

Micah – A Lesson in Luck

By David Pyles

Judges 17 & 18 make a historical narrative that seems purposed to account for the introduction of idolatry to Israel after the deaths of Moses and Joshua. It begins by telling how a man named Micah of the tribe of Ephraim stole 1100 shekels of silver from his own mother. In today's money, this would be valued near \$10,000. His angry mother then pronounced a curse on whoever stole the silver. Micah, being a superstitious man, became anxious about this curse and opted to return the money. The story of Jacob and Esau shows that ancient people thought that parents had power to put blessings or curses on their children (Gn 27). This belief likely furthered Micah's fear. When Micah returned the silver, his mother blessed him for it, as if this would reverse the curse. She also told Micah that it had been her intent to give him the silver anyway for purposes of making idols. She therefore told Micah it was not necessary that he return it. But Micah, evidently still apprehensive about the curse, insisted that she retake it.

She then used the silver as planned and hired a craftsman to form it into two idols. Upon giving these to Micah, he added a teraphim (another type of idol) and a priestly ephod. He appointed his own son to be his personal priest. He also built a house of gods to contain all his sacred objects. However, shortly thereafter, Micah encountered a young Levite, who appears to have been a vagrant seeking employment, and Micah offered to hire the man as his personal priest. He promised him room, board, clothing and a meager 10 shekels of silver per year. The young man agreed, and thereafter became dear to Micah, who treated him as one of his own sons.

In those days, the tribe of Dan had not yet fully occupied the territory allotted it, and the Danites had become pressed for space. Consequently, they sent a group of five spies to examine a city called Laish on the northern extremity of Canaan. While en route, these spies came by the house of Micah and became acquainted with his Levite priest. They asked the priest to do divination to see if their journey would be successful. The priest complied and said that success was en store. So the men continued on their journey and found the city to be very vulnerable to conquest, even as the Levite had predicted. The Danites then returned home and assembled a force of 600 men for purposes of capturing the city. When this force was en route to conquer, they came by the home of Micah again, but this time they seized his gods and ephod, and coaxed the Levite to serve them instead, promising better terms than had been given by Micah. The Levite happily complied, and forsook his loving Micah for better fortunes with the Danites.

Micah quickly discovered his loss and pursued the Danites to recover his possessions. He was accompanied by men of his village. Upon reaching the travelling force, he protested that they had taken his gods and priest, thereby leaving him with nothing. But the Danites threatened Micah with violence, and being too weak to oppose them, he capitulated and returned to his home empty. The Danites went on to victoriously take the city. Being convinced that the idols and priest had given them good luck, they established them as a permanent religion of their people. Thus was the beginning of idolatry among the Israelites after they had entered Canaan.

This bizarre story has many marks of satire. Micah's ignorance would be amusing were it not for the tragedy to which it would eventually lead. He thought like an Israelite in some ways, but his mentality was more that of a Pagan. Now Pagans seem to have been obsessed with luck. What they did in religion was purposed to improve their fortunes by securing the favor of the spirit world. It seemed to matter little to them if their aid came from a devil or a god. Pagan gods were seldom righteous, so the distinction between a god and a devil was blurred to them. They considered the immediate effect of religion to be what really mattered. If a devil could advance their temporal welfare, then a god was little better. So a Pagan could be characterized as believing the perverse proverb that says "it is better to be lucky than good." Such was the case with Micah. He was obsessed with luck, and to paraphrase a song of Fleetwood Mac, he "was looking out for luck." However, his quest for such would lead to an ironic end, and he would commit a multitude of religious errors along the way.

It seems that humans are incurable believers in the idea of luck. To demonstrate this, consider a Harvard probability professor in a casino playing craps. Suppose he gets "snake eyes" on his first throw of the dice (a very bad roll). It will not matter how much probability theory he understands, nor that such theory says his subsequent rolls have no correlation to the first, his mind will entertain worries that the bad roll might be a bad sign of bad things to come, i.e. that his luck is bad. Now suppose he and the remainder of the faculty are at a Harvard football game where their team is being badly beaten, but suddenly a Harvard player makes a spectacular play and scores. All such faculty will react with glee, thinking that the play might somehow be a sign of better things to come, even though nothing in their science would support this belief. Even if one were to offer the scientific argument that the successful play might inspire the Harvard players to a greater level of energy, it would only do this if the players were themselves believers that the good play portended better luck. In my many years of being an investor/speculator, each day brought perceptions of either good luck or bad, yet I can confidently say that my belief in luck never did anything but lose me money or lose me opportunity. I soon learned that my success was largely contingent upon my ability to subdue my belief in luck. Notwithstanding, no amount of experience was sufficient for me to completely overcome my superstitions.

