will instruct us in the way of God. The Bible tell us to listen to these leaders, learn from them, submit to them when they correctly guide us (Heb. 13:7, 17). In today’s church there are a lot of folks without any accountability at all, and they are one step away from asking Mama for some idols to serve!

We were created for two main things: (1) For community: with God and our fellow man and (2) To obey God’s instructions about life, worship Him in the way He reveals, and to serve Him all of our lives for His glory.

But oh how the fall of man into sin messed things up; oh how mankind has fallen in Eden! After the fall mankind did not naturally commune with God and each other, but sought to make a name for themselves (see Genesis 10-11). Man sought His own glory through individualism, or doing what is right in his own eyes.

Man lived according to the dictates of his own sinful reason and heart.

This tendency we must fight against in the Church as the people of God. God has called the Church in Jesus Christ to repent and put aside their individualistic tendencies. God has called the Church in Jesus Christ to learn to commune with God and our fellow man in peace before God’s face.

God has called the Church in Jesus Christ to be obedient in reliance upon His grace, to worship Him in the way He reveals, and to serve Him all of our lives for His glory.

This is why Israel was called out and released from slavery in Egypt so that they might worship and serve YHWH. But things turned out quite differently many times in redemptive-history.

We should remember that one reason why sinful mankind wants to be individualistic is because sinful mankind does not want to be accountable. Sinful man does not want to be accountable to God or to others. When we are regenerated and becomes members of a congregation even, it is not easy for us to be accountable to God and others. But we must learn to do this as part of our new identity in Christ.

Micah and His Priest

Micah then needs a priest for his shrine (since he had a new really nice idol). So he takes the authority of God himself and ordains his son to be his priest (until a better more skilled, more legitimate priest comes along!).

Enter: A young man (a boy younger than Micah we are to understand) of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. Confusion: Why a Levite from the family of Judah? (v. 7).

The location of redemptive-history is now beginning to be focused on Bethlehem now (cf. Ruth 1:1; perhaps a king will come from there?). He said: "I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place" (v. 9).

Micah installs the priest, and he becomes a surrogate father and religious mediator for him before God (vv. 10-13). Confusion: "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest" (v. 13).

Micah is still showing how superstitious he is and how confused he is with regard to God's covenant and commandments. Micah thinks that now he has legitimacy before God because he has obtained and hired a Levite Priest which God has ordained to lead and guide Israel.

How did Micah obtain this man? After this Levite, Jonathan we will call him since that is his name (18:30), Micah hired him for the right price. The boy Levite got the opportunity to be a father, that is a superior in role to Micah; to be his priest-representative before God and his gods, and was given a nice salary and a nice set of vestments we are told (17:11).

Micah also took it upon himself again to perform an ordination-installation service without the authority from God to do so- -but then, Micah can do with his shrine what he wants- -right?! Micah ordains the priest over "Beth-Micah" or the "House of Micah" (17:12).

We should note a few things at this point. Micah as we have seen is a blatant law-breaker against God. He has stolen, dishonored his mother, made graven images, put idols before God, and now he has ordained a Levite for his own service.

In our passage, we must contrast the pure and true worship of God vs. the syncretistic and false worship of God (John 4:24). This idolatry we should understand clearly is NOT the true kind of worship of God nor is the designated place that God should be worshipped.

The “House of Micah” or “Beth-Micah” should be understood here in contrast to “Beth-el” or “the House of God”. The House of God or “Beth-el” at this time was in Shiloh we are told (18:31); close perhaps in geographical proximity, but no cigar! Micah had set up a competing shrine of gods and now had ordained a Levite to be priest at this new shrine.

The “House of Micah” is outwardly devoted to YHWH, but inwardly it is a “House of Sin” and full of idolatry. The “House of Micah” is not about God as He has revealed Himself, **but the “House of Micah” is well, about Micah** – it is about self-centered individualism and doing what Micah thinks is the best before (or IN!!) the face of God.

