

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 17

- Vv. 1- 6 *Micah's image made.* Micah stole eleven hundred pieces of silver from his mother. When she uttered a curse concerning it, he confessed that he had stolen it. Nevertheless, Micah's mother carried out her intention concerning the money and paid a founder to forge an image. The rest of the money was probably used to perpetuate the idolatrous worship.
- Vv. 7-13 *A Levite consecrated to be Micah's priest.* A young Levite who lived in Bethlehem-judah was induced to serve as the priest at Micah's pagan sanctuary. Micah was thus satisfied with his wicked arrangements for the establishment of false worship in the midst of God's chosen people.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *A wicked son is a grief to his mother.* Micah stooped so low as to steal money from his mother. Even when he gave it back to her and made confession of his theft, his mother had cause to be grieved; for he plunged deeply into idolatry. Although she herself was involved in the making of the graven image, Micah took the lead in setting up a center of image worship. He consecrated one of his own sons as a priest and became a leader of false religious practices in Israel. Such a son would surely be a heaviness of heart to any righteous mother, even if Micah were not so to his mother.
2. *Counterfeit religion is hard to detect.* Micah went to great trouble in order to make a false religion very much like the true religion. He made an ephod, the

distinctive garment of the priests of Israel. He secured a young Levite of Bethlehem-judah to be his priest. God had ordered the priestly family to be of the tribe of Levi, More specifically, they were to be descendants of Aaron. The man who became Micah's priest was probably a renegade who wandered up into Ephraim after he left his Levitical city in Judah, but he was still of the family from which the priests were taken. It is the same way with false religions today. They have many features copied from the true religion, but in essence they are only forgeries.

3. *False priests serve for selfish reasons.* Ezekiel roundly rebuked the "fat" shepherds of his day. The word of the Lord came to him saying, "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves" (34:2). Jesus once described shepherds who were hirelings as those who fled when the dangers threatened the sheep (John 10:12), Christian workers today who follow the example of the Levite in Micah's day and go wherever they can find the best paying job without regard to the false way of life they must follow thereby are as reprehensible as was the man of Bethlehem-judah in the days of Micah.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

DOUBLE APPENDIX 17:1-21:25

The Idolatry of Dan 17:1-18:31

Micah's Images 17:1-6

And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

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

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silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son.

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.

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,

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.

6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

1. Who was Micah? 17:1

The word Micah is an abbreviation for Micaiah (Jeremiah 26:18). The name is interpreted by a question: "Who is like the Lord?" The name was given to a rather large group of men, there being at least eight men in the Old Testament who bore this name. The best-known man bearing this name is the prophet whose book is one of the Twelve. The Micah mentioned in this chapter of Judges is not further identified, but the account of his idolatrous worship is one of great importance.

2. Where was Mount Ephraim? 17:1

The land given to the tribe of Ephraim was largely composed of hill country. There were many smaller mountains within the border of this section of Palestine, but the northern part was especially hilly since the heights of Mount Carmel began to take their rise from the center of this land. On the northern border of the territory

assigned to Ephraim were Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Somewhere in this hill country Micah and his mother had settled.

3. *In what way had Micah's mother uttered a curse? 17:2*

The Scripture is not clear as to the nature of the curse which was uttered by Micah's mother, but it appears on the surface that she had prayed for God to curse whoever had stolen her money. There is a possibility of her simply placing a ban on the money or in other words, having dedicated it to the service of God. When the money was restored to her, she said she had sanctified the silver to the Lord. In either case Micah realized he was encountering a possibility of being smitten of the Lord for having taken his mother's money. He had heard the curse which she uttered, and this frightened him into making a confession of his theft.

4. *Why did his mother pray for him to be blessed? 17:2*

When Micah made a confession of his theft, his mother prayed God to bless him. She saw in his confession a proof of his fear of God. More than this, his confession made possible her dedicating the silver to the Lord. When her son gave the money back to her, she was able to fulfill her intentions.

