

Judges 17:1-13
Spiritual Corruption – Part 1

Introduction

1. There are three parts to the book of Judges.
2. The first two chapters of the book give us our introduction and layout to the book
3. Chapters 3 through 16 give us the stories of the judges
4. The last five chapters compose the third and final part of the book and serve as a commentary on the spiritual and moral corruption that existed in Israel at the time of the judges
5. Chapters 17 and 18 reveal the spiritual corruption, while chapters 19, 20 and 21 reveal the moral corruption
6. Today we will be looking at chapter 17 where we will meet three individuals and they all share two things in common

A. Micah's mother (17:1-4)

1. In the first verse we are introduced to Micah, but the first four verses are actually about his mother
2. The text says that she had a stockpile of silver that was stolen by her son (2)
 - a. It was 1100 pieces (likely shekels) which is about 28 US pounds
 - b. It's almost impossible to determine exactly how much this would be by today's standards but it was sizeable
 - 1) Micah paid his priest 10 pieces of silver a year
 - 2) 200 pieces were enough to build an idol or two (4)
3. When her son comes clean about stealing his mother's silver, we learn something about her religious life: she was a worshipper of Yahweh, the God of Israel (2-3):
 - a. She calls on the LORD to bless Micah for returning the silver (2): **"Blessed be my son by the LORD."**
 - b. She dedicates the silver back to the LORD and gives it to her son to make an idol (3): **"I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD..."**
 - c. So the first thing we learn here is that she knew Yahweh because she speaks of him in a way that only an Israelite could, by his personal name.
4. However, we learn a second thing about her almost immediately—she worshipped God through idols (3-4): **"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." 4 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 "**
 - a. We see two things here.
 - 1) The first is that Micah's mother gives the silver back to her son for primarily one purpose: so he can make idols
 - 2) The second is that she reserves 200 pieces of the silver for herself, gives them to a silversmith and has him make her an idol or idols

- b. There's obviously a problem with this—the Law prohibited the making of idols:
 - 1) Turn to Deut 27:15-26 with me
 - 2) In this chapter, Moses is giving the Israelites instructions on how to honor and obey God when they cross over the Jordan and inherit the Promise Land
 - 3) In verses 15 through 26 Moses describes twelve curses that will come upon those who violate specific laws
 - 4) The first curse is directed at those who make idols: (15): **“Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.” And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’**
 - a) Idol (lit. “graven image”) refers to carved wood, stone or metal
 - b) Molten image refers to melted metal that is poured into a cast
 - 5) Notice that Moses refers to this as **“an abomination to the LORD”**—this means that God loathes or detests it; He literally hates it.
5. While the author doesn't come right out and judge this woman for her idolatry, he does give us some subtle clues to the problem with it:
 - a. Notice the word play with the word **“curse”**:
 - 1) She issued a curse against the one who stole her silver
 - 2) God through Moses issued a curse against those who make idols
 - b. Notice also the words used by the woman, Moses and the author:
 - 1) The woman: **“for my son to make a graven image and a molten image”** (17:3)
 - 2) Moses: **“the man who makes a grave image and a molten image”** (Deut 27:15)
 - 3) The author: **“the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image...”** (17:4)
 - c. By repeating these words the author subtly links this story to the prohibition in Deut 27 indicating God's disapproval of such things
6. Before we move on to the next individual, I want us to focus on and remember two things about this woman:
 - a) The first is that her words indicated that she was a follower of Yahweh
 - b) The second is that she attempted to worship God in a way that was not only prohibited by the Word of God, but in a way that He detested

<p>B. Micah (5-7, 13)</p>

1. We were introduced to Micah in verse 1: **“Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah.”**
2. Already in these first few words we learn something about him and it has to do with his name: Here and in verse 4 the author uses the long form of his name, Mikayehu, which means **“One who is like Yahweh”**
3. We also learn that he was a religious man (5): **“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.”**
4. If we jump down to verse 13 we learn that, like his mother, his words indicated that he was a worshipper of Yahweh

