

Judges Chapter 17

Verses 17:1 – 21:25: Whereas the double introduction (1:1 – 3:6), of Judges moved from the problem of warfare to the problem of idolatry this double conclusion moves in the opposite direction, showing the nation's headlong descent into idolatry (17:1 – 18:31), and the extent of its internal warfare, which nearly destroyed one of the tribes (19:1 – 21:25).

In verses 1-5 the name "Micah" is the Hebrew expression "who is Like Yahweh?" Micah and his mother reflected the nation of Israel at this time, having incorporated pagan practices and pagan gods in their worship of Yahweh. They did not live as if Yahweh was God alone (Exodus 20:2-5, 23; 34:17; Lev. 19:4).

Judges 17:1 "And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name [was] Micah."

Chapters (17 to 21), give miscellaneous appendixes to illustrate the pervasively depraved conditions in the era of the judges.

These chapters form an appendix to the narratives of (chapters 1 – 6), which flow largely in chronological sequence. The precise time of the events of these last chapters is uncertain. The common thread running through them is the observation that in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes (verse 6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

This is a study of a man who is self-willed. He is a man that does not go by the rules. He does what is right in his own sight. Micah is the man we are talking about.

Verses 2-5: Apparently the "mother" hoped to negate the force of the curse by using the many images and the "silver restored" by her "son" for "religious purposes".

Judges 17:2 "And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred [shekels] of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver [is] with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed [be thou] of the LORD, my son."

Who seems to have been a widow, and an ancient woman since Micah had sons, and one of them at age to become a priest.

"The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee": Which were taken away by stealth from her, though it may be rendered "taken to thee". Which she had taken to herself out of the rest of her substance, and had separated and devoted it to religious uses. But Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it as we do, and which seems to be the best sense. Of the value of this sum (see Judges 16:5). And because the like sum is there offered, and was given to Delilah, hence some have thought, as Jarchi relates, that this woman was Delilah. But, as he observes, it is a mistake; for this woman lived long before the times of Samson and Delilah.

"About which thou cursedst": Which when she perceived was stolen from her, she fell into a passion. And cursed and swore, cursed the thief that took it, whether of her own family or another. Or adjured her son, that if he knew anything of it, that he would declare it, suspecting him of the robbery. Some think this refers to the oath she had made, that she would devote the silver to a religious use.

"And spakest of also in mine ears": Of the sum how much it was, and of the use she had designed it for. Or rather the curse was delivered in his hearing, and cut him to the heart, and wrought that conviction in him. That he could not retain the money any longer, not being able to bear his mother's curse. Though Abarbinel connects this with the following clause, "behold, the silver is with me". As if the sense was, that she spake in his ears, and charged him with the theft to his face. Saying, verily the silver is with thee, thou hast certainly taken it; upon which he confessed it.

"I took it": But the former sense seems best, that not being willing to lie under his mother's curse, he owned that the money was in his hands, and he had taken it from her.

"And his mother said, blessed be thou of the Lord, my son": She reversed the curse, and pronounced a blessing on him, or wished one to him. And that without reproving him for his sin, rejoicing to hear of her money again.

It appears from this that his mother was very indulgent of this son. Someone had taken 1,100 shekels of silver from her and she had spoken a curse upon that person. She had no idea that it was her own son, who had taken the silver. At least, he admits that he took it, and gives it back to her. The mother is so pleased with her sons' confession, that she now speaks a blessing on her son from the LORD. These were people who knew of God. This was a Hebrew family.

Judges 17:3 "And when he had restored the eleven hundred [shekels] of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee."

The whole sum, having embezzled none of it.

"His mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord from my hand, for my son to make a graven image and a molten image": This she had done either before it was stolen, and it troubled her the more, and caused her the rather to curse the man that had taken it. Or after it was stolen, that if it should be recovered again she would appropriate it to such a use, so Abarbinel. And by the Lord, or Jehovah, she doubtless meant the true God. For she had no intention to forsake him, but to worship him in and by these images, and which she designed for the use of her son and his family. That they might not go so far as Shiloh to worship at the tabernacle there.

"Therefore I will restore it unto thee": For that use, and so gave him the money again, to be laid out in images, or to make images of it.

God had forbidden making graven images and molten images. This is a strange way to worship God. This is similar to much that is going on in many churches today. They have a form of Christianity, but there is so much of the world caught up in the services that the Lord Jesus would not recognize the worship. This seems to be a feel good religion. The mother and Micah are doing what is right in their own sight. They have mixed idol worship with the worship of God. These people wanted all the benefits that God could give them, but they were not faithful to Him. They worshipped idols and false gods, along with the worship of Jehovah.

Judges 17:4 "Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred [shekels] of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah."

Gave it to her a second tithe, not as disapproving her idolatrous intention, as the sequel shows, but being desirous to be entirely free of it. And not have his mind disturbed with it as it had been, and that she might do with it as she thought fit.