5. *What kind of image was made? 17:4*

Two different words are used in the Hebrew text to describe the idolatrous image. The first word *pesel* is used for an idolatrous image made either of metal or wood. The word *massecah* stands for something poured or cast. When this latter word is used in the singular, it generally refers to the calf cast by Aaron or Jeroboam. The two words used together probably describe a symbol of the Lord. Judging from the events at Mount Sinai, Micah's mother probably made an idol in the form of a calf to stand for the presence of the Lord. In Judges 18:17, 18, the two words are not used together; and some think Micah's

mother made two different objects. It is hard to imagine, however, that Micah's mother made two images of the Lord. For this reason it seems better to view this reference as signifying an image, *pesel* and a pedestal upon which it stood—the *massecah*. In Judges 18:30, 31 the *pesel* alone is mentioned. Likely it was probably an image of a bull similar to the golden calf which Aaron made at Sinai (Exodus 32:4) and the two golden calves which Jeroboam erected in Israel, one of which was set up in Dan (I Kings 12:29).

6. *What was the "house of gods"?* 17:5

Micah's house of gods was a private shrine which he erected on his property. It was not another tabernacle or a forerunner of the temple. God had decreed only one sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12). Although the house of gods which Micah erected was largely for his own private use, it is possible that neighbors and friends came to the sanctuary of false worship erected by this well-to-do man. Thus the seeds of idolatry were scattered far and wide from this center of paganism.

7. *What was the ephod?* 17:5

The ephod was the garment worn by the priests. God had prescribed the attire for priests. Various articles of clothing were described—an ephod, a robe, a mitre, linen breeches and breast plate. The ephod was a short garment without sleeves and formed the basic article of clothing.

8. *What were the teraphim?* 17:5

Teraphim were small household gods. They are sometimes called penates. Rachel stole Laban's teraphim when she and Jacob fled from Haran (Genesis 31:19). These images were worshiped as the givers of earthly prosperity and as sources of divine knowledge. The form *teraphim* is the plural of the singular *teraph*.

9. *What was the meaning of the remark about no king? 17:6*

The author is dating the event as being prior to the time of writing, which was probably in the early days of the monarchy. The events which transpired in Chapter 17 did not necessarily follow those which are described in Chapter 16 of the book of Judges. That is to say, Micah's era was not later than that of Samson's. Micah established his false worship some time during the period of the judges. More than likely it occurred early in the era and may be no less than a century after the false worship which erupted at Sinai was soundly denounced by Moses.

10. *What is the bearing of this regarding the date of the book? 17:6*

If the people were then becoming acquainted with the monarchy, it would help them make a comparison between their times and the early days. Throughout the last five chapters of the book of Judges we find constantly recurring references of a similar nature (18:1; 19:1 and 21:25). If Samuel were the author, he was evidently emphasizing the difference in the social climate under the judges as compared to that under the king. By the end of Saul's lifetime the people of Israel had been given ample opportunity to see the nature of a king. They had asked for a king to enable them to be "like all the nations" (I Samuel 8:5). Most of the time commentators view this period as a time of near anarchy. We may be led to believe that it was also a time when the spiritual climate was very poor. Nevertheless the record says that "every man did that which was *right* in his own eyes." It does not say that every man did what was wrong. Things could have been worse.

Micah's Hired Priest 17:7-13

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.

8 And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah as he journeyed.

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.

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.

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

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

13 Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

11. How could the Levite be from Bethlehem-judah? 17:7

Levites were given forty-eight cities spread throughout the length and breadth of the Promised Land. They were not given land on which they could plant vineyards and orchards. They did not have extensive fields in which they could sow grain. Only about 1,000 cubits roundabout each of these forty-eight cities was provided as a place where they could tether their animals and raise gardens of herbs and vegetables. Thus the Levites might live in the land assigned to any one of the twelve tribes. The Levite who came to Micah was from the southern area, the tribe of Judah.

*12. Why was the Levite so poor and so easily contented?
17:9, 10*

He was evidently not needed in the service of the Lord in Bethlehem-judah; and when he left his village, he had no means of making a living. The Israelites were not always faithful to God's command to give a tithe to support the Levites. In the days of Nehemiah the Levites had been forced to go to labor in the fields. Nehemiah straightened this out and commanded the people to bring a tithe to support the Levites (Nehemiah 13:10, 14). It is also quite possible that this Levite was inept and rebellious. For this reason he was forced to go elsewhere to find a means of livelihood.

