

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 13A**

**JUDGES**

**CHAPTER 17**

**INTRODUCTION**

A new division of Judges begins from Chapters 17 to 21. The preceding chapters of Judges are an account of a series of cycles of Israel's history since entering the Promised Land. They were recorded in chronological order. This new section of the five remaining chapters is a supplement to Israel's history. The events are not given in chronological order. Apparently, the writer selected two events, which were representative of what life was like in Israel at this distressing period of its history. These selected events show the reason and the extent of the spiritual degeneration of the children of Israel narrated in the earlier chapters. Both episodes involve Levites, who were to be the most spiritual people in all of Israel other than the priests.

The refrain: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" appears four times (17:6; 18:1; 19:1 and 21:25). This message

emphasizes the spiritual hole that she has dug herself into by her many years of rebellion against the LORD. Israel had turned her eyes from the LORD and replaced God almighty with idolatry of the worst kind . . . . SELF! Each subsequent judge was more "flawed and failing" than the previous. Israel had rejected the LORD God to rule over them and had become immensely carnal in her outlook of life and in her very existence. Instead of being a spiritual nation shining forth the grace and mercies of God to a world in darkness, Israel has turned off her spiritual lights and become very much like the world.

Chapters 17 and 18 deals with the religious and spiritual degeneracy of the nation exposed to the Canaanites' idolatry. Chapters 19 to 21 focus on the moral chaos of the children of Israel. Chapter 17 is an account of how a man named Micah turned his home into a centre of idolatrous worship. This begins a account of Israel's spiritual blindness and the evil of the sin of idolatry.

**OUTLINE**

1. Micah the Idolater – 17:1-6
2. The Levitical Compromiser – 17:7-13

## COMMENTARY

### Micah the Idolater – 17:1-6

Micah, whose name means “who is like the Lord”, was an Ephraimite living in the hill country of Ephraim. It is quite obvious that he came from a very wealthy family. Although he had a good name, his character and conduct reflected a man full of self, sin and shamelessness. He confessed to his mother that he was the culprit who had stolen the 1,100 shekels of silver from her. He confessed because he heard her cursing the thief who stole her money. In response, his mother acted even more strangely. Instead of chiding her son for stealing her money, she blessed him. Perhaps she did this to cancel the curse she had pronounced earlier as it was her son who had stolen her silver. That was outright superstition.

From Micah’s mother’s blessing we see that the name of the LORD was still used. They had not forgotten the LORD like the generation in Moses’ time when Israel did not receive word from the LORD for more than 400 years. But the Israel in the days of Judges could still remember the Name of the LORD but they utter His Name in front of idols. Micah should have been rebuked by his mother for stealing and pay the penalty as dictated in the Law of Moses. Instead she blessed him! What an upside down society Israel had become where wrong

becomes right and right becomes wrong. Sin is blessed and probably righteousness is cursed!

This is a very sad and sinful incident. Micah stole from his mother, but he did not receive any correction or punishment. There was a lack of discipline on the part of the parents in the home. The reason for this lack of discipline was because the mother herself was not a godly woman. She blatantly disobeyed the commandments of the LORD not to make graven images and worship them.<sup>1</sup> In addition, she compounded her sin by encouraging her son to sink deeper into idolatry. Note that her dedication of the amount of money returned to her by her son was to make objects of idolatry such as a graven image (stone or wood as they could be carved) and a molten image (metal).

Like mother like son, Micah had many idols in his home. He made an ephod (a breastplate designed by the LORD God for only the high priest to use to communicate with Him); a teraphim (usually a small idol in human shape kept for prosperity), and he made one of his sons to become a priest! This points to Micah as being an older man to have a son old enough to function as a priest. This act was also in direct violation of the commandment of God that worship of Him was to be carried out in the Tabernacle, the place which

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto

was appointed by God.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, he had established a priesthood not according to God's instruction<sup>3</sup>. The religion of the children of Israel had sunk to such a low level. They still professed their allegiance to the LORD but clearly manipulated theology for their own interest. The divine writer gives his comment that "in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (17:6). Micah exemplified the prevailing spiritual mood in Israel.

This sin of Micah was very great. The work of the priesthood was God's domain and privilege. To be a priest is to be holy. No man or church or institution can make another man who is a sinner like him holy. He has no inherent holiness to enforce this even if he wanted to. It is an impossible situation if God has not intervened in the lives of sinful men and appointed His own priesthood. God alone being inherently and perfectly and immutably holy can appoint and make sinners holy. He has chosen only the Aaronic

priesthood as His mediators between God and man and no one is allowed to usurp this position.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Levitical Compromiser – 17:7-13**

The young Levite mentioned in 17:7 lived in Bethlehem, Judah. Bethlehem, Judah was not one of the 48 Levitical cities. He was not supposed to live there. The phrase "of the family of Judah" does not mean that the Levite was a Jew from the tribe of Judah, only that he lived in the city. He decided to relocate and depart from Bethlehem looking for another place to live. This was another sad reflection of the spiritual state of Israel. The Levites and the priests were to live off their ministries. They were not to move out of their Levitical cities. They were to be scribes and teachers of God's Word to Israel.