5. So here we have another individual, who looks to be and claims to be a follower of Yahweh, but also like his mother, there are some significant problems:
 - a. Let's look again at verse 5
 - b. The text said that he had a "**shrine**" in his home: the literal Hebrew is "**house of gods**"
 - c. It also says he made an "**ephod**":
 - 1) The word can refer to a portable idol
 - 2) It can also refer to the garment that priests wore (if that's the case here, it likely refers to the garment he made for his son or the Levite priest he hired later)
 - d. It also says he made "**household idols**":
 - 1) Hebrew terephim
 - 2) They were household idols used for divination (Ezekiel 21:21; Zechariah 10:2)
 - e. Finally, he hired his own son (a non-Levite) to serve as his priest—this would be in direct affront to the official Levitical priesthood established by God to serve Israel
6. Once again the author gives us some clues as to what to make of all this:
 - a. The first is in how he changes the way he refers to Micah:
 - 1) The first two times he writes Micah's name, v. 1 and 4, he uses the longer version which means "**One who is like Yahweh**"
 - 2) However, every other time after v. 5 he uses the shorten form which is basically the same name with Yahweh chopped off—it becomes a meaningless name
 - 3) Notice that this change occurs immediately after describing Micah's house full of idols
 - 4) This irony is the author's way of saying Micah truly wasn't like Yahweh after all.
 - b. Notice also what the author writes in v. 6: "**In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes.**"
 - 1) Notice that this verse comes immediately after the author describes Micah's household of idols
 - 2) It's a phrase the author will repeat three additional times in these final chapters of the book
 - 3) What the author communicates here is that Micah was a man who worshipped God in a way that was right only in his own eyes
7. So we see that Micah had two things in common with his mother:
 - a) The first is that he was a religious man who claimed or professed devotion to Yahweh
 - b) The second is that like his mother, he attempted to worship God in a way that was contrary to the Law, and actually offensive to Him

C. The Levite (7-12)

1. Like our first two characters, this individual was supposedly a follower of Yahweh:
 - a. He not only refers to himself as a Levite, but the author uses this title nine times to refer to him—it is clear the author wants us to understand who he was
 - b. The Levites were supposed to be the religious and spiritual leaders of Israel
 - c. In fact, this is a role he apparently recognized because he spoke on behalf of Yahweh when the Danites asked him to inquire of God on their behalf (18:6)

2. But immediately, we begin to see problems:
 - a. First, and rather subtle, is the fact that he was nothing more than a youth, but Levites could only serve as priests between the ages of 25 and 50 per Numbers 8:24
 - b. Second, while the text doesn't say specifically why he was out traveling, it does suggest that he may have been looking for work as a priest
 - 1) Look at vs. 9-10
 - 2) Look also at 18:4, 19-20
 - c. We also see a few other areas where this particular priest disregarded the Law:
 - 1) The Law was very specific about how the priests were to be compensated and it doesn't include a salary, clothes and an expense account—see Deut 18:1-5
 - 2) Just like Micah and his mother, this Levite was an idol worshipper: see 18:19-20
 - d. What we see here is not a genuine Levite priest who is devoted and committed to Yahweh, but rather an opportunistic priest-for-hire who is committed to his own well-being and selfish ambitions
 - e. So, like our first two individuals in this text, we have here a man who claims to represent Yahweh, but at the same time disregards the Law of God, and instead does what is right in his own eyes.

Conclusion

1. So, what do we make of all this? What lessons are there for us here?
2. Remember, the author is giving us a look into the spiritual corruption that plagued Israel—it's ultimately the reason why Israel struggled with cycles of apostasy through the book of Judges, and in fact for all of its existence
3. Israel was a nation who professed devotion and commitment to God, but choose to live and worship Him in ways that were contrary to His ways—they simply did what was right in their own eyes
4. There are many unsaved people who claim to know Jesus, that go to church, that perform religious ceremonies:
 - a. They that think they are saved, but ultimately live life on their own terms, doing what is right in their own eyes, not realizing that it's all an offense to God and that they are lost in their sins
 - b. Remember what Micah said (17:13)? **"Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest"**—he thought he would get God's blessings simply because he had the right religious token, seemingly oblivious to the fact that his idolatry was a great offense to God
5. There are also many churches and believers that claim to love and honor Jesus Christ, but are teaching and incorporating all kinds of things into their worship and activities that are an offense to God
6. But what about us, sitting here today? Are we ever guilty of this? Do we profess Christ but then simply do what is right in our own eyes?
 - a. I think we deceive ourselves if we say we are above that

- b. With the exception of the Gospels, Acts and Revelation, nearly every NT book is corrective in nature
 - c. God has even given us a pattern for dealing with times when we do choose to simply do what is right in our own eyes—it's called confession and repentance
7. I would like to close with a challenge from the apostle Paul:
- a. In the closing chapters of his second letter to the Corinthians, he is preparing them for his visit
 - b. There is apparently some unresolved sin among his readers
 - c. So, he encourages them to deal with it before he comes so that he doesn't have to do it when he arrives
 - d. In chapter 13:5 he writes this: **"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?"**