

Israel's Delusion

Lesson Scope: Judges 17-21

Lesson Focus

The last five chapters of the Book of Judges present a glimpse into the deplorable spiritual condition of many in Israel. The manner in which individuals conducted themselves at home eventually affected their communities and ultimately their nation. Israel could not prosper spiritually when homes failed to uphold godly principles and priorities.

Likely this degeneration can be attributed to the failure of parents to teach and train their children in right ways. Also, there was no king in Israel in those days. Having no God-fearing leaders to hold him accountable for his actions, each man could decide independently how to order his life and conduct his worship.

Without godly leadership to direct people's minds, their affections became set on material things, and their worship evolved into an exercise of pleasing and serving self. Rather than following God's prescribed methods for worship, each man devised a religious system to suit himself.

Man's worship is an index of his heart's condition. When a person's worship degenerates, his entire life is corrupted.

This account illustrates the religious confusion that results when godly leaders do not promote right forms of worship and proper conduct. It is important that church leaders promote Biblical worship patterns.

Though Israel's experience varies from ours, this lesson can be made relevant to our time. While we are not tempted to employ the specific deviations in worship forms that Micah used, we should evaluate our own worship patterns in light of New Testament principles. In some churches today, casual dress for worship is accepted and even promoted. Worship is approached in a lighthearted manner, often with an informal, unstructured atmosphere designed to entertain. We do need to learn to appreciate the spiritual content of a worship service where God's Word is given a prominent place.

Lesson Aim: To discern traits of perverted worship.

Theme Verse: [John 4:24](#). God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Lesson Text:

Deviation in the Home

[Judges 17:1-4](#) ¹ And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name *was* Micah. ² And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver *is* with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed *be thou* of the LORD, my son. ³ And when he had restored the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee. ⁴ Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

Deception in the Leadership

[Judges 17:5-10](#) ⁵ And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. ⁶ In those days *there was* no king in Israel, *but* every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes. ⁷ And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah of the family of Judah, who *was* a Levite, and he sojourned there. ⁸ And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah to sojourn where he could find *a place*: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. ⁹ And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I *am* a Levite of Bethlehemjudah, and I go to sojourn where I may find *a place*. ¹⁰ And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten *shekels* of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

Delusion in the Congregation

Judges 18:2-5 ² And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there. ³ When they *were* by the house of Micah, they knew the voice of the young man the Levite: and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this *place*? and what hast thou here? ⁴ And he said unto them, Thus and thus dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest. ⁵ And they said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

Judges 18:18-20 ¹⁸ And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye? ¹⁹ And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: *is it* better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? ²⁰ And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people.

Judges 18:30 ³⁰ And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.

Questions for Study

Deviation in the Home

1. What do Micah's mother's actions reveal about her attitude toward God's commandments?
2. How does the love of money lead one into idolatry?
3. What resources do we have to promote a love for God in our homes?

Deception in the Leadership

4. Why did the Levite so readily accept Micah's invitation to be his priest?
5. Why is material gain not a sure sign God approval on one's life?

Delusion in the Congregation

6. What characteristics of perverted leadership do we see in Micah's priest?
7. Explain the priest's answer to the Danites in Judges 18:6.
8. What concepts of God must be the basis for our worship?

Analyzing the Passage

Judging by his name (which means, "Who is like Jehovah?"), we can conclude that Micah was from a godly family who knew the Mosaic Law. Micah's mother's references to the Lord even while engaging in her idol-making activities and evident deviations from the Ten Commandments, however, indicate a state of spiritual confusion.

When Micah's mother discovered the missing silver, she placed a curse on the thief. Micah, hoping to avoid the curse, confessed the deed and returned the silver to his mother.

Instead of holding her son accountable for his wrong conduct, she made concessions to accommodate him, and they became partners in a willful, self-devised religious arrangement. Micah's son, whom he consecrated to be his priest, apparently accepted this strange mixture of worship forms as a suitable alternative. This illustrates the process of apostasy in worship as it continues in succeeding generations.

