

• *The state of Israel after the judges – “worse than ever!”*

Micah, his mother and an idol

- Her curse
- His confession
- Her blessing

• *An idol is made*

• *In those days Israel had no king...*

Micah and a Levite

• *A Levite appointed in Micah’s sanctuary*

• *A string of events that should never have happened*

• *In those days Israel had no king...*

• *Everyone ‘doing what is right in his own eyes’*

• *They didn’t feel they were doing wrong*

• *We need a miracle of grace to see things as they really*

Our story of twelve judges has come to an end. The question now is: what is the state of Israel now that the twelve judges have finished their work? The answer is: worse than ever! When each judge died, the people returned to ways that were even more corrupt than those of the previous generation ^{☞1}. The overall situation was declining despite periodic rescues and revivals.

1. **Drifting from God leads a society into chaotic ignorance.** An Ephraimite called Micah stole eleven hundred shekels of silver from his mother. Not knowing who had taken her money, the mother cursed whoever the thief might be. Micah was present at the time of her curse, and was so distressed at being cursed by his mother that he confessed to what he had done. The mother’s curse was replaced by a mother’s blessing ^{☞1}.

The mother let Micah have two-elevenths of the money. She wanted him to have enough money to make an ‘image and idol’ (two words for one object) which was meant to represent Yahweh, the God of Israel ^{☞1}. The new idol was placed in a shrine which Micah already used for worship. The shrine already had an ephod (some kind of container with stones in it which were used like dice for discovering God’s will) and it had some additional idols. One of Micah’s sons became a priest in the sanctuary ^{☞2}.

All of this was idolatrous. Yahweh was not meant to be worshipped via images. All priests were meant to be members of the tribe of Levi. And a man who robs his mother and then becomes religious is a strange kind of worshipper! ‘In those days Israel had no king...’ ^{☞1}.

The scene changes. One day a Levite left Bethlehem looking for a job ^{☞1}. He happened to pass Micah’s home ^{☞2} and Micah thought he was just the man he wanted to be the priest in his sanctuary ^{☞3}. So the Levite was given the job that previously had been done by one of Micah’s sons ^{☞4}. It made Micah feel sure that God would prosper him ^{☞5}.

Almost everything in this story is wrong. One should not rob mothers. One should not curse thieves. One should not make images of Yahweh. One should not keep private sanctuaries for idols. You should not consecrate a priest if you are not yourself a high-priest. Only a Levite descended from Aaron and appointed in Jerusalem by the high-priest can be any true priest in Israel. But a Levite should not have to go looking for a job. A Levite who is not descended from Aaron should not be a priest at all. This entire story is a string of events that ought not to have happened!

The problem was – as the narrator points out – that there was no king in Israel. King David, who came later, would never allow such idolatrous nonsense to exist in Israel.

The story is a picture of everyone ‘doing what is right in his own eyes’. It is not (be it noticed) a matter of doing what is wrong, but of doing what is **right** – in one’s own eyes. No one felt they were doing anything wrong! The people actually felt good about what they were doing. The mother thought it right to curse a thief. Micah thought it right to build a shrine for his gods. They both thought it was a good idea to add another god, an idol representing Yahweh. They thought a priest for the idol would be a good idea, and a Levite was the best man for the job. Worst of all – in abysmal ignorance – Micah thought Yahweh would prosper him for his weird religion.

Before we denounce Micah too much we ought to remember times when we have done similar things. How ignorant of God we all are by nature! It needs a miracle of grace before any of us see things as they really are. How superstitious we get. What incredible stupidities there are in many

^{☞1} see Judges 2:19

^{☞1} 17:1-2

^{☞1} 17:3-4

^{☞2} 17:5

^{☞1} 17:6

^{☞1} 17:7

^{☞2} 17:7

^{☞3} 17:8-9

^{☞4} 17:10-12

^{☞5} 17:13

• *Stupid superstition*

• *This grotesque story shows how drifting from God leads a society into chaotic ignorance*

Dan looks elsewhere for its inheritance

• *They had never taken their God given inheritance*

• *A terrible description of dead, decayed, disastrous religion*

• *This story shows Israel's desperate need for a king*

modern religions! How cruel religious people can be. Robbing a mother of her silver and then going to the sanctuary – to prop up the little idols! But we have often been equally stupid.

The story is one of grotesque and hideous ignorance. What sort of religion is it that encourages a man to rob his mother? He is so superstitious that his mother's curse terrifies him. He claims to be an Israelite yet does not even obey the Ten Commandments. Has he never heard of 'You shall not make for yourself a graven image...'? Apparently not. The story lets us see that drifting from God leads a society into chaotic ignorance.

Next comes a third stage in the story (after two in 17:1–6, 7–13). The tribe of Dan had never obtained its 'inheritance' in the land of Israel. They had been allocated their territory but had never taken it (compare Joshua 19:40–46 and Judges 1:34). Now they decide to look for an inheritance elsewhere ^{¶1}. They send out five men representing the tribe ^{¶2}. They come to the hill-country of Ephraim. As they are passing Micah's house they hear the voice of the Levite priest. Maybe he is loudly reciting some prayers for the family. His accent is not Ephraimite and they are curious to find out whose voice it is. They discover the shrine and ask the Levite how he came to be there ^{¶3}. Soon they are asking for an oracle to let them know whether their expedition will be successful ^{¶4}. Yes, says the Levite, God approves your venture. Go in peace.

It is all a terrible description of dead, decayed, disastrous religion. The people of Israel had deteriorated to a level of chaotic idolatry with all of its accompanying religiosity. This is what religious decline is like. When there is no God-given leader the state of a nation or of a church will decline. The result is chaotic ignorance. Mothers are ill-treated. Cursing abounds. People remain religious but their religion is weird and ignorant. Being a priest becomes a profession and such professionals go around looking for a job. They are consulted by people who want to satisfy their inclination to have God on their side. Those who want to earn money by giving religious oracles make sure that they give ones that encourage the enquirer and keep him coming (plus the right fee) for more assurance that their expeditions will be successful. 'Go in peace', the religious professionals say. But it is not going in peace; it is going around in appalling superstition and religious delusion.

The point of the story is to show us the desperate need for a king in Israel. Only God's king would receive a revelation of what God wanted. Only God's king would reveal a holy God. Only God's king would provide true salvation. David was His prototype; Jesus would be the fulfilment of the royal pattern that He initiated.

¶1 18:1
 ¶2 18:2a
 ¶3 18:3
 ¶4 18:4-5

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