"And his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image, and a molten image": The other nine hundred pieces she kept to herself, repenting of her vow, and being unwilling to part with so much money for such a use. Or else they were laid out in an ephod, and teraphim, and what else were thought necessary for the idolatrous worship they were about to set up. Though Kimchi is of opinion, that the two hundred shekels were what she gave the founder for making the images, and of the nine hundred the images were made. And indeed, the images must be very small ones, if made out of two hundred shekels of silver only. Some have thought there was but one image, called both molten and graven. Because after the silver was melted, and cast into a mold, it was fashioned with a graving tool, as the golden calf was by Aaron. But they are manifestly distinguished and represented as two (Judges 18:17).

"And they were in the house of Micah": In an apartment in his house, peculiar for them, as appears by the next verse. Here they were put and continued.

This is a breaking of the Ten Commandments. She seemed to think these idols had some power to protect her son. She gave them to Micah for his house.

Judges 17:5 "And the man Micah had a house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest."

"Micah had a house of gods": A counterfeit shrine and personal idols with a private priest is set up within the tribe of Ephraim (verse 1), whereas God's priests were of the tribe of Levi (compare verse 13). The defection is one example of personal and family idolatry.

It appears, this mother wanted her son to be protected by the gods. These graven images were just an addition to all the other things in her son's house. An ephod is what a high priest wears in the carrying out of his duties in the temple. It appears this woman and her son wanted all the blessings of God. They just had some of the false gods around, to make sure they had the power of all of them. Their faith was not in the One True God. As far as they were concerned, he was

one of many. All of this is speaking of keeping just the portion of the law that suited them, and dropping all the rest. Their desire was to have their own personal priest that they could control. They did not want to go to the place that God had chosen for worshipping Him. The worship of Jehovah was done here, but it had a corrupt side to it with the idols.

Judges 17:6 "In those days [there was] no king in Israel, [but] every man did [that which was] right in his own eyes."

This verse offers a chilling commentary on how far Israel had fallen from God's ways. God should have been Israel's King (Deut. 33:2-5), but "there was no king" (emphasized again in 18:1). With no godly king or judge, every form of religion, and especially false religion, abounded, and much like today, "every man" followed their own moral code, doing "that which was right in his own eyes". This is the general characterization of the time and of sinful behavior in all times. This attitude had been mentioned much earlier in Israel's history (compare Deut. 12:8; Judges 21:25).

We do not know the time setting for this. We do know that it was sometime before Saul was made king. There really were no definite rules. They just did what felt right to them to do. You cannot trust your flesh. It will lead you into sin.

Verses 7-13: Even the Levite priests acted without regard to God's law. This young "Levite" should have lived and served in a Levite town (Joshua 21:9-16). He also should have received a priestly share of the sacrifices people offered to Yahweh (Deut. 18:1-8), rather than receiving a salary and benefits. Foolishly, "Micah" thought that employing a priest would gain him favor with God, but God wants obedient worship from His people (Micah 6:1-8).

Judges 17:7 "And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family of Judah, who [was] a Levite, and he sojourned there."

"A Levite": He compromised in departing from one of the 48 cities God gave for Levite service to Israel (Joshua 2:1). Then he sinned grossly by prostituting himself as a priest in a private idolatry.

This is speaking of Bethlehem in the land of Judah. If a man were a Levite, he could not be of the family of Judah. I believe this is saying, he was a Levite, who had been living in a city in the area of the inheritance of Judah. He would have been of Judah, like I am an American. America is made up of people of many nations. It seemed, this Levite moved from Bethlehem to the city where Micah lived.

Judges 17:8 "And the man departed out of the city from Beth-lehem-judah to sojourn where he could find [a place]: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he journeyed."

Either being a man that had a rambling head, and of an unsettled mind, and could not easily stay in any place. Or else there being no supreme magistrate, to take care that the Levites had their due maintenance, for which there was a sufficient provision made by law. And the people being negligent of paying their tithes, there being none to oblige them to it. And they indifferent to the true worship of God, and prone to idolatry. This man was obliged to go abroad, and seek for a livelihood where he could get it, and sojourn in a place the most convenient for him.

"And he came to Mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed": Not with a design to stay there, but called by the way, having heard perhaps that Micah was both a wealthy and a hospitable man. And he also might have heard of the new form of worship he had set up in his house.

We are not told why he departed. Perhaps like many a young person, he just wanted some adventure in his life.

Judges 17:9 "And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I [am] a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find [a place]."

For as he might ask for a meal, or for a night's lodging. It was but natural to put such a question to him, as from whence he came, and what was his business in these parts? Or where he was going?

"And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem-judah": The tribe he was of was Levi, and so a Levite by tribe and office. And the place he came last from, and where he had sojourned awhile, was Beth-lehem, a city in the tribe of Judah.

"And I go to sojourn where I may find a place": The most convenient to abide in, where he could make a livelihood.