The Levite who came to Micah's house while searching for a place to stay apparently lacked a means of livelihood because of Israel's failure to support the priests with their tithes and offerings. He agreed to Micah's proposal to serve as a paid priest. Later, he forsook Micah to serve the Danites in an equally corrupt system of worship. His presence as a religious leader gave Micah and the Danites a false sense of security.

Micah asked, "What have I more?" (Judges 18:24), when the Danites stole his idols and took away his priest. This shows the utter helplessness of those who trust in idols. The teraphim—which were pagan household gods—rather than protecting him from loss were themselves carried away. And the priest he had hired to bless him and make his religious system appear legitimate forsook him in his time of need.

Meanwhile, the house of God in nearby Shiloh was neglected. Apostasy had alienated these people from the true God who could have been their refuge.

The deception of Micah's religious system led the Danites to believe the true God could be consulted in Micah's house as well as at Shiloh. The Levite's answer, "Before the LORD is your way," implies that they were under God's eye and, by implication, that they had His blessing and protection.

Principles and Applications

Deviation in the Home

1. Perverted worship results when people disobey God's commands (Judges 17:1-4). Persons who deliberately sin fail to understand God's holiness and His intense hatred for sin. When one condones wrongdoing, his concept of God is altered. This leads to false ideas regarding the kind of worship God will accept.

2. Perverted worship is a mixture of the true and the false (Judges 17:3). Though she claimed the silver that was taken was wholly dedicated unto the Lord, Micah's mother used it for making a graven image, which God had forbidden. Such mixtures lead to confusion. This causes people to think they have God's blessing while they live in disobedience.

3. One worship perversion leads to many perversions (Judges 17:4). When man's ideas are employed rather than Biblical principles, there is no end to the possible variations. Such do-it-yourself approaches to God feed man's pride and are repulsive to Him. True worship is God-centered and is structured to please God rather than self.

Deception in the Leadership

4. Individualism leads to perverted worship (Judges 17:5, 6). Micah worshiped as it seemed fit in his own eyes. His worship pleased himself, but it did not please God. It was a religion of his own making. But to come to God and be accepted, one must come in God's appointed way. He cannot set his individual ideas above the Word of God.

Many today are choosing a "home worship" approach rather than submitting to the direction of a Scriptural church group. God certainly will honor the sincerity of any who worship Him individually because they have no other option. But He will not honor small group worship that results from individualism and insubordination.

5. Perverted worship especially beguiles the unstable (Judges 17:7-9). Those who are not committed to doing right often find any worship alternative attractive and acceptable. For that reason, the traveling Levite accepted Micah's offer as the answer to his material need.

6. Perverted worship often carries the promise of monetary gain (Judges 17:10). Blinded by the glitter of gold, many have turned aside as Demas, who loved this present world. Those who serve God for the money they hope to receive are wrongly motivated. We should seek first the kingdom of heaven and make that our purpose for living. If we allow our material

interests to compromise our separation from the world and thereby jeopardize our relationship with the Lord and a Scriptural church, we are little better than this Levite.

Delusion in the Congregation

7. Perverted leaders give people a false sense of security (Judges 18:5-6). They tell people what they want to hear. They promise God's blessing to those who are living in obvious error. Rather than giving the entire counsels of God, perverted leaders speak that which will gain them the praise of men. The simple fact that these images could not prevent themselves from being stolen is proof that they were no gods. How then should a priest of such a system be considered a valid source of divine direction?

8. Perverted worshipers choose to ignore sin in their own lives and in the lives of others (Judges 18:18-19). Sin is disregarded and excused in situations where it would be inconvenient to speak out against it. Micah's priest was willing to remain silent and to cooperate with the scheme of the Danites. His decision in this matter was influenced by economic factors.