Micah's quest for luck will have similar effects, and lead him to multiple errors, including:

- 1) Micah brought a curse upon himself, and became guilty of theft, by stealing what was going to be his anyway. This is truly ironic, and is an early indication that the story is satirical. While it is a true story, providence reshaped events to convey important lessons through satire.

What was true of Micah's transgression is true of sin in general. Sin pursues its own welfare by unlawful means, and the things it greedily takes would have been in free abundance had it not been for sin. The same may be said of false religion. Nearly all such religions are works-based, and therefore make claims of personal merit, but this is really theft, because it takes credit properly belonging to Jesus Christ. The irony is that righteousness is freely and abundantly given to the very ones who disclaim such merit (Mt 5:6, 1Jn 1:9).

2) Micah thought he was free to worship God any way he wanted, so he fabricated his own religion, borrowing ideas from both true religion and false. The end result was a religion that suited his personal palate and purposes rather than that of the God he purported to please. The same error is committed by billions in the world today. Their idea that worship can be personally tailored was borrowed from Pagans. The God of the Bible always required that worship follow doctrine and practice given by God Himself through verifiably inspired men.

Micah's preferred personal religion was also a convenient one. His house of gods, ephod and priest were substitutes for tabernacle service and were purposed to relieve him of the burden of travelling to the tabernacle itself. The problem was that the law of God either prohibited these substitutions or did not authorize them. Later, a king named Jeroboam committed similar error in setting up his own religious sites and promoting them as being more convenient than the temple at Jerusalem (1Kings 12:28). This argument contributed to massive corruption in Israel that eventually led to its destruction. The same error is committed by millions of Americans today who think remote viewing via Internet is a convenient substitute for church attendance. Millions more attend unsound churches to avert the inconvenience of travelling to sound ones.

3) Micah took the silver for lack of faith and patience. It was going to be his anyway had he waited. Now God cannot be pleased by anyone lacking faith (Heb 11:6), and it is also true that anyone lacking faith cannot be pleased with God. The reason is that God has made the world such that there is nearly always a delay between good and its reward, and also between evil and its retribution. Solomon spoke of this in:

Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. – Eccl 8:5-6

The meaning is that a man will always be blessed for doing what God says, but it may require time for the blessing to take effect. Solomon said that to every purpose there is an aspect of judgment and an aspect of time. There is an aspect of judgment because to every purpose there is right and wrong or wise and foolish. There is an aspect of time because there will be a delay between doing right and being rewarded for the right that was done, and also between doing wrong and realizing the consequences for it. For example, there is a right way to plant turnip greens, and one who does it will have something to eat in a few weeks. There is also a right way to plant an apple tree, but one who does this will have something to eat only after many years. This illustrates what Solomon meant by time and judgment.

This characteristic of the world causes man misery because it derives from God's curse on the earth. If evil were instantly punished, then it would be near-eliminated from the earth, and if good were instantly rewarded, then even evil men would be anxious to do it in order to secure their reward. However, this is not how things work in reality. In the real world, one must have faith and patience that, eventually, good will surely be rewarded and that evil will surely be punished. Micah's religion was conceived in violation of this principle.

4) When Micah restored the silver, his mother blessed him from the same mouth wherewith she had cursed him. Devils will bless you in the ear while privately conspiring to curse you. James condemned those who both bless and curse in his famous and eloquent analysis of the tongue:

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. – Js 3:9-12

This will explain why the curse took effect but the blessing did not. Micah was rightfully fearful of this, which explains why he insisted upon returning the silver even after his mother offered for him to keep it.

5) Micah purposed to build his gods a house. When David purposed the same, wishing to build a temple, the true God objected to the absurdity that a mere man could build the omnipotent, omnipresent God a house. God claimed the opposite would be true, or that He would build David a house by establishing his progeny as a dynasty ending with the eternal Messiah (2Sam 7:5-16). While God afterward conceded to the building of a temple, He warned that He would destroy it if higher priorities were not kept. The completion of this temple did in fact mark the apex of Israel and the beginning of its descent. The house that was truly initiated by God was a mere tabernacle, which only served symbolic purposes to the instruction of the people. As God told David, it will forever remain the case that God provides houses for men. Only a false and beggarly god would need men to provide a house for him.

