



## STRANGE TIMES

### Part 1

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Welcome to Let the Bible Speak. Many of us watch the news, scroll through social media, or just observe the culture and think, “we are living in bizarre times.” And it’s not just the world in general, to many, it seems that way in the religious world too. Perhaps we romanticize the past, but there is no doubt that values and cultural norms have shifted in the past several years. At least as far as our lifetimes and modern history are concerned, things have changed drastically and very quickly.

It would be wrong to say that the times are unprecedented. There have been plenty of places and times in history where strange things occurred, and people’s values have shifted in some shocking ways. The book of judges describes such a time among, not the world, but the people of God. I want to read part of a story to you that happened in that period and if you listen closely, you may be left scratching your head – especially when you consider the fact that this story doesn’t take place in some strange, pagan land, but in the land of Canaan among the Lord’s chosen people.

Reading now from Judges, chapter 17, beginning in verse 1, and again, remember this is taking place among a Hebrew family dwelling in the Promised Land. ***“Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears—here is the silver with me; I took it.” And his mother said, “May you be***

***“blessed by the LORD, my son!” So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, “I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you.” Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah. The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.”***

This story recorded in Judges 17 and 18, involves, at first, a man and his mother, Hebrews dwelling in central Israel during the period the judges. As the name of the period suggests, this was when Israel was ruled by a system of judges who administrated and adjudicated the national affairs of God’s people before they were given an earthly king. These judges were God’s delegated rulers in the land because God Himself was to be honored as their King. It was only because of the misguided desire of the people that God allowed them to have a human monarch when He appointed Saul. Their request represented their desire to be like other nations and was ultimately a rejection of God’s rule over their lives.

This was a time of spiritual anarchy, confusion, and frankly, bizarre behavior, not because God’s system of judges didn’t work, but because the people were ignoring the law of God and becoming a law unto themselves. The following statement is made more than once in the book of judges and it describes not only what was going on then, but what we’re seeing today. Judges 17: 6 says: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Now please notice that it doesn’t say “every man did that which was WRONG in his own eyes,” but rather, “every man did that which was RIGHT in his own eyes.” You see, it wasn’t that people were consciously saying, “here is what God says but we’re going to ignore that, rebel against God, and willfully do what we know is wrong.” No, rather, what was happening was far more subtle and insidious. The people had drifted from the law of God and so their thinking became all twisted and confused until they convinced themselves that they were doing what was morally and spiritually right even though it was wrong and completely contrary to the law of God. As Paul wrote more than three-thousand years later about the Gentiles in Romans 2:14. “for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,” The difference is, these Jews living in the days described by the Book of Judges HAD the law and were doing the opposite. They were making moral and spiritual decisions based on their own thinking and subjective whims instead of strictly following the law of God. “Every man did that which was right in his OWN eyes...” In other words, ‘what’s right for me is right for me and what’s right for you, is right for you.’ Does that sound familiar? Sure, it does. Isn’t that the mantra of not only the world around us but many in the religious world as well? My truth is my truth and your truth is yours. What right do I have to judge the beliefs and values of someone else? Who are we to say that something is wrong for someone else just because we think it is. Who are we to say that certain religious beliefs and practices are wrong? Don’t we all have a right to seek and follow God in our own way?

Barna took a poll in 2016 that showed nearly six out of ten Americans say that knowing what is right or wrong is a matter of personal experience and not based on an absolute, objective standard. A few years before that, a similar survey showed that eighty-eight percent of adults feel “accepted by God” while at the same time, a majority of those surveyed do not hold a biblical worldview or believe in absolute truth. That was a decade or more ago. What do you suppose the case is now? Do you suppose there’s a correlation between all of that and the confusion, division, and absurdity we see all around us in our culture and even in religion today? Friend, that’s the philosophy that got the people of God into serious trouble in the days of the judges and that post-modern philosophy is no better today. It has created just as much confusion and sin in our time as it did back then. And it accounts for the strange ideas and behaviors that we see, not only in our culture, but in religion as well. This story that we read a portion of in Judges 17, vividly illustrates what the philosophy of “every man does what is right in his own eyes” led to then, but what it has led to today as well. I want you to see how this terrible and misguided standard worked its way through the culture of God’s people from one level to the next until that day was saturated with sin and error.

First, this philosophy led to a breakdown in the family. Like the proverbial chicken and the egg, perhaps there was a breakdown in the family that led to this philosophy, but either way, here is an account of something that happened in a family that illustrates just how off-track and astray many of the people in that day were. This story begins in a family. It involves a man named Micah and his mother. The bible tells us in Judges 17:2 that Micah stole quite a bit of money from his mother. 11-hundred shekels, in fact, and when she found out about it, she was understandably upset. So much so, she placed a curse upon the thief. Now, it’s not too hard to imagine a son stealing from his own mother as terrible as that is. We hear about elder abuse and children defrauding their own aged parents. That’s awful but it’s the result of greed and covetousness and a lack of natural affection and those are conditions that have plagued immoral people throughout time. That’s not what’s so strange about this story. When Micah found out that his mother had discovered the missing money and was on the warpath, he brought the money back and admitted that he had stolen it. I don’t think he did that because he couldn’t sleep at night and his conscience made him repent; I think he did so because he knew she was so upset and had cursed whoever stole her money. So, he brings the money back and here is where the story becomes so strange.

