

## **DIY RELIGION IN A MAKE-IT-YOURSELF CULTURE (Judges 17-18)**

When I went in view of a call as the pastor at First Baptist, Stillwater, a full weekend was planned. On Saturday morning, there was a breakfast, and the entire church was invited to come meet the prospective pastor. Joe and Margaret Ann Berry served as host and hostess.

Joe was professor in the agricultural college at OSU. He was a poultry specialist. He knew everything there was to know about chickens and eggs. I asked Dr. Berry if it was really possible to fry an egg on the pavement on a very hot day. He told me it doesn't get hot enough to cook the egg.

Joe had all the equipment needed for everyone to make their own omelet; so, that's what we had that morning. It only took a couple of minutes to make your omelet, and you could add cheese, onions, ham, bacon, whatever you wanted. It was wonderful.

I'm sure you've been to places where you can make your own sundaes with all the mix-ins you might want. That's fun.

Some larger malls have a Build-a-Bear store where you can put together your own teddy bear. You can personalize it and add accessories and outfits. I'm sure that creative types would love that kind of thing. I'm not the creative type.

There was a day when if there was something you wanted and you didn't know how to make it, you had to buy it or pay someone to make it for you. That was before the internet, before YouTube instructional videos. Now, you can do it yourself.

There is even a network on cable TV called the DIY Network. It is full of shows that can teach you how to do various things: how to build a house, how to build a barn, how to build a house barn, how to build a swimming pool, how to build a deck, how to build a tree house, and thousands of other things you can do yourself.

In addition to those DIY shows, there are, of course, the dummy books: Auto Repair for Dummies, Investing for Dummies, Getting Your Book Published for Dummies. I've not yet found a Remove Your Own Spleen for Dummies, but you would have to be a real dummy to perform surgery on yourself.

There is no shortage of dummies in our world, and sometimes we qualify for that designation. One of the dumb things that has become popular is making up your own religion and fashioning your own view of who God is or who you want Him to be. This isn't anything new.

In today's text, we will see how those who were supposed to be God's people were engaging in do-it-yourself religion. As we look at Judges 17-18, we are going to consider, "DIY Religion in a Make-It-Yourself Culture."

Once we get to Judges 17, the book changes dramatically. We are in a new section. From Judges 3:7 through the end of Judges 16 we were in the period of the judges. The judges were those whom God raised up to be governors and often military leaders for his people. It appears that with each succeeding judge, the situation got worse. Each leader was morally and spiritually farther away from where God wanted them and his people to be. By the time we get to Samson, the process of Canaanization is complete. The people,

along with their leaders, are thoroughly like the people around them. They are like the people of Canaan who have their own god.

In the last five chapters we find two stories that serve to give us a flavor of how far the people of God have fallen. We come to the first of those two stories today. Let's start with the first six verses of Judges 17.

We are not told the name of the mother, nor where or what has become of the husband and father, but the adult son is named Micah. His full name means "Who is like YHWH?" That is the kind of name you would find in an orthodox, Jewish home. And the mother blesses her son in the name of YHWH; which is something that a mother would say and do in an orthodox, Jewish home. As we read the story, however, we discover that this Jewish home is anything but orthodox. The son steals from the mother and only returns what he stole after he hears her invoke a curse upon whomever has stolen from her. When he returns the stolen money, which is a rather significant amount, she replaces the curse with a blessing.

It is interesting that the mother dedicates the returned money to the LORD, but she only gives 200 silver coins out of the 1100 leaving the reader to wonder, "Where are the rest of the coins, the other 900? What has she done with them?"

In the same way, we supposedly dedicate ourselves to God, but we only end up giving him a portion of our lives, some of our time, a bit of our money, leaving God to wonder, "Where is the rest of you?"

From these two chapters, there are three major points I want to stress.

## **DIY Religion Allows Us to Make/Choose What We Want**

Just as with make it yourself omelets, ice cream sundaes, and build-a-bears, you can add what you want and construct as you wish in three areas: who your god is, how you will worship, and your take on morality. That leads me to ask three questions.

### *1. Are You Making/Choosing Your Own God?*

Look again at 17:4. God had expressly commanded, "Worship no other gods but Me," and "Do not make any graven image." Micah's mother, however, gave the silver-smith 200 silver coins to use in fashioning an idol to worship. This idol would have been rather puny. Those 200 coins would equal about 80 ounces or 5 pounds. That is not a whole lot with which to fashion an idol even though it seems the idol was made of wood and plated with silver.

Whenever we fashion our own god, he ends up looking rather puny when compared to the real God, the God of the Scriptures that tell us the heavens cannot contain Him.