Micah is in direct opposition to the true worship of God and has no accountability. Part of the role of the Levites was to teach the people of God, and to be messengers of God’s will (Malachi 2:1-9). God had made a covenant with the Levites so that they would be blessed and serve God and His people as preacher-messengers (Mal. 2:7):

ESV Malachi 2:7 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people¹ should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

The Levite, “Father Jonathan” never rebukes Micah, he only opportunistically takes his cash and job. According to Deuteronomy 12-13, Micah and his mother were under the death sentence and should have been stoned for their graven idols. But no one is holding Micah accountable for his sins- -there was no king to rule and reign righteously over the people (17:6; 18:1).

And time doesn’t grant me the time to explain that Levite “Father” Jonathan was none other than the grandson or descendent of Moses! This was so hard to stomach by later Rabbis that they inserted a Hebrew “Letter N” into MSH so that rather than “Moses” the name identified with this blatant covenantal sinfulness would be Manasseh rather than Moses. But the text is clear that it is either a grandson or descendent of Moses (see 18:30).

Chapter 18

Verse 1: “In those days there was no king in Israel...” The Tribe of Dan, the people of Samson are looking for their place to inherit in the Land of Promise (v. 1b). They come to Micah’s place in the hill country of Ephraim and lodge there (v. 2). The priest whom Micah has made mediator gives them advice (vv. 3-6) “from the LORD”.

The Danites return to their people after ‘spying out the land’ to tell them it is as nice as Moses said (but it is as if they don’t know what Moses has said about Dan’s allotment in the land and how they were rightly to obtain this land inheritance), but nevertheless the land is described as “very good” (vv. 9-10). They believe that God has given the land into their hands, but they seem to be directed by Micah’s mediator-priest rather than the words of Moses.

Eventually, the Danites plot to steal Micah’s self-made priest and mediator in order to be great in the land as a tribe (vv. 14-20). The Tribe of Dan make the priest an offer he cannot refuse by offering to make him surrogate father and priest of not merely Micah but of the entire tribe and clan of Dan in Israel (vv. 19-20).

We see the true opportunistic sinfulness here of the Levite, “Father Jonathan”. “Father Jonathan” takes a bigger church—he is offered a megachurch, the entire tribe or clan of Dan, rather than just one household.

We see the boy Levite’s eyes light up with dollar signs \$\$\$ and his grin reveal a greed prevalent in his heart; we see his mind thinking about the book publishing he will be granted and how he will be considered “great” by other lesser ministers! Rather than merely serving as pastor-father over a few, he will now be promoted and exalted to pastor-father over many- -“And the priest’s heart was glad” (18:20a)!

Application: There are many ministers who are not far from this today. Some ministers who work for celebrities, politicians, act as celebrities and publish books about how good everyone can be, all have sold out, or on the verge of selling out in their faithfulness to God, and his high calling of office as an ordained minister.

Oh, we see them often on television telling us as talking heads on the History Channel and another episode of “Mysteries of the Bible”: “Evidence has shown scholars that there is no way to know if the Bible is God’s Word.” Or: “Evidence now suggests that the Apostle Paul was a homosexual and so it is alright to be on in God’s eyes.” Or, “Evidence tells us today that there were many lost books of the Bible and so this undermines the canon of Scripture.” Or, Jesus had a marriage relationship with Mary that was a cover up, or God says he loves you and there is no hell, blah, blah, blah, on and on, what men will tell Larry King for a nice paycheck!

This was also the way of Levite “Father” Jonathan: He eventually (I am told) got a megachurch, a huge 13 million dollar book deal, a movie about his life played by Anthony Hopkins, and laughed it up to the bank as he became “Prophet to the Stars” appearing on afternoon and nightly television to tell people what they wanted to hear 😊.

What is ironic and part of the inspired parody is that as Micah has stolen from his mother, so now the Danites steal or take from him (18:18ff).

So the idolatrous priest and cult of worship was taken - -stolen idols- -funny, if it were not so sad. Micah pursues and humorously shouts at the Danites who are stealing the

worship stuff: ***“What is the matter with you, that you...take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and leave me with nothing?”*** (v. 25).

Micah shows his true spirituality in his response: “You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what I have left?” Isn’t this the truth of the matter? All that Micah has are gods and a priest of his own making. Micah, whose name means “Who is like YHWH?” or interpreted positively: “YHWH is incomparable to all other gods!” has shown himself to think that many idols are as good as YHWH; YHWH is not so “incomparable” in Micah’s idolatrous estimation!