9. Perverted worship appeals to the pride of its constituency (Judges 18:19-20). Like the Pharisees who loved the uppermost seats in the synagogues, Micah's priest responded to the carnal appeal of a position of greater honor. Let us diligently seek to avoid features in church life that feed the pride of man.

10. God desires that apostates return to Him in true worship (Judges 18:31). The opportunity for true worship remained. The tabernacle at Shiloh was available to the few true worshipers, but it was sadly neglected by many. God waits for the return of apostates who, in true repentance, choose to seek Him in sincerity.

Important Teachings

1. Perverted worship results when people disobey God's commands (Judges 17:1-4).

2. Perverted worship is a mixture of the true and the false (Judges 17:3).

3. One worship perversion leads to many perversions (Judges 17:4).

4. Individualism leads to perverted worship (Judges 17:5-6).

5. Perverted worship especially beguiles the unstable (Judges 17:7-9).

6. Perverted worship often carries the promise of monetary gain (Judges 17:10).

7. Perverted leaders give people a false sense of security (Judges 18:5-6).

8. Perverted worshipers choose to ignore sin in their own lives and in the lives of others (Judges 18:18-19).
9. Perverted worship appeals to the pride of its constituency (Judges 18:19-20).
10. God desires that apostates return to Him in true worship (Judges 18:31).

Answers to Questions

1. What do Micah's mother's actions reveal about her attitude toward God's commandments?

Micah's mother ignored two of the Ten Commandments. First, she failed to hold her son accountable for stealing the silver. Second, she took the silver to the founder who made of it a graven image. Accommodating her son was of greater importance to her than operating her home on the basis of God's laws.

2. How does the love of money lead one into idolatry?

The love of money causes a person to focus on material things and draws his mind away from the love of God. The love of material things becomes a form of idolatry because one's affection is set on them rather than on God.

3. What resources do we have to promote a love for God in our homes?

We should read the Bible together as a family. We should discuss the Scriptures that apply to the matters that arise in daily life. Parents need to communicate to their children by word and example that God is the focus of their love and loyalty.

4. Why did the Levite so readily accept Micah's invitation to be his priest?

He apparently was not serving in the role God had assigned to the Levites, possibly because Israel was neglecting her spiritual leaders. He was traveling to look for other employment. Since Micah's offer looked attractive from a financial standpoint, he agreed to it without considering the spiritual implications of this arrangement.

5. Why is material gain not a sure sign of God's approval on one's life?

Life is more than food and drink. One can have his material needs well supplied and yet experience leanness of soul. Wicked men can be prosperous and at the same time be spiritually dead. God's greatest blessings come to us in the spiritual realm.

6. What characteristics of perverted leadership do we see in Micah's priest?

He served for monetary gain. It seems he did not ask counsel of God before answering the Danites' question about whether their way would be prosperous. His pride led him to accept a higher position to the neglect of prior commitments. He switched loyalty and agreed to be silent about the theft of Micah's images.

7. Explain the priest's answer to the Danites in Judges 18:6.

He told them what they wanted to hear. He led them to believe that God would prosper their way. Though his answer could be understood to be noncommittal, it was worded to imply God's blessing on them.

8. What concepts of God must be the basis for our worship?

We must believe that God knows our motives and sees our manner of life and our conduct. God detests acts of worship coming from those who disobey His commandments and His directives for worship. Since God is a Spirit, they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Summarizing the Lesson

A misplaced affection leads to idolatry. We may be tempted by covetousness, which is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5). "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

God is not worshiped by the works of men's hands. Gifts and sacrifices brought by disobedient and world-loving people are not acceptable forms of worship. God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. He knows that those who worship Him rightly will reflect His image in a righteous life. By adhering to God's Word in our mode of worship, we will avoid deception and delusion.

Research Guide

1. Read the chapter on "Worship" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.
2. Check a Bible dictionary for information on teraphim. Also read Scriptures regarding the use and the misuse of the ephod.