

# Home-made Gods

Cycles of Sin . . . Stories of Grace – Part VIII

Judges 17, 18

## Introduction – When God’s Revelation is Rejected

The book of Judges is coming to a tragic close. The nation of Israel is adrift spiritually and morally. No more judges will appear on the scene to fight or pray or preach. It is no surprise that this book closes with tragic tales of disobedience, superstition, immorality, theft, murder, and eventually, Israelite fighting against Israelite.

What is the root problem? In the remaining five chapters, we will read four times, with some variation, the refrain, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

What does this tell us? It tells us that Israel is without civil authority and has rejected God’s authority.

A popular ballad of a number of years ago would have been a hit in Israel, with the line, “How can it be wrong, when it feels so right?”

The writer of Judges now attempts to hold a mirror in front of Israel’s face – as well as ours – and say, “Here you are Israel. Take a good, hard look at what happens to a nation that rejects the authority of God.”

Primarily, two things happen when a nation rejects God’s authority:

1. false religions are created;

2. moral absolutes are destroyed.

Today, we will study the first of these issues; that is, the creation of false religions and false gods. I will attempt to parallel Israel’s confusion with America’s confusion.

In our next discussion, as we conclude our study of this book, we will deal with the second issue concerning moral absolutes. It is somewhat ironic in its timing because the moral perversions exposed are immorality, homosexuality, murder, and eventually, civil war among the nation.

## When God’s Revelation is Replaced

Our story opens in Judges chapter 17, and continues through chapter 18. It is a story that reveals the development of false religions. These two chapters, in fact, give us some of the characteristics of false religions that still exist today.

### Four characteristics of false religion

I want to highlight four of these characteristics of false religions. These four things will serve as major points in our discussion today.

1. **Characteristic number one – a false religion is stimulated by personal convenience.**

Look at Judges 17:1-2.

*Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. He said*

*to his mother, “The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, “Blessed be my son by the Lord.”*

Understand that this son stole eleven hundred pieces of silver from his mom. His mom, who evidently had adopted the pagan practice of making spells or curses, casts an eerie curse upon whoever stole it. She probably had a good idea it was her son because the text tells us that she uttered the curse in his hearing.

The curse worked! Look at Judges 17:3.

*He then returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother, and his mother said, “I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son to make a graven image and a molten image . . .”*

This is a Jewish mother steeped in idolatry. Look at what she does next, in Judges 17:4!

*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 . . .*

This mom is not even giving what she said she would give! She:

- praises God for her dishonest son confessing;
- promises to dedicate the money to God;
- uses the money instead, to make idols in God’s name;
- shortchanges the false gods by only using two hundred of the eleven hundred pieces of silver.

Even this false religion was shortchanged by a mother who found it much more convenient to keep nine hundred pieces of silver to herself.

The Israelites are bound by idolatry. Why? Because it has always been more convenient to make one’s own gods than to serve the true and living God.

Why should they bother with trips to Shiloh, when they can worship at their own self-made shrine? Why should they bother with the tremendous expense of unblemished animals for sacrifices? Why not just have some homemade gods? It is much more convenient.

False religion is popular because it demands nothing more than what the follower is willing to give.

False religions are just as popular today. One television talk show host recently had these true things to say about religion in America:

- There are some people who think religion is like a faucet – to be turned on only when needed.
- In our day, the most popular religion is Confucianism – we want beliefs that make us feel good, and when they do not, we see a psychiatrist.
- Most people have some sort of religion – at least they know which church they are staying away from.
- Many people use their religion as they do a bus – they ride only if it is going their way.

Notice Judges 17:5.

*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.*

How convenient all of this was.

Now we will read the important statement, in Judges 17:6. This is what God thinks.

*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.*

In their own eyes, the Israelites said, “Why bother with Shiloh, we can have everything we want right here! We can have religion our way!”

George Gallup and David Poling conducted the first survey to assess the religious life of our nation. *Glamour* magazine conducted the second survey, to which 25,000 people responded. Of the people polled, 98% believed in God. Under close scrutiny, these surveys revealed that the people chose to believe only what appealed to them and ignored teachings that ran contrary to their personal goals or felt needs. Their religious commitments were a “convenient and comfortable form of Christianity.”

It is no wonder that Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary, observed that the Christian church in America is about five hundred miles long and an inch thick.

## 2. Characteristic number two – a false religion is concealed by religious appearances.

A new character is added to the plot in Judges 17:7.

*Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there.*

We will learn later that this young man's name is Jonathan. Look at Judges 17:8.

*Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah.*

Remember that Micah consecrated one of his sons to play act the role of priest. I would imagine his son does not do this very convincingly. Continue to Judges 17:9-10a.

*Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to stay wherever I may find a place." Micah then said to him, "Dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me . . ."*

"This is great," Micah thought.

Micah wanted a more authentic line to God; Jonathan wanted a more appealing ministry for God. Look at Judges 17:10b to see how good it gets.

*". . . be . . . a priest to me, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance." So the Levite went in.*

The Levite is thinking, "Hey, this is really a blessing. I get a regular paycheck, a brand new suit, and an expense account. Isn't God great?!"

Make no mistake, however, God is *not* smiling! This priest had no right to wander from the central sanctuary; no right to set up a priest's office; no authority to serve an individual or a family.

This system was totally contrary to God's word. Yet it had all the appearances of religiosity! All the right words were said and there was even a Levite playing priest!

Does America do this? Do we have the form of religious appearance without the reality of God's authority? You had better believe it! Think of:

- the many thousands of families that will want their babies baptized, but will care little whether or not their children are taught anything of Christ's claims;
- the many thousands of couples that will want a church wedding – in white with all the trimmings; with a smiling minister who sounds official – but will have nothing to do with the head of the church, Jesus Christ, in their marriages;
- the many thousands of people who will expect a minister to conduct their funerals at their hour of death – eulogizing with flowery words – but have no desire for God to rule during their hours of life.

Yes, this country has fallen into the same pit. It wants all the appearances of religion, without any commitment; it wants all the benefits of God's blessing on the marriage, on the family and home, on death, without ever considering God's principles.

Look at Judges 17:13.

*Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest."*

Notice the not so subtle motivation – "Now God can make me a prosperous man."

Do not overlook Micah's sin. He:

- made his own gods;
- made his own shrine;
- employed his own priest.

He is considering himself under God's blessing, but when all the appearances of religion are stripped away, he is under God's judgment.

## 3. Characteristic number three – a false religion is motivated by disobedience.

Chapter 18 broadens the list of characters in this drama to include the rebellious Danite tribe. Look at Judges 18:1-2.

*In those days there was no king of Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel. So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah*

*and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, "Go search the land." And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.*

It appears on the surface that Dan is looking to possess its inheritance. However, this is written to reveal their point of view! They have already failed to possess their inheritance, as we were told in Judges chapter 1, when they ran from the Amorites in unbelief.

In Judges chapter 5, Deborah laments about several tribes who would not help the nation. She reveals that the tribe of Dan was huddled in ships, waiting to set sail should the Israelites lose in battle.

The tribe of Dan in actuality, since disobeying in the past, has been wandering about and looking for a handout or for someone to prey upon. They are about to find the perfect victim!

Look at Judges 18:3-4.

*When they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; and they turned aside there and said to him, "Who brought you here? And what are you doing in this place? And what do you have here?" He said to them, "Thus and so has Micah done to me, and he has hired me and I have become his priest."*

Continue to Judges 18:5-6. The Danites ask this priest to inquire of God, but already know, from God's revelation, that they are in sin.

*They said to him, "Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether our way on which we are going will be prosperous." The priest said to them, "Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the Lord's approval."*

Of course this priest would say this – he will say whatever his hearers want to hear. The trouble is – the Danites do prosper! They do win the battle, and in the process, guess whose credibility goes up? This fake priest's.

Had this priest been genuine, he would have excoriated the Danites for their rebellion and shiftless ways. He would then, have sent them to Shiloh to make sacrifices for their violation of God's word.

Instead, upon this priest's advice, the Danites will massacre a peaceful people in Laish. Then, they will

set all their idols up and use Jonathan and his sons as their false priests.

This religion is built upon the foundation of people who are disobeying the authority of God. Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes – even the religious crowd.

It is interesting that in the book of Revelation chapter 7, where we are introduced to the 144,000 Hebrew believers who carry out a special ministry for God in the Tribulation, after the rapture of the church, in that list of tribes, Dan is not mentioned. They refused to follow God's mission for them in the land of Israel and they chose to perpetuate a false religion.

God later, will refuse to give them this special ministry of blessing for Him in the future.

#### **4. Characteristic number four – a false religion is attracted to superstition.**

When God is set aside, we must believe in something or someone! Everyone places his faith in something. Even the atheist has placed his faith in his own reason that God does not exist.

The denial of God's authority opens the door to unbelievable confusion.

The fact that America has become the new focus for eastern religions, should cause the New Age movement to be no surprise to us.

Dr. Andrew Greeley of the University of Chicago, in the results of a massive survey, concluded that 67% of Americans now believe in the supernatural, 29% believe in reincarnation, and 42% believe that they have been in contact with someone who has already died.

There is little doubt that Americans have found a new world of reality that a previous generation did not know existed. It is a world of miracles, out of body experiences, and conversations with spirit entities that lived thousands of years ago.