Micah inquires of him where he is going, and the man tells him he is looking for a new home. He also explains that he is of the tribe of Levi, and had been living in Beth-lehem.

Judges 17:10 "And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten [shekels] of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in."

Hearing that he was a Levite, he thought him a fit man for his purpose, and would give some credit to, and put a better face upon his new form of worship. And therefore, without further inquiry after him and his character, invites him to make his abode with him.

"And be unto me a father and a priest": A father to instruct him in the knowledge of divine things. So prophets were called fathers, and their disciples their sons. And a priest to offer sacrifices for him, and to consult before him by his teraphim upon occasion.

"And I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year": Or yearly, which was but a small sum, a poor salary for a priest.

"And a suit of apparel": Or "an order of apparel"; such as was fit for one of his rank and order as a priest to wear, so Jarchi and Abarbinel. Or a couple of garments, as the Targum and Septuagint, a double suit of apparel, according to the order of the season, one for summer and another for winter, as Kimchi and Ben Melech.

"And thy victuals": His meat and drink.

"So thy Levite went in": Into his house, and it looks as if the parley was made, and the bargain struck at the door. Micah being at it as the Levite passed by, or came to it upon his knocking at it. He went after his counsel and advice, as Jarchi, or to do his business, as Kimchi.

He does not want him to be his physical father. He is speaking of the Levite being his spiritual leader. He wants this Levite to be his personal priest. Micah offers to give him a living to be his priest. The Levite agrees to the wages, and stays with Micah as his priest.

Judges 17:11 "And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons."

To continue with him; after he had made trial for some time. He liked his service, and his wages, and way of living. It was all agreeable to him.

"And the young man was unto him as one of his sons": As dearly beloved by him, and used as kindly and tenderly, as if he had been one of his own children. So strong were the affections of Micah to him, and so well pleased was he with his service.

The Levite seemed to be happy with his wages, and he taught Micah as a father would do.

Verses 12-13: With the arrival of the "Levite, Micah" attempted to clothe his apostate religion with an aura of authenticity.

Judges 17:12 "And Micah consecrated the Levite; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah."

Installed him into, and invested him with the priestly office. In like manner, he had consecrated his son before, by filling his hand with sacrifices (see Judges 17:5).

"And the young man became his priest": And did the work and office of one. This was a very daring piece of presumption in them both. In Micah, to take upon him to consecrate a priest, who was himself of the tribe of Ephraim. And in the young man, to suffer himself to be put into such an office, which did not belong to him, for though every priest was a Levite, or of the tribe of Levi. Yet every Levite had not a right to be a priest, only those who were of the family of Aaron.

"And was in the house of Micah": And continued there.

This just means there was a dedication service, to dedicate the Levite as the priest.

Judges 17:13 "Then said Micah, Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to [my] priest."

Within himself, pleased with what he had done, and with what he engaged in.

"Now know I that the Lord will do me good": That I shall enjoy his favor and be a happy man, and prosper. And by this it appears, that notwithstanding the idolatry he had fallen into, he had not utterly forsaken the Lord, but worshipped him in and by his images. There was a mixture of the worship of God, and of the worship of images.

"Seeing I have a Levite to my priest": Who was of the same tribe the priests were. And so the nearest to them of any, and which he thought would be acceptable to God, and an omen of good to himself.

Even though Micah was not worshipping in the way he should have, he still recognized the Levitical tribe as the leaders of the religious aspect of their lives. To me, this shows the futility of a man-made religion. It also shows the uselessness of worshipping, if you do not worship the One True God and Him alone. A minister should not accept a job as a leader of a church for just the monetary benefits. A minister should be consecrated by God, and not by his people he is to minister to. It appears that Micah and his mother wanted to be saved, but they did not trust one God to do it. They were superstitious and taking no chances. They did not place their faith entirely in the One True God.

Chapter 17 Questions

1. What is this lesson a study of?
2. He does what is right in _____ sight.
3. How many shekels of silver had been stolen from Micah's mother?
4. What had she said about the one that took it?
5. Who had taken it?
6. What did his mother do, when he gave it back?
7. What had she dedicated the money to?
8. What did she hire someone to do with 200 shekels of the silver?
9. How does the author relate this to Christian activity today?

10. Micah had a house of _____.
11. What were some of the things he had made for this house?
12. Who became priest?
13. Who wears an ephod?
14. What was wrong with this worship in Micah's house?
15. When did all of this happen?
16. What is meant by Beth-lehem-judah"
17. If a man were a Levite, he could _____ be of the tribe of Judah.
18. What is this saying, then?
19. Why had the young Levite left home?
20. Who did he tell Micah he was?
21. What did Micah offer him, to get him to stay?
22. Did the Levite accept the offer?
23. Who consecrated the Levite?
24. Why did Micah think the LORD would do him good?
25. What is wrong with this?