

Judges

Chapter 17

Micah and the Levite

There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. 2 And he said to his mother, “The 1,100 pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and also spoke it in my ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.” And his mother said, “Blessed be my son by the LORD.” 3 And he restored the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, “I dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image. Now therefore I will restore it to you.” 4 So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took 200 pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image. And it was in the house of Micah. 5 And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest. 6 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. 7 Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. 8 And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. 9 And Micah said to him, “Where do you come from?” And he said to him, “I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place.” 10 And Micah said to him, “Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.” And the Levite went in. 11 And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. 12 And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest.”

17:1–21:25 Two episodes forming an epilogue to the story of the judges (see Introduction: Literary Features). The events narrated evidently took place fairly early in the period of the judges (see notes on 18:30; 20:1, 28). They illustrate the religious and moral degeneracy that characterized the age—when “Israel had no king” and “everyone did as he saw fit” (17:6; 21:25). Writing at a time when the monarchy under the Davidic dynasty had brought cohesion and order to the land and had reestablished a center for the worship of the Lord, the author portrays this earlier era of the judges as a dismal period of national decay, from which it was to be rescued by the house of David. (CSB)

17:1–18:31 The first episode illustrates corruption in Israelite worship by telling of Micah’s establishment of a local place of worship in Ephraim, aided by a Levite claiming descent from Moses. This paganized worship of the Lord is taken over by the tribe of Dan when that tribe abandons its appointed inheritance and migrates to Israel’s northern frontier. (CSB)

17:1 *hill country*. Much of Ephraim is hilly, but this probably refers to the territory between Bethel and the Jezreel River. (TLSB)

17:2 *utter a curse*. Fear of the curse seems to have motivated his returning the stolen money. (CSB)

Apparently, Micah returned the money out of fear of his mother’s curse on the thief, himself. (TLSB)

blessed be my son. A blessing to counteract the curse. (CSB)

Not wanting her curse to fall on her son, she tried to reverse the effect by blessing him. (TLSB)

17:3 *mother ... son.* With their paganized view of the God of Israel, both were idolaters in disobedience to the law (Ex 20:4, 23; Dt 4:16). (CSB)

Remarkably, the mother dedicated all of the silver to the Lord, but then made an idolatrous image. (TLSB)

a carved image and a cast idol. The image was probably made of wood overlaid with silver; the idol was made of solid silver or of cheaper metal overlaid with silver. (CSB)

First term refers to a statue, as of stone or wood, that is shaped or “gravened” by a tool; latter term refers to a statue that has been cast of molten metal. Some scholars believe these were two separate images, while others think the image had two parts, perhaps the idol and its pedestal. (TLSB)

17:4 *silversmith.* A maker of idols, as in Ac 19:24 (cf. Isa 40:19 and Jer 10:9, where the Hebrew for this word is translated “goldsmith”). (CSB)

Apparently, 200 pieces of silver for the image and the balance for the maintenance of the shrine. (TLSB)

17:5 *shrine.* Household gods, used in this case for divining (cf. Eze 21:21; Zec 10:2). Some of them were in human form (1Sa 19:13). (CSB)

ordained. Micah presumed to make one of his own sons a priest, in direct violation of God’s Word, which required that all priests of the Lord be from the tribe of Levi and, specifically, descendants of Aaron (Nu 3:5–10). (TLSB)

17:6 *had no king.* See 18:1; 19:1; 21:25; suggests that Judges was written after the establishment of the monarchy (see Introduction: Author and Date). (CSB)

did what was right in his own eyes. The expression implies that Israel had departed from the covenant standards of conduct found in the law (see Dt 12:8). (CSB)

Variation of the expression used in 14:3. Since there was no central civil authority, people developed their own individual and regional practices, resulting in moral and religious relativism. Chem: “Scripture is constantly describing the corrupt and dissolute state of the church, for example Judg. 17:6; 21:25. Thus people boast of their Christian liberty and under this pretext claim that they are permitted to spread whatever opinions they wish” (*LTh* 1:17). (TLSB)

17:7 *Bethlehem in Judah.* Not among the 48 designated Levitical cities (Jos 21). (CSB)

Levite. Jonathan. The Levites were given cities distributed throughout the lands of the other tribes (Nu 35:1–8). They were counted, in civil matters, as belonging to the tribe in whose land they lived. So the young man could be considered “of the family of Judah,” though he was literally a descendant of Levi. (TLSB)

17:8 *departed that town.* The failure of the Israelites to obey the law probably resulted in a lack of support for the Levites, which explains the man’s wandering in search of his fortune. (CSB)

Bethlehem was not one of the cities given to the Levites. The young man dwelt temporarily in different places rather than serving in the place where God assigned him, showing how the Israelites had drifted

away from following God's Word. Economic hardship or lack of support for the priestly tribe may have forced the man to move. (TLSB)

17:10 *father*. A term of respect used also for Elijah (2Ki 2:12) and Elisha (2Ki 6:21; 13:14). See Ge 45:8; Mt 23:9. (CSB)

Title of respect to a spiritual adviser (e.g., 2Ki 6:21; 13:14). (TLSB)

ten pieces of silver. In the light of this remuneration for a year's service, the stated amounts in 16:5 and 17:2 take on special significance. The offer of wages, clothing and food was more than this Levite could resist (v. 11). Clearly material concerns were at the root of his decision, because later he accepts an even more attractive offer (18:19–20). (CSB)

17:12 *ordained the Levite*. An attempt to make his shrine legitimate and give it prestige. Micah probably removed his son (see v. 5). (CSB)

Lit, Micah "filled the hand" of the Levite by entrusting the sacrifices to him. Though Micah had irregularly ordained his own son as the priest for his idolatry (v 5), he knew enough of God's Word to know that Levites were preferable, since God appointed the members of that tribe for service in His tabernacle. Not just any Levite was to preside as priest, but only those of the clan descended from Aaron (cf Nu 18:1). And Levites were to serve the true God at the tabernacle sacrifices, not false gods at idolatrous shrines. (TLSB)

17:13 Pagan religiosity seeks to manipulate deities for the worshiper's tangible benefit. (TLSB)

Ch 17 A dishonest Ephraimite named Micah uses cursed treasure to create idols, which he worships as the true God of Israel. He even hires a wandering Levite to serve as the priest of his idolatrous shrine. Remarkably, the situation will grow far worse in the coming chapters. Even at our worst, the Lord has chosen and ordained for us a Savior, our true High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is the only way to salvation. • O Lord, forgive me for my idolatry, for the way I exalt my own opinions and preferences and hold to them rather than to Your holy Word. Teach me to forsake the materialism of our times and to follow You as my King. Through Christ, I pray. Amen. (TLSB)