

## **Day 255 - TUESDAY: September 12th**

### Judges 17

#### Judges 17:1-13 NKJV

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. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he was a Levite, and was staying there. The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find a place to stay." Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in. Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

## **Daily Deep Dive:**

The UCG reading program states: “The last five chapters of Judges are interesting as a group for, in addition to making no mention of particular judges, they appear to be incidental notices of Israelite history that do not follow the general theme or time line of the rest of the book of Judges. Indeed, *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: "The book of Judges closes with two appendixes, the first in chs. 17-18 and the second in chs. 19-21. They seem to be unrelated to the material preceding them and to each other. For instance, these chapters do not describe the cyclical pattern of sin, servitude, [supplication] and salvation seen in the earlier chapters of Judges. While chs. 2-16 describe foreign threats to Israel, these last chapters show an internal breakdown of Israel's worship and unity. Furthermore, the events in these chapters appear to have taken place early in the period of the judges" (note on 17:1-21:25). That these chapters are out of chronological sequence with the rest of the book is attested to by several facts.

First, Judges 18:1-3 inform us that the Danites had not received their inheritance in the land—"the tribe of the Danites was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in; for until that day their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them." This could be interpreted in two ways: either it had not "fallen to them" by lot, or it had not "fallen to them" by conquest. Joshua 19:47 informs us that when Dan received its territorial allotment the Danites found the land too small for their numbers, and hence they undertook the conquest of Laish. The settlement of Dan's territory must have taken some time, and so the conquest of Laish must be put either late in Joshua's time or very early in the period of Judges.

Second, 18:30 identifies the priest who officiated at the shrine in Dan (formerly, Laish) as "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh." The Hebrew text of this phrase is remarkable for the fact

that the name Manasseh is spelled with a small superscripted nun (letter N), as MNSH. The Masoretes—scribes who compiled the Hebrew text into its present form—were scrupulous not to disturb the position of the individual letters of the text, even to the point of developing a vowel system of "points" which fitted above and below the letters, but never between the letters. Thus, this small superscripted nun is a clue that it was not part of the original text. If the nun is removed the name becomes MSH or *Moshe*, i.e., Moses. Now we know that Moses had a son named Gershom (Exodus 2:22). Therefore, many scholars believe that the nun was a scribal insert into the text to direct the reader of the text to read "Manasseh" rather than "Moses," thereby sparing Moses the dishonor of having Israel's first apostate and idolatrous priest in his lineage. Jonathan would be the *grandson* of Moses. If this is correct, then the transactions mentioned in connection with Micah and the Danite conquest of Laish must have occurred late in the period of Joshua, or early in the period of Judges, the likely lifespan of Jonathan.

Third, Joshua 20:1 and verses 27-28 inform us that when Israel was roused to action against the Benjamites they assembled before the Lord where Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, was still serving. Phinehas was thus the *grandson* of Aaron, and hence of the same generation of Jonathan, who seems to have been the *grandson* of Aaron's brother Moses. Phinehas was old enough to slay the fornicating Israelite (Numbers 25) and would have survived into the period of Joshua and perhaps the early part of the period of Judges, and hence would put the war against the Benjamites in the period of Joshua or early in the period of Judges.

Fourth, the war against the Benjamites was so devastating to Benjamin that it was feared the tribe would vanish in Israel (Judges 21:1-3). Only 600 Benjamite men are said to have survived (Judges 20:47), all the other Benjamites—men and women—being put to death (Judges 20:48)

so that these 600 men could find no Benjamite wives. Yet at the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the Benjamites were considered a full tribe (although the smallest, see 1 Samuel 9:21) and contributed in some significant way to the fighting force of 180,000 men at Rehoboam's command. If the story of the war against Benjamin is correctly placed in the chronology of the book of Judges, that would mean that in a period of 120 years (the time from Saul to Rehoboam) the Benjamites recovered their numbers. This is extremely unlikely. It is far more reasonable to believe that these events happened late in the period of Joshua or, more reasonable still, early in the period of Judges, in conjunction with the evidence above, and that Benjamin therefore had about 400 years to recover their position and numbers.

The same is true for the story of the Danite conquest of Laish, as it probably happened within a short time of the war against Benjamin. That would mean that the history of these transactions has not been placed in chronological sequence within the book of Judges.

This, however, should not be viewed as a mistake. Much of the Bible is not in chronological sequence. Likewise, these accounts were appended to Judges intentionally and purposefully, and it is instructive to search out why. As the study Bible note quoted earlier goes on to state: "There is a certain logic to placing them at the end of the book. For one, the structure highlights the theme of the disintegration of Israel. The last chapters emphasize that 'every one did what was right in his own eyes' (Judges 17:6; Judges 21:25). The general tone of these last chapters is satirical and understated. The many violations of Mosaic law receive only minimal comments. However, a muted note of disdain for Israel's wanton behavior is evident in places."

“Micah was an Ephraimite. This man built what appears to have been a personal shrine to God in his house. The context leads us to believe that neither Micah nor his mother *intended* open rebellion against God.

Micah's mother invoked the name of God in blessing her son ("May you be blessed by the Lord, my son," verse 2) and she had originally dedicated the silver to God (verse 3). Also, the name Micah itself meant "Who Is Like the Eternal?"

As for Micah, notice the "shrine" he had in his house. The Hebrew phrase that the New King James Version renders as "shrine" (verse 5) is *beth Elohim*. While the original King James translates this "house of gods," it should perhaps more properly be rendered "house of God." Thus, it may have been some kind of miniature representation of God's tabernacle. Micah also had, as is mentioned in verse 5, an ephod, a garment worn during worship and probably in imitation of the ephods of the tabernacle priests. And then, mentioned in the same verse, were his *teraphim* (translated "household idols"), small figures either representing gods or some devices associated with a god—in this case perhaps even a miniature Ark of the Covenant. He was pleased to hire the Levite as his priest, at least showing he had some sort of respect for the God who had appointed the Levites to certain religious service. Furthermore, he sought instruction from the priest ("father" being a term for one who teaches and provides counsel). And Micah believed that the Lord (the same Lord invoked by his mother) would bless him for these measures (verse 13).

While certainly not wholly in line with God's instructions, neither was this *meant* to be wholesale apostasy. It was the worship of God united to idolatry—the sin of *syncretism*, blending pagan practices into their own religion, which the Almighty had expressly forbidden (see Deuteronomy 12:29-32) but which the Israelites often fell into. Moreover, it was doing what *seemed* right rather than following God's explicit commands—a recipe for disaster as this is the path that leads to death (see Proverbs 14:12; Proverbs 16:25). Though not *intended* to be apostasy and rebellion against God, it was apostasy and rebellion nevertheless.

Sincerely attempting to please God is no excuse for breaking His direct commands. We must all remember this in our own worship of God.”

[END]

Verse 2 – From Adam Clarke’s commentary: “It is likely that when the mother of Micah missed the money, she poured imprecations on the thief; and that Micah, who had secreted it, hearing this, was alarmed, and restored the money lest the curses should fall on him.” [END]

Verse 6 – Many people do what they believe is right. Many people want to be good people and to lead lives that please God. They may actually spend considerable effort trying to live a right life. It’s important to remember there can be a big difference between what we might sincerely believe is right and what is in fact right in the sight of God. The Bible clearly tells us that our own nature is not capable of going in the right direction on our own (compare Jeremiah 17:9 and Jeremiah 10:23). We must all constantly study God’s Word to ensure our lives are aligned with His way.