When he admits to the crime, it doesn’t seem as though she’s upset with him but rather, she is relieved and instead she blesses him. Now, that’s not because she needed the money to live on. It’s not because she was on a fixed income, and he had stolen her retirement funds. No, listen to her strange rationale. Verse 3 says, “So when he had returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, “I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son...” Well, that’s all sounds good. It sounds like he had stolen her church contribution (so to speak). But you need to read on! She says, “I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image...” Now, just think about that. She had dedicated this money to the Lord to make an image or an idol. There is nothing that God detests more than idolatry and Moses strictly forbade not only the worship of any other God but the very making of any graven image. The number one sin that

God's people have committed then and throughout time is the sin of idolatry and here is a family that is steeped in idolatry but in all of it thinks they are serving the Lord. And remember, they are 'doing what is right in their own eyes.'

Well, Micah and his mother have a little back and forth about what to do with this money now, and when it's all said and done, she took some of her money down to the silversmith and has him make an idol out of it and she then turns around and gives the image to her son and he just puts it up in his house alongside his other idols and he institutes yet another religion there in his house. He tries to find a priest to come in and be over this new religion and ends up appointing his son to the job and the bible says he "had a shrine, an ephod, and household idols." Imagine it, now! Friend, this is not a story of a rebellious son who defied his upbringing and left the faith of his father and mother, the whole family is involved in this. And again -- this is important -- they think all the while, they are serving the Lord. On one hand, I read this story, and I think, "how could a family who was supposed to be a part of God's covenant people be so upside down and mixed up?" But, then again, it shouldn't be so surprising because they had neglected the law of God and were following their own instincts and feelings instead. Whether that philosophy led to a breakdown of morality and truth in the family or the breakdown of the spiritual fabric of the family led to that philosophy, I don't know. I DO know that where you find one, you will find the other. Whatever Micah and his mother were thinking, it is certainly pure, unmitigated moral and spiritual confusion and delusion. Here you have a family full of lying, deceit, stealing, blessing, and cursing, rank idolatry, and whatever other forms of ungodliness -- and as they're living this way, they believe they are serving the Lord. Here is a family where the name of God may have been spoken and lip service given, but it was a home whose moral and spiritual foundations had eroded and crumbled away.

That is where the downfall of any people, any church, or any society begins! If things go awry at home, everything else will fall apart. If you have a home where there is no instruction in righteousness, no discipline, no training, no godly example of morality, goodness, and fidelity to God, the cycle is merely continued and amplified into another generation. I see a meme from time to time just concerning church attendance that says something to effect of: When you have a grandfather who is faithful to attend church, but a father who attends occasionally, then you'll likely have a son who says it is unnecessary altogether, and then grandson who says, 'what's church?'. Proverbs 22:6 says "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." How do you train up a child? You don't do it by letting them find their own way. You set their feet on the right path and lead them in the right direction. Well, in order for you and I to do that, there has to BE a direction. There must be a standard. There must be a law and rule by which a family lives and operates. Unfortunately, few people model their home after the home portrayed in the word of God. The irony of that is that God instituted the home and family in the beginning of time. He designed it. He structured it with an order and a framework that would insure that truth and righteousness would be transmitted from generation to generation. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-15 "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Is yours a home guided by the scriptures? Is it modeled and operation upon the precepts of the bible in how its ordered; what it prioritizes; what is allowed and forbidden? Are your children even being taught a respect for the word of God and what it says about what we should believe and how we should live? Are the scriptures even read and taught in your home? Do you teach your family in WORD and by example to be honest and virtuous? Or do you tell your children “tell them you’re not quite twelve yet, so we can get into the amusement park of eat at the restaurant for less money”? Do you set an example of morality and purity in your home, or do you children see you drinking and hear you cursing and using foul and vulgar language? I’m particularly speaking to mothers and fathers today who consider yourselves Christians; is the bible the bedrock of your home? I’ll tell you this, you can’t leave your job to someone else. You can’t drop them off at a Sunday School and expect them to grow up to know God. Sunday Schools aren’t even taught in the bible. The church did without them for eighteen hundred years after its establishment. That’s because God didn’t give some other person, or even the church, the primary responsibility of training up your children, he gave YOU that responsibility. And if you don’t know how to do that, then you need to get you nose in the word of God and become the spiritual leader that God expected you to be when He blessed you with a family. If our homes are not right, nothing else will be right. It’s not up to society or even the church to make our homes better and what they ought to be. It’s up to our homes to make society and even the church what THEY ought to be. And I submit to you today, that if you think we’re living in strange and bizarre times (and we are), you can lay much of the primary blame at the doorstep of the decaying home in our culture.

In the introduction to this story of Micah and his household, we can see the disastrous effects of a home without truth and a home without God and His word. That’s just the beginning point. It didn’t stop there. As we, God willing, continue in the story next week, we will see that this corruption of thinking in the home led to a breakdown at every other level. It reverberated to the spiritual leaders of that day and then to much of the nation. Lord willing, we will pick up there next week, and you’ll be interested to see that this confusion extended to the religious leaders and to the culture at large led to the strange and sordid stories we find in the book of Judges. And in the same vein, because we every person today is doing what is right in their own eyes, we’re living in STRANGE TIMES too.

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