

**“The Decline of a Nation”**

**Judges 17**

**Scripture Ref:**

1. Last week we ended the account of Samson with a dire warning of sorts
  - a. That because of Samson’s continued compromise, he got really messed up in his thinking
  - b. He really lost the ability to discern right from wrong, and he ended up make more poor decisions
  - c. And staying in situations that were really bad for him
2. The warning being that if we continue to compromise, it can lead us down a path of rationalization, denial, and finally a totally warped sense of reality!

***Rom 1:21-23***

*...although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,*

3. As we finish out Judges, we are presented with three situations that show us very plainly that this mentality can actually happen on a national level
  - a. The extent of Israel’s moral bankruptcy will be laid bare in Judges 17–21.
  - b. Theft, idol worship, abuse of the priesthood, looting, death threats and the slaughter of innocent people, civil war, kidnapping women for wives
  - c. These are the actions that will dominate these chapters!
4. The key verse that sets the stage for where the nation is:

**Judges 17:6** *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

5. Just a note: It’s not clear that these events are in chronological order from the previous chapters – there are a few hints
  - a. The setting of chapters 17-18 seem to fit with the situation of chapter 1v34, where we are told that the Amorites drove the Danites from their allotment.
  - b. And in the setting of 19-21 includes a reference that Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was ministering in the tabernacle.

**Micah's Idolatry**

17:1 Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 2 And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears -- here is the silver with me; I took it."

And his mother said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!" 3 So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you." 4 Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.

6. **Really strange situation – the son steals 1100 shekels of silver from his mom (which would seem to be significant, as later on it appears that 10 shekels per year is an acceptable salary)**
  - a. **She curses it – he gets a little paranoid – and he returns it to her**
  - b. **She is really glad to have it back, and notes that she had dedicated the money “to the Lord” for her son... to make a carved image, a molded image.**
7. **Now the strange part is not that she wanted to make an image – it’s her silver and she can do whatever she wants with it.**
  - a. **The strange part is that she wants to have an image made “to the Lord” – the two statements don’t go together.**
  - b. **If your desire is to follow God and worship Him, you don’t do it by making an image:**

***Ex 20:4-5***

*4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image -- 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; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.*

- c. **Seems pretty clear!**
8. **What does this tell us? It tells us that there was great spiritual confusion in the land.**
  - a. **That the people had lost the ability to discern right from wrong, and even worse true worship from false worship.**
  - b. **This is no better displayed than when we look at what Micah does**

5 The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. 6 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

9. What we are basically seeing is Micah developing his own church – his own worship.
  - a. And he is not creating it from scratch – but creating a “blended” form of worship.
  - b. Taking a little of God: Has an Ephod, a Temple, even gets one of his son’s to be a priest
  - c. And he adds in a little of the world around him – some idols...
  - d. And viola – a church is born!
10. We are also seeing the culture that is behind Micah’s actions: *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*
  - a. IOW – because there was no central authority, no strong leader, things began to unravel in the land.
  - b. There are two aspects of this situation:

**Perspective #1: A strong government**

11. When there is no governing establishment in place to place boundaries around the affairs of men, the result will be disorder.
  - a. As much as we love to hate the government, without it each of us would be subject to the whims of others.
    - i. If there were no laws to limit reckless driving, you couldn’t go on the road without being at great risk
    - ii. You couldn’t walk down the street without being robbed
    - iii. Even with government oversight, man figures out how to cheat and benefit himself, as we see clearly with the latest “sub-prime mortgage” fallout in the financial markets.
    - iv. We watch as billions of dollars of net worth evaporates, while those who profited from the activities have taken their money and run!
  - b. Take it a step further: we are seeing the downward spiral or morality in our country, simply because God is being removed from every vestige of public life.
    - i. Not that it is the governments job to keep God before us
    - ii. But the cumulative effect of evolution theology and acceptance of immoral behavior as a “right”
    - iii. Successive generations of people are further and further away from God

**Perspective #2: Israel did have a King: The Lord!**

12. In the same way that our country has walked away from the faith of our forefathers, so did Israel walk away from their faith in the Lord

- a. Truths and traditions are forgotten replaced with the only thing left – What each man wants...
- b. The similarities too great to ignore, we are going the same way as the nation of Israel!
- c. Including having a “mixed up” sense of worship.

**13. So here is Micah, and his “mixed up new church”, and what great fortune he has – a pastor shows up!**

7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a **Levite**, and was staying there. 8 The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay **wherever he could find a place**. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. 9 And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?"

So he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay."

**14. This guy was a Levite – he was provided cities to live in, the ability to be supported through the ministry of the tabernacle and the tithes of the people.**

- a. Why was he out wandering?
- b. Either there was no place for him any longer, or he was in search of something “better”
- c. Guess you could say he was a “seeker”

10 Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in. 11 Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. 12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

**15. So Micah adds to his mixed up church a priest – some guy that wanders by and is a Levite.**

- a. What we have here is an arrangement: I’ll take care of you financially if you’ll give me spiritual credibility
- b. You know what? Happens all the time.
- c. There are many segments of our society that want to have life both ways
  - i. People want to live like the world, but feel good about God
  - ii. And if they can find a church that will approve of their lifestyle, all the better!

**Prov 14:2** *He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is perverse in his ways despises Him.*

**Prov 14:12** *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*

- 16. Now that does not mean that as a church we all are supposed to be perfect, and anyone who isn't is judged and run out**
- a. What it does mean is that we keep our perspective of God true**
  - b. It means we keep our perspective of sin and righteousness clear**
  - c. It means if we are in sin, we call it that, and we repent, seeking to restore our walk with the Lord**
- 17. Because you see, if we don't keep clear vision when it comes to our worship, our vision we become clouded, and we get to the place that Samson and the rest of Israel had come to...**
- a. We don't know the difference between right and wrong.**

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