But he did what was right in his own eyes and came to the cool hilly country of Ephraim and to the house of Micah. The Levite told Micah that he was from Bethlehem, Judah and wanted to find a place to stay. He was a Levite who had not been faithful to his calling, travelling from place to place. Micah was no better. Like people like priests in this case like Levite. Both of them were out of God's will and they took matters into their own hands.

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 12:14 But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 40:13 And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 14 And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats: 15 And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.

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<sup>4</sup>Ordinary Israelites can do the work of priests if they take the vow of a Nazarite.

Micah seized upon the opportunity and offered him his house to live. Micah could now have a proper Levitical priest. He made it attractive to the Levite by compensating him with an annual income of ten shekels, a suit of clothes, plus board and lodging. It was too good to refuse, and the Levite was “content to dwell” with Micah. The Levite knew better, that idolatry was against God’s Law, which was given to the children of Israel through Moses. The priesthood was the responsibility of the descendants of Aaron.<sup>5</sup> But he wanted to please himself more than to please God. He was looking for a job and food to eat and a place to stay, and here was an offer, which he could not resist.

Micah was delusional. He really and sincerely thought that now that he has a Levite in his home as his personal mediator to the LORD, the LORD will surely do him good. To consecrate a Levite is to make himself a god. Only God can consecrate a man to be the mediator between God and man. Micah made himself to be a god when he consecrated the Levite as his personal priest.

Money talks. The Levite listened very attentively and he heard

it loud and clear! Seek ye first the kingdom of man and his own righteousness and all the things of the world will be added unto you! The Levite was literally bought with money. He sold his unique spiritual service for filthy lucre!

### PRACTICAL VALUE

We view with disbelief that the mother of Micah did not discipline her son for stealing her money but she blessed him instead just because he returned the money to her. This is an example, which parents today should not emulate. Children must be firmly taught that stealing things, which belong to others, is breaking the Eighth Commandment of God. God condemns such acts. Teach a child when he is still young to fear God and that stealing is wrong, so that he will not steal when he is older. To return the money is right but that does not mean that there should not be discipline for the wrong done. But to bless a sinner is to bless the sinful deed.

Like mother like son because she encouraged Micah to sin more in his idolatry. Micah and his mother did not worship the Canaanite gods. In fact, they professed to worship the LORD God but in their own abominable way. Today, some people may be guilty of the same sin. They professed to worship the living and true God and the Lord Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> Exodus 28:1 And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, *even* Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.

Christ but in reality, they trust their good financial standing and jobs as better means of security. This is also idolatry. We should be aware of these things that we do not fall prey to such temptations to sin. *If people do what is right in their own eyes they will end up doing what is wrong in the eyes of God.*<sup>6</sup> The practice of idolatry in any form is not only an abomination to the LORD God but it will also lead us to the downward spiral of immorality, injustice, lying and cheating.

The Levite abandoned his God-appointed responsibility and duty in search of better things. In the process, he became a mercenary for hire. This is a gross sin against God. He may seem to be well materially, enjoying the temporal comforts of life. But how miserable he would be, having to dance to every tune of his benefactor. He becomes a person without character, respectability and integrity. This is a lesson particularly for pastors, missionaries, evangelists and full-time workers who are exposed to such temptations and can become mercenary. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Judges 17:1-6; Proverbs 28:24.; Exodus 20:4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Donald K. Campbell, Judges, p.148.

**TUESDAY:** Judges 17:7-13; Hebrews 12:16; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

**WEDNESDAY:** Judges 17:1-13;

**THURSDAY:** Judges 17:1-13;

**FRIDAY:** Judges 17:1-13.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Write one or two sentences about the conduct of the following:

a. Micah

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b. Micah's mother

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c. The Levite

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2. Who was the greater sinner, the Levite or Micah and his mother?

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5. Would you want a pastor who serves with the same motivation like the Levite? Would you want an elder or deacon in the church who serves with the same motivation like the Levite? What about yourself in the office or home?

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3. Cite parallels today of pastors who behave like the Levite?

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6. Will a genuine Christian worship idols deliberately?

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4. Cite parallels of members in churches today who behave like Micah and his mother?

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7. What have you learned in this chapter about the influence of idolatrous worship?

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