

The Heartbreak of Self-Made Religion

Judges 17-18

This story in Judges shows believers **three aspects of self-made religion** that are dangerous to our spiritual lives.

- **Aspect #1: SELF-MADE RELIGION ALWAYS TWISTS GOD'S WORD.**

Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim² said to his mother, "The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it." Then his mother said, "The LORD bless you, my son!"³ When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, "I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol. I will give it back to you."⁴ So he returned the silver to his mother, and she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who made them into the image and the idol. And they were put in Micah's house.⁵ Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some idols and installed one of his sons as his priest.⁶ In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit. Judges 17:1-6 (New International Version)

- Self-made religion = religious ideas and practices that feel comfortable and even satisfying, but which are disconnected from God's Word and result, not in spiritual life and health, but in spiritual defeat and/or even spiritual death

*There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death.
Proverbs 14:12 (NIV)*

- Syncretism = the combination of different forms of belief

Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol—a thing detestable to the LORD. . . . Deuteronomy 27:15 (NIV)

- The most dangerous aspect of self-made religion for Christians = subjectivism

*Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
⁶Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.
Proverbs 30:5-6 (NIV)*

See also John 10:35 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

- **Aspect #2: SELF-MADE RELIGION IS SELF-SERVING AND SELF-DECEIVING.**

In those days there was no king in Israel. People did whatever they felt like doing. Meanwhile there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah and from a family of Judah. He was a Levite but was a stranger there. He left that town, Bethlehem in Judah, seeking his fortune. He got as far as the hill country of Ephraim and showed up at Micah's house.⁹ Micah asked him, "So where are you from?" He said, "I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah. I'm on the road, looking for a place to settle down."¹⁰ Micah said, "Stay here with me. Be my father and priest. I'll pay you ten pieces of silver a year, whatever clothes you need, and your meals."¹¹⁻¹² The Levite agreed and moved in with Micah. The young man fit right in and became one of the family. Micah appointed the young Levite as his priest. This all took place in Micah's home.¹³ Micah said, "Now I know that GOD will make things go well for me—why, I've got a Levite for a priest!" Judges 17:6-13 (The Message)

¹¹Then six hundred men from the clan of the Danites, armed for battle, set out from Zorah and Eshtaol. . . .¹⁸When these men went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the other household gods and the cast idol, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"¹⁹They answered him, "Be quiet! Don't say a word. Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?"²⁰ Then the priest was glad. He took the ephod, the other household gods and the carved image and went along with the people. Judges 18:11, 18-20 (NIV)

And he said, "You take my gods that I made and the priest, and go away, and what have I left?" Judges 18:24 (English Standard Version)

- **Aspect #3: SELF-MADE RELIGION IS ABOUT EASY LIVING.**

See Judges 18:1-2, 7-10, 27-31 (NIV).

These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD's instruction.¹⁰ They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions."¹¹ Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!" Isaiah 30:9-11 (NIV)

In those days Israel had no king. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking a place of their own where they might settle, because they had not yet come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. ²So the Danites sent five warriors . . . to spy out the land and explore it. These men represented all their clans. They told them, "Go, explore the land . . ." ⁷So the five men left and came to Laish, where they saw that the people were living in safety, like the Sidonians, unsuspecting and secure. And since their land lacked nothing, they were prosperous. Also, they lived a long way from the Sidonians and had no relationship with anyone else. ⁸When they returned . . . their brothers asked them, "How did you find things?" ⁹They answered, "Come on, let's attack them! We have seen that the land is very good. Aren't you going to do something? Don't hesitate to go there and take it over. ¹⁰When you get there, you will find an unsuspecting people and a spacious land that God has put into your hands, a land that lacks nothing whatever. . ." ²⁷Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a peaceful and unsuspecting people. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city. ²⁸There was no one to rescue them because they lived a long way from Sidon and had no relationship with anyone else . . . The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there. ²⁹They named it Dan after their forefather Dan, who was born to Israel—though the city used to be called Laish. ³⁰There the Danites set up for themselves the idols, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land. ³¹They continued to use the idols Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh. Judges 18:1-2; 7-10; 27-31 (NIV)

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