Micah, or ***“Who is like YHWH?”*** does not have true religion or a true relationship with the living God. Rather, he is an individualistic, self-centered, idolater who breaks the law of God in order to have his own way.

So the Danites threaten Micah, and Micah realizing his defeat goes back home.

The Danites then wreak havoc on the “quiet and unsuspecting people” of Laish and they built a city in order to make a name for themselves and settled down. They called the city Dan instead of Laish and engage in idolatrous activity. The Danites served and worshipped the idols that Micah had made and ignored the place of worship at Shiloh (vv. 29-31).

We may not today build literal houses of gods and idols and worship them. We may not be like Micah and the Danites in their individualistic way of worshipping God. But we must guard against syncretism. Our false religion today takes the form of syncretism oftentimes.

Application: Syncretism is being influenced to worship God by the way other religions do it; syncretism is concerned with doing what the most people think is right particularly in worship. Syncretism is not necessarily gross idolatry where God’s people would worship and serve false gods. Syncretism is idolatrous and dangerous because (like Micah and the Danites) we can be tempted to worship the right God in the wrong way ***and this is just as bad as worshipping the wrong god in the right way!***

We can be fooled into borrowing other religious ways of approaching God; we can be fooled into worshipping the right God in the wrong manner (see Judges 17:3, Micah and his mom make idols but they call God “YHWH” which is correct). What we must ask is how has God taught and commanded us to worship Him?!

Micah, his mom and the Danites have forms or appearances of outward religiosity (Judges 17:13). Micah thought he would be blessed for having the mere outer trappings of religion to save him. We see this same belief in some in today’s church who believe that infant baptism is the same as regeneration; or those who believe that being a member of the church is the same as being regenerated, converted and united to Jesus Christ; or those who believe that if one walks the aisle at the Baptist Church in town then they have come truly to receive Christ and His salvation.

In our passage of Judges 17-18 Israel and her holy institutions have become corruptly Canaanized. Individuals represented by Micah and his mother as well as whole tribes such as Dan have been corrupted.

What is worse, even “the clergy” the Levites who were to hold God’s people accountable to God’s Word, have also become terribly corrupt- -and work for cash \$\$\$. The spiritual degeneration of Israel has affected both the clergy and the laity in Israel: all false short of the glory of God and live with much theological confusion and covenantal compromise.

What is wrong with this “topsy-turvy” upside down Church? No repentance, zeal without knowledge of God and His Word, and no king at this point to hold anyone accountable. The Church needs a king and faithful God-given ordained and installed mini-mediators to rule and teach each congregation and home according to God’s Word.

This is why I entitled the sermon: “Me, Myself, and Micah” because the Church can be confused theologically and covenantally unfaithful to God- -especially in worship- -because of rampant individualism, because of there being no accountability to God’s Word. Worship according to Scripture must constantly be assessed according to God’s Word.

Both Micah and the Danites seem successful outwardly in the eyes of the world. But although they both may seem successful in their self-centered, individualistic worship enterprises and “playing church” they have sinned and broken covenant with God in the worst way.

Application to the Church:

Micah: How are individuals to live in light of this before the face of God? We as God’s people must be constantly repenting of idolatry. Worshipping and serving God as he has called us to worship and serve. This is what we call historically the “Regulative Principle”. King Jesus has given us His Word so that we can worship the right God *rightly*.

We need to be careful of our individualism manifesting itself in Jesus’ Church! We need to repent of our self-centeredness and learn to know the love of Christ *together with all the saints* (Eph. 3:18). We need to take our vows of membership seriously when we vow to live and believe *in reliance upon God’s grace* and to submit to the governing authorities of the Church if they are teaching Biblical truth; they are watching our souls, keeping us accountable, because they will be held accountable for how well they do!

ESV Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Regardless of how this story works against our modern ways of interpretation in trying to find “good and helpful and relevant stories from the Bible” for the purpose of building us up, we must also learn from this story and from history about our individualistic and idolatrous tendencies before God and man- -and take this sinfulness seriously.

The Levite: How are God’s called out leaders to live in light of this before the face of God? Those who are called are to watch life and doctrine closely and to lead the Church into the proper worship and service of the Living God need to heed this story prayerfully.