A Gallup poll released in the 1980's, reported that ten million Americans were already engaged in some aspect of Eastern religion.

Perhaps the most popular aspect of Eastern religion is Yoga, which in Hindu means, "to yoke," and is the way to yoke with Hindu spirits by emptying the mind. It has been repackaged for spiritually confused Americans as a means to relieve stress and increase productivity.

Millions of dollars have been spent by Fortune 500 companies on meditation, self-hypnosis, visualization, biofeedback and other New Age mind-control techniques. Clients have included IBM, AT&T, Coca Cola, General Electric, RCA, Sears, Proctor and Gamble, Boeing, General Dynamics, Allstate, and Hewlett-Packard.

In the last year, I have had two professionals come to me and reveal that their company or line of work has required them to attend seminars that teach New Age theology. One professional, a nurse, told me of a required session called "Therapeutic Touch". Therapeutic Touch has its roots in Eastern superstition. It was interesting that the seminar leader began by saying, "Therapeutic Touch is not anti-Christian."

Today, supposedly sixty million Americans have bought into, in varying degrees, the same lie the Danites and Micah and the Levite bought into – fulfillment and direction can be found, not by denying or even ignoring God, but by rewriting who God is, and what the spiritual world is really all about.

Look at Judges 18:18-20.

***When these [Danite warriors] went into Micah's house and took the graven image, the ephod and household idols and the molten image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" They said to him, "Be silent, put your hand over your mouth and come with us, and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and family in Israel?" The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image, and went among the people.***

Even if it is idols, this priest is a thief too!

Skip to Judges 18:30.

***The sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.***

Look in your cross reference section to discover the shocking fact that this false priest who goes to the highest bidder, is actually Moses' grandson!

Continue to Judges 18:31.

***So they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh.***

The last phrase in this verse reemphasizes that they are rejecting true worship. They have set up their own gods. Why? Because they know they need direction from somewhere, and they believe that they can receive it from another source!!!

Is it any surprise that the New York telephone system handles one million calls a month on its dial-a-horoscope lines? Is it any surprise that one out of every three newspaper readers consults his daily horoscope? From former first ladies to the common people, this nation is looking elsewhere for guidance!

David Virkler, a Christian speaker and evangelist, writes, "In 1956, I purchased a set of the Encyclopedia Americana. I recently referred to the section on astrology. The section concluded with this remark, 'Astrology still flourishes, however, in Asia and Africa, and is a means of livelihood to many charlatans who prey upon the ignorant.'"

A *Times* columnist wrote clearly, "The Christian who believes in divine providence is bound to reject the idea that the motions of the stars and planets govern human affairs."

Why can an unbeliever see it so clearly, when the religious world cannot!

Another entire subject is visualization; that is, if you see it in your mind, you can make it yours. Also called "imaging," major religious leaders write about it; the New Age promotes it.

Recently in Edinburg, Texas, teachers were forced to teach what is called E-K curriculum. This is based on the four thousand year old belief that universal cosmic energy or light flows through the body in channels. The source of energy can be tapped by visualization and other Hindu techniques.

In Los Angeles, Dr. Beverly Galyean developed a "Holistic curriculum" that requires first graders to lie motionless and visualize their bodies filled with light. They were taught they could tap into a universal mind through spirit guides.

What is going on? People have rejected the authority of God and His word and it has led to spiritual confusion. People no longer deny the spirit world, they just do not understand the reality of it.

There is much more to this subject. If you would like to understand more, you may want to listen to a series that we previously did on the New Age.

Shirley MacLaine, the actress whose journey into the New Age world lead her to believe she was a god, was on television, at one time, promoting Hinduism, or New Age-ism. She asked her audience, "What do you have to lose?"

The answer is, "Everything. Everything."

## **Application**

Let me apply the problem that we see in Judges, and in America, in a couple of ways.

1. First, those who are use spiritual words may not necessarily lead in spiritual ways.

We should be like the people of Berea when Paul preached there. They searched the Scriptures daily to see whether the things he said were true (Acts 17:10-11). They were checking out the apostle Paul's teachings!

2. Secondly, rejection of God's counsel ultimately, results in man's confusion.

Do you want to know how to live? Look in the Bible.

Do you want to know God? Look in the Bible.

Do you want direction and wise counsel? Look in the Bible.

In the Bible, there is safety and security and counsel and wisdom; there is the one and only God revealed. You will have to throw away your homemade gods, if you want to know Him.

Jesus Christ said,

*. . . I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6)*

*. . . you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:32)*

We have everything to gain by following Him. Everything.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/24/1992 by Stephen Davey.

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