Nevertheless, it appears that many in our day construct their own god. It is like they go through a buffet line and say, "I want a large helping of grace and mercy and goodness and kindness. I don't care much from holiness, wrath, and judgment. You can leave all that out. I don't want my god to be jealous; so be sure to add a large dollop or two of permissiveness." We mix it all together and work it out, like so much playdoh, until we are pleased with the god we have created for ourselves. It is that god we worship rather

than the God of the Bible. Instead of Him being the Great I Am, our god is the far tamer, I Wish Him to Be god. That is why some people say things like, “Well, my Jesus wouldn’t do this or wouldn’t do that.” They are guilty of making their own, personal Jesus.

I once heard an evangelist tell of the time a young man said to him, “I don’t believe in god.” The evangelist replied, “Tell me about the god you don’t believe in. Maybe I don’t believe in Him either.”

Instead of responding to the God who is, many simply react against the caricature of the god they’ve heard about.

Neither make for yourself nor choose for yourself a puny god. Let your God be the God proclaimed in this Book, the God who is worthy, the God who is.

## 2. *Are You Making/Choosing Your Own Worship?*

The Old Testament Law clearly prescribed where and how the Jews were to worship, but Micah was into convenience. Instead of traveling to Shiloh where the Tabernacle was located, he built a shrine for himself at his own house. Since he didn’t have a priest, he installed his own son as a priest.

Then, one day, he had a stroke of good fortune. Let’s read Judges 17:7-13. Scripture was clear that only men from the tribe of Levi were to be priests. Micah has a chance meeting with a young Levite who is looking for a job. As soon as he meets this man, a light bulb turns on above Micah’s head. Micah has a bright idea. He thinks to himself, “I like my son and all, but if I want my worship to be legit, I need a real Levi to be my priest. Here this man is. He’s a Levi. I will make him my priest. God will be happy, and I will be blessed.” He thinks God will be obligated to bless him.

When I was in seminary, a professor mentioned to his class that when you take your first church, you will not be very discerning about that church. You’ll just be glad that somebody wants you. This young man should have known that Micah was rather shady, and that what he was doing wasn’t right. This man, however, was just glad to have a job along with room and board and little spending money. He was content with his situation.

Watch out if your pastor ever views what he does as being a job rather being a calling. That is why in the church we don’t use the word *hired*. You didn’t hire me to do a job. You called me to be your pastor. There is a world of difference between the two.

There is also a world of difference between worshipping as we see fit and worshipping God as He has prescribed. If our worship is not biblical, it is not worship. If we are looking for worship that fits our schedule, worship that fits our taste, and worship that appeals to the way we like to do things, then it becomes clear that we are actually worshipping ourselves. We have placed ourselves on the throne, and God is just a prop.

Jesus said in John 4 that God seeks worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Our worship is to be Spirit-directed and truth-driven, i.e., Spirit-led and truth-informed. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He is the one who guides us into all truth. If we are not worshipping the true God as He truly is and proclaiming the truth He has spoken, then we are not truly worshipping the true God.

### 3. *Are you Making/Choosing Your Own Morality?*

It will take a little time, but I want to read the entirety of Judges 18. In the previous chapter we saw that Micah stole. His mother promoted the breaking of the first two of the Ten Commandments, and Micah engaged in false worship that was not in accord with what Scripture taught.

Then, in chapter 18, we see that the tribe of Dan is looking for a place to live just like the Levite was looking for a place to work. They had been given a portion of land by Joshua, but they had not been obedient to their responsibility to move out the people living there. They end up stealing Micah's gods and objects of worship. Next, they give the priest a better job offer than the one he presently has. Verse 30 tell us that this priest's name is Jonathan. Jonathan is upwardly mobile. He doesn't have to pray about whether to accept their offer.

I'm reminded about the pastor who said to his wife, there is a church in the city that wants to call me to be their pastor. They have a much larger parsonage and they promised to pay twice what we make here. His wife said, "Honey, you pray about this, and I'll go pack."

I have preacher friends who once advised, "Go where the money is because God's everywhere." I think they were joking; at least, I hope they were.

When Micah comes after them to retrieve his priest and his stolen, religious items of worship, the heavily armed men basically warn him, "You better go away before we tire of you." He shrinks back home realizing they are too strong.

They also prove too strong for a peaceful town far from where the land that had been apportioned to them. Notice v. 10 and what the five-man scout force told the tribe of Dan. Sometimes, God gets blamed for things He had nothing to do with. God didn't send Dan to that town to annihilate those peaceful, quiet people. They came up with that on their own.

It is quite possible that you have never heard a single message on the material found in the last five chapters of Judges. I have only heard one sermon, and it dealt with chapters 17-18. It was preached back in 1967 by a man named Paris Reidhead. You can find an audio of the message on YouTube. I had a cassette tape of the sermon years ago.

In his message, Reidhead preaches against what he calls *utilitarian religion*, *expedient Christianity*, and *a pragmatic approach to life* that instead of asking, "Is it right?" asks only, "Will it work?" He claims that instead of seeing God as an end, we see Him as a means to our own ends. We don't worship God. We use God. We attempt to use God to get whatever it is that we want.