Exodus 32:25-29 teaches us that after Israel’s idolatrous “Golden Calf Incident” the Levites were blessed for their faithfulness to YHWH and served God by formally disciplining the Israelites for sin; this special role should have continued.

Malachi 2:1-9 speaks specifically of God’s “covenant with Levi” (vv. 4-5). God had called these men to serve as worship mediators before the LORD; the Levites had a high calling before God (vv. 6-9). This calling was specifically described as: (1) Instruction and (2) Messengers or preachers of truth (v. 7).

We are told specifically concerning elder-pastor-leaders in Christ’s Church that they should know and teach doctrine, rebuking those who contradict it:

ESV Titus 1:9-11: He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound¹ doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

Our hope as God’s people is in Christ: There was no king at this time in redemptive-history, but eventually a king would come and partially restore Israel to peace and to the correct worship of God (under David, see 1 Samuel 1-4; 2 Samuel 5-7). Ultimately however, mere earthly sinful kings would fail (again see 1 Kings 14:8-9).

Even the Kings of Israel that God would eventually raise up would be guilty of idolatry and bring about God’s exile to punish Israel for covenant breaking.

What began in a typical, ordinary and obscure home in Israel, under the persuasion of a “sweet” mother to her son, becomes a tribal, clan-wide apostasy in Dan, which eventually causes the entire Nation of Israel to be chastised and exiled out of the land (see 2 Kings 17:6-8, 19-23).

ESV 2 Kings 17:19-23: Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced.²⁰ And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight.²¹ When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin.²² The people of

Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them,²³ until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.

Even with a king later in redemptive-history, the people of Israel do evil in the sight of God (1 Kings 12:25-33). Even later earthly kings who would be raised up in redemptive-history would lead Israel to sin and commit idolatry. Even the best of the kings such as David could not fully obey God's commandments and live perfectly faithful to God's Covenant Law!

Micah's shrine that was established at Dan eventually became the shrine King Jeroboam would use to cause the Israelites to sin (see also 1 Kings 14:8-9).

What would have been Micah's (or his mother's!) if he had been told that one of the idols that he had made, funded by his own Mama and placed in his own shrine would cause not only an entire congregation of God's people to stumble, and eventually be the root reason and primary consequence of Israel's exile from the land?! Perhaps if he would have known, he would have taken God's Word and his own sinfulness more seriously; but he didn't.

Only Jesus Christ could change the hearts of God's people by His Spirit so that we can serve and worship God faithfully (Ezek. 36-37; Jeremiah 31:31-34). That was why a New Covenant was so desperately needed for those who believe.

The people of God need a priest-king NOT according to Aaron and the Levites to serve before God; we don't need a priest-king who will NOT hold us accountable, or be bought for cash.

The believing people of God need a priest-king according to the order of Melchizedek! We need a Savior from idolatry who can make us priest-kings with him in order that we might be faithful in our families, and in our congregations, and in our culture and world.

The Savior from idolatry and crass individualism that God requires –God provides—in the person of the LORD Jesus Christ!

God/YHWH would enflesh himself to be the Sovereign King of Israel to lead His people and to guide His Church in covenant faithfulness. God/YHWH would seek worshippers to worship him rightly in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:22-24). God/YHWH would enflesh himself to keep the covenant God made with Israel, and to take upon Himself the wrath/curse of covenant breakers.

God/YHWH would rule and lead the people in righteousness for His Name's sake and cure believing Israel's constant and consistent idolatrous covenantal unfaithfulness. Light would appear in the spiritual darkness, and the darkness would not ever overcome it as in times past (see John 1:5ff; 3:19-21).

God's people need God to be their king; God's people need God to be their High Priest. God's people should worship and exalt God that Christ is the Great High Priest King of His Church and makes his people worshippers of God in Spirit and in Truth, as well as a Kingdom of Priests to be like him in this world:

ESV 1 Peter 2:9-11: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

How could we live any longer as an individualistic idolater? We must be who we are in Jesus Christ: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, called to proclaim the gospel excellencies of His grace and truth!

Thanks be to God for His Christ! Thanks be to God for His Word!

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