6) Micah made an ephod in imitation of tabernacle service. He further imitated true religion by later appointing a Levite as his priest. However, these things were done for a mere appearance of legitimacy. Micah was not truly seeking compliance with divine protocol. Such is true of false religion in general. It will imitate true religion at sufficient points to dupe its devotees.

This satanic method of imitation is especially exposed in the book of Revelation. For example, God exists in the form of a Trinity, so Satan manifests himself in the form of a trinity also, consisting of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. God has a Son, so Satan also has a son, the son of perdition (2Thes 2:3). Since God's Son was accompanied by a prophet named John the Baptist, Satan's son is accompanied also, but by the false prophet (Rev 13). God's Son was also accompanied by apostles who are to be enthroned (Mt 19:28). Satan's son is accompanied by 10 kings. God's Son has a virgin bride to whom He is faithful. Satan has a bride also, this being the Babylonian harlot, but he betrays her and burns her with fire (Rev 17:16). God has a city, the New Jerusalem. Satan has a city too. This is Babylon. God has a resurrection, so Satan simulates his own resurrection in the mortally wounded head of the beast (Rev 13:3). All these parallels suggest why Paul could say in his own times that "*the mystery of iniquity doth already work*" (2Thes 2:7). The appearance is that Satan, upon seeing the plan of God unfold in the life of Jesus Christ, and having it explained to him and other angels, both good and bad, by the Spirit-led church (Eph 3:10, 1Pet 1:12), then purposed to set in motion his own plan of imitation.

This imitation will climax with the beast of Revelation. This beast is portrayed as having seven heads, all of which are mystically risen from the dead, but the resurrection of the seventh will be especially important and serve to the amazement of a deceived world. All this will be in imitation of true religion because the Bible presented seven resurrections up through the resurrection of Christ, but the seventh resurrection, or of Christ Himself, represents the power behind all others, and it also serves as the basis of all religious truth.

All this is stark warning that anything calling itself a religion must be carefully scrutinized. It cannot be assessed merely on the basis of superficial appearance. The more ignorant a man is, the more will all religions appear the same to him.

7) Micah appointed his own son as his personal priest. Hence, Micah got his religious leadership from someone he had taught himself. This is an amusing part of the story. Obviously, there is not much hope of learning much in a system like this. True religion is instructed by God Himself through His inspired word. Paul warned Timothy:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. – 2Tim 4:2-4

When Paul said to teach with all “*doctrine*,” his meaning was to teach with scriptural authority. But false religionists teach their own teachers what they are to be taught themselves.

8) Micah later replaced his son with a young Levite. Micah was confident that having a Levite for priest would bring him better fortune; however, the Levite had no qualification and later proved to be inept. The Levite was trusted because of who he was rather than what he knew. This is also a characteristic of false religion, which always puts unwarranted trust in the teachings of some incompetent man.

9) Micah was forsaken by both his priest and his gods when the Danites offered better terms. The lesson here is that the true God and true religion attend to the needs of the poor, but false gods and false religions cater to the highest bidder.

10) Micah’s quest for luck ended in the worst kind of misfortune. There is an ironic sense in which his imagined luck made him victim of his own success. His idols were thought to bring luck to the Danites, which is of course what the idols were intended to do, but this is why the Danites seized them, leaving Micah with nothing. The fact that Micah professed to be left with nothing was an admission that his gods were ineffective in the end. Any benefit they brought him was either imagined or short-lived. If Micah’s gods were what he claimed, then he should have had sufficient strength to overcome the Danites, or else he should have gained sufficient silver to replace the gods they took. Instead, all of his inherited silver was lost, with all of the benefit it might have given him had it been used in lawful ways. Micah must have felt quite

outsmarted. It is no wonder. The same God who told us not to worship idols is also one who “*taketh the wise in their own craftiness,*” (Job 5:13).

The curse of the silver continued long after Micah. The Danites, who found the Canaanite city of Laish to be so vulnerable and easily taken, would themselves become one of the most vulnerable tribes of Israel to foreign invaders.

The story of Micah and the Danites can be summarized by paraphrasing another song from the country singer, Johnny Lee: They were “looking for luck in all the wrong places!”

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