13. What was the reward for the Levite? 17:10

Micah promised the Levite that he would give him ten shekels of silver per year as his salary. By way of comparison, it is good to remember that the founder who made the image was paid 200 shekels of silver—an amount equivalent to twenty years of pay for the Levite. The Levite was also promised a place to live and clothing to wear. In other words he was to receive room and board plus a small stipend.

14. Why did Micah think he would be blessed? 17:13

Micah was like many people who follow false religions today. They are superstitious and ignorant of the true meaning of worship. Because Micah had an image, a sanctuary in which to worship, robes for his priest and a priest who was related to the true priests of Israel, he felt that he had everything any religious man could hope to have. He felt that such rituals and forms of religion would bring him a blessing. He was willingly ignorant of the fact that God's spirit does not dwell in externals. God is more pleased with obedience than with sacrifice (I Samuel 15:22).

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 17

1. Where was Micah's home?
2. How many pieces of silver did he steal from his mother?
3. How much did the graven image cost?
4. Who first served as a priest for Micah?
5. Where had the young Levite lived before he came to Micah?
6. How many pieces of silver did Micah promise per year to the Levite?
7. What other pay did Micah promise the Levite?
8. Who consecrated the Levite to be a priest?
9. What other objects did Micah make for his false worship?
10. Was there a king in Israel in Micah's day?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 18

- Vv. 1- 6 *Men of Dan at the house of Micah.* The further history of the false worship instituted by Micah is traced out in this chapter. The men of Dan who were seeking additional territory in which to settle were caught up with the false worship. From the fact of their recognizing the voice of the Levite, we assume they had some former connection with the man in charge of Micah's sanctuary. The five men of Dan asked the Levite to inquire concerning the outcome of their expedition; and when he informed them of the good auspices, they set out on their journey.
- Vv. 7-26 *Micah's image stolen.* The spies sent out from Dan returned to their brethren and informed them of the good land which was theirs for the

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taking. Six hundred men with weapons of war set out to take possession of the territory around Laish, near the extreme northern border of the Promised Land. As they made their way towards their new home, they went up again to the house of Micah and took the carved image, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molten image. They also persuaded the unprincipled Levite to accompany them and serve as their false priest. Micah opposed them; but when he saw that they were too strong for him, he returned to his home.

Vv. 27-31 *False worship established in Dan.* The irascible Danites stole the idols of Micah and his priest and took them to Laish. They attacked the city and burned it to the ground. When they rebuilt the city, they named it Dan; and here they set up the graven image of Micah.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. "Replenish *the earth, and subdue it*" (*Genesis 1:28*). When God created the earth, He gave it to man to possess. His blessing upon man in the beginning has been called the colonist's character, the missionary's manifesto. Some believe the Garden of Eden was a sample of what God intended for the whole earth to become. In a special way, God had given directions to the people of Israel as to His desire for them to go into the land and claim it for their inheritance. When the children of Joseph complained about their land being too small, Joshua told them to make good use of what they had. So with the Danites, when they found their land was

not able to sustain them, they went out in

search for additional territory. Man is God's capsheaf of creation, and all that is in the universe is for his possession and good use. What he does with it will be accounted for in judgment; and if he has been a good steward, he will be amply rewarded.

2. *Some preach the gospel for personal gain.* The apostle Paul met those who had inferior motives for engaging in the work of the ministry. Although he could say he was glad for the gospel's being preached, his own high motives were certainly the best. The Levite, evidently a renegade from the true worship of God at the Tabernacle, first took his place with Micah and ministered at his pagan sanctuary. When he had an opportunity to serve as priest for a tribe instead of an individual, he offered little resistance to the Danites even though they stole the image at whose sanctuary he was to serve as priest.
3. *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.* The Israelites should have been very jealous to protect the true worship of God. The Ark was at Shiloh, but pagan worship was allowed to exist in Dan. Such a condition reached the state where God finally drove the people out of the land promised to their forefathers. The Israelites were told: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).