Reidhead claims that both the church and our culture have been infected by humanism. This brand of humanism claims that the end of all things is the happiness of man not the glory of God. If it makes us happy then it must be right, and it must be good. He said, "This is the betrayal of the ages—using God to get what we want."

DIY religion allows us to make/choose what we want.

## **DIY Religion Exists When King Jesus Is Absent**

Four times in the last five chapters of Judges we find the same statement. I said there are two case studies in the last five chapters, and in both case studies the same statement is made two times each. Look at 17:6 and also 18:1.

Let me tell you what the author does not mean by this statement. He is not saying, “Boy howdy, we need a King because if we had a strong, godly King sitting upon the throne of Israel, he wouldn’t allow us to get away with the stupid things we are doing.”

I think the author means one of two things. He could be saying, “Kings don’t always lead their people into living righteous lives. Sometimes, the King leads his people into godlessness and wickedness. Even without the terrible influence of a wicked King, our culture is all messed up because we are doing what is right in our eyes.” That could be what he is saying because history tells us that every single King in the Northern Kingdom was wicked, and the majority of Kings in the Southern Kingdom were wicked.

I think that what the author was seeking to communicate was, “God is supposed to be our King, but we haven’t looked upon Him as King. Instead, we have just been doing whatever we want to do. It is because we have not owned Him as King that these dreadful things are happening.”

I’ve never been much of a chess player, but I know that in the game of chess, you will do everything you can to protect your King. If you have to lose a pawn to protect your King, you will gladly lose a pawn. You will sacrifice a bishop, a knight, a rook, and even your queen if you must to save the life of your king.

Likewise, history tells us that entire kingdoms will do anything and everything they can to protect their King. They know that when the King falls, the kingdom is lost. The King must be protected at all costs.

One example of this is found in World War II. The Allied invasion of Normandy, D-Day, took place on June 6, 1944. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill desperately wanted to join the expeditionary forces and watch the invasion from the bridge of a battleship in the English Channel. General Dwight David Eisenhower was desperate to stop him, for fear that the Prime Minister might be killed in battle. When it became apparent that Churchill would not be dissuaded, Eisenhower appealed to a higher authority: King George VI. The King went and told Churchill that if it was the Prime Minister’s duty to witness the invasion, he could only conclude that it was also his own duty as King to join him on the battleship. At this point, Churchill backed down. He knew that he could never expose the King of England to such danger.

The Kingdom of God is different. In Christ’s Kingdom, it is not our job to give our lives to protect His. Instead, He gave His life to secure ours.

There is one way, however, that we are to protect Jesus. We are to protect His honor. We are to protect His reputation. If what do or are planning to do will bring dishonor to the name of Jesus, don’t do it. Protect His honor at all costs.

When Jesus is absent from your thinking, when He is absent from your decision-making, you will do the wrong thing. Your default position will be to do what is best in your own eyes. That is why it is crucial that we stay in close fellowship with Jesus. That

is why He put His Spirit in us. Let Him lead you, guide you, and protect you.

## **DIY Religion Has Devastating Consequences**

When we opt for our own way and do only what we think will make us happy, we dishonor Christ; we besmirch His character, and we do untold damage to our own lives and the lives of others.

Look at 18:30-31. Wickedness and idolatry persisted among the people of Dan generation after generation. They were living where they were never meant to live, and they did what they were never meant to do. They wasted their lives in both time and for eternity.

I want you to look with me at Revelation 7:4-8. I am not going to say everything that could be said about this passage, but I want you to notice that in this list of the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Dan is not mentioned. Dan is absent from this list. A seal symbolizes ownership and protection. The number of those sealed is not a literal number. It symbolizes all those who belong to God. It is the people of God both in the Old and New Testaments. These are those who are owned and protected by God. Those, like Dan, who have not lived under His Kingship have forfeited their place and His protection.

Choices have consequences. Good choices have good consequences, and bad choices have bad consequences.

I may have told you once before the story of the elderly gentleman who was known for giving wise answers to difficult questions. One day, a teenage boy with a rather sketchy reputation caught a bird in his hands. He saw the old man who was out taking a walk. He approached him. He told the old man that he was holding a bird in his hands. He asked, "Is this bird dead or alive." The young man thought to himself, "If he says 'alive,' I will give the bird a quick squeeze, and then open my hands to reveal the bird is dead. If he says, 'dead,' I will open my hands and let the bird fly away."

Again, he asked, "Dead or alive, old man?"

The old man looked deeply into the eyes of the young man and answered, "It is as you wish."

Your relationship with Jesus, the King, will be as you wish. Do you wish to own Jesus as Your King and to live under His Lordship? Do you wish to live life according to His plan or yours? It will be as you wish.