A Lack of Instruction

Judges 17:1-6; 18:18-19, 27
SS Lesson for 10/25/2026

Devotional Scripture: Deut 6:10-16

OUTLINE

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

An accurate understanding of the book of Judges hinges on knowing the covenant God established with the Hebrew people. God gave instructions for holy living and proper worship. For example, he expressly prohibited the making of carved images and idols (Exodus 20:4; 34:17; Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 5:8; 27:15). God inaugurated the tabernacle as the central place of worship for Israel (Exodus 26:1-37; 36:8-38; 40:1-38; Deuteronomy 12:1-14). He established a priesthood (Exodus 28:1; Numbers 3:5-10). He consecrated and ordained the priests to be the purveyors and administrators of the covenant, overseeing the sacrificial system (Exodus 29:1-9; compare Leviticus 9:22-24; Numbers 1:47-51). God also gave regulations concerning the priests' attire (Exodus 28; 39:2-31). From all these and others, we see a picture of required faithfulness and obedience through attention to detail. The book of Judges focuses on the Israelites' repeated apostasy. Apostasy

is what happens when faith is abandoned, whether through the willful and outright refusal to conform to the conditions of the covenant or as a gradual slipping away from obedience and faithful practice. The events surrounding Micah's household and the conquest of Laish happened early in the judges' era, even though they are not mentioned until late in the book. This is established by comparing Joshua 19:47 (where the town of Laish is called "Leshem") with Judges 1:34; 18:1, 27-29. Therefore, Micah lived during the days of Othniel, Israel's first judge, in the mid-1300s BC (Judges 3:7-11).

Key Verses: Judges 17:6

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Misguided Worship (Judges 17:1-6)

1 Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah.
2 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!"
3 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."
4 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.
5 The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated 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.

Worship based on stolen offerings (1-2)

Offerings of the wicked (Prov 15:8)

8 The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

Offerings of those who do not please God (Hos 8:12-13)

12 I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien. 13 They offer sacrifices given to me and they eat the meat, but the Lord is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: They will return to Egypt.

Offerings that have not been given in the right way (Gen 4:5-7)

5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Offerings that are meaningless (Isa 1:13-17)

13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations, I cannot bear your evil assemblies. 14 Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; 16 wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, 17 learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Worship dedicated for idols (3-4)

Worship of idols (Ps 97:7)

> 7 All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols — worship him, all you gods!

Worship must be to God only (Matt 4:10)

> 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Worship of heavenly bodies (Acts 7:42)

> 42 But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: "'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?

Worship of angels (Col 2:18)

> 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

Worship done in a worldly manner (5-6)

Worship with rules of man (Matt 15:9)

> 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'"

Worship that is not done in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24)

> 21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Worship by those that do not keep a tight rein on the tongue (James 1:26)

> 26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

Worship of idols that are nothing compared to God (1 Cor 8:4)

> 4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

Misguided Relations (Judges 18:18-19, 27)

18 When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"
19 And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. Is it better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?"
27 So they took the things Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire.

Relations conquered (18-19)

Conquered because of the love of money (1 Tim 6:10)

> 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Conquered because of bribes (Isa 1:23)

> 23 Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.

Conquered because of illicit favors (Ezek 16:33)

> 33 Every prostitute receives a fee, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors.

Conquered because of ungodly agreements (Judg 17:10-12)

> 10 Then Micah said to him, "Live with me and be my father and priest, and I'll give you ten shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food." 11 So the Levite agreed to live with him, and the young man was to him like one of his sons. 12 Then Micah installed the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in his house.

Relations destroyed (27)

Destroyed because of mingling too long with sin (Ps 106:35-36)

> 35 but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. 36 They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them.

Destroyed because of playing with the fire of sin (Prov 6:27-28)

> 27 Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? 28 Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?

Destroyed because of being yoked together with sin or wickedness (2 Cor 6:14-15)

> 14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

Destroyed because of things that contaminates the body and spirit (2 Cor 7:1)

> 7 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Have It Your Way, Micah (Judges 17:1-13)

We are introduced to a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim. Micah was not the model son, but then neither was his mother a "Proverbs 31 kind of woman." Micah had stolen 1100 pieces of silver from her,[6] and she had pronounced a curse on the thief in his hearing. (One has to wonder if she knew – or at least suspected – that it was her son who was the culprit.) It seems to have been the curse which prompted Micah to confess, and not his conscience. This does not appear to be a biblical curse, but something that came from "the dark side." How different this mother's curse was from the "curses" God had the Israelites repeat from Mount Ebal, the first of which went like this:

"'Cursed is the one who makes a carved or metal image – something abhorrent to the LORD, the work of the craftsman – and sets it up in a secret place.' Then all the people will say, 'Amen!'" (Deuteronomy 27:15)

The important thing to Micah's mother was that the curse seemed to work. Micah confessed, and his mother's problem now was to somehow reverse the curse. She attempts to do so by pronouncing a blessing upon her son, a blessing invoked in the name of Yahweh. When Micah returned the stolen silver, his mother dedicated a portion of it (200 pieces of the silver) to the Lord (Yahweh) so that with it her son could make two idols. Ironically, the two terms she employs to refer to these idols are the same terms contained in the curse of Deuteronomy 27:15, referring to idols that the Israelites must never make. So far, neither Micah nor his mother is looking godly.

Micah's mother takes the 200 pieces of silver to a silversmith to fashion two forbidden images. When these images were completed, they were placed in the house of Micah. We should not think that these are the first and only idols Micah owned. From verse 5, we learn that Micah had a "house of gods," which included an ephod and "household gods." We have already read of Gideon's idolatrous ephod in Judges 8:27. The "household gods" would be similar to those Rachel stole from Laban's house.[7] These were the sort of personalized idols that were kept in many heathen homes.

So Micah is already an idolater, and also a thief, but thanks to his "confession" and his mother's blessing, he now has an even more complete collection of gods. With such a collection, Micah will need a priest, and so he dedicates one of his sons to carry out this family function. Here is a truly dysfunctional family. And so our author makes a statement for the first time in Judges that we will see several times in his conclusion to this book:

In those days Israel had no king. Each man did what he considered to be right (Judges 17:6).

It should not take the reader long to discern the meaning of these words. In Deuteronomy 12, God clearly explains the meaning of these words by contrasting them with another statement:

"You are not to do as we are doing here today; ***everyone is doing whatever seems right in his own eyes***" (Deuteronomy 12:8, CSB; emphasis mine).

"Be careful to obey all these things I command you, so that you and your children after you may prosper forever, because you will be ***doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God***" (Deuteronomy 12:28, CSB; emphasis mine).

Doing "what is right in your own eyes" is living according to your own personal standards. Doing what **"is right in the sight of the LORD your God"** is doing what God has declared to be right in His Word. Clearly, Micah and his mother were not living according to God's commandments; they were living in accordance with their own corrupt value system. This does not bode well.

Micah now has his own "homemade religion." He has a shrine containing various pieces of forbidden religious hardware and a son who is set apart to serve as his priest. But there is something less than authentic in having one's son be the family priest. After all, he is not a Levite.

How fortunate, how providential (to use a more pious sounding term), it must have seemed to Micah when a young, unemployed, Levite happened his way. This young Levite had come from Bethlehem in Judah where he had sojourned for some time. Remember that the Levites did not have an allotted inheritance as did the other tribes. They were to live off of the tithes and support of their fellow Israelites. There were a few cities in Israel that were set apart for the Levites, as well as some surrounding farmland.[8] Given the spiritual state of the nation, it is almost certain that this command was being ignored:

Be careful not to overlook the Levites as long as you live in the land (Deuteronomy 12:19).

The Levites suffered from unemployment, and thus they traveled about the nation seeking a roof over their heads and food on their table. The young Levite in our text had not found "a place" in Bethlehem and had made his way to the hill country of Ephraim, where he encountered Micah's "bed and breakfast."[9] Micah asked the Levite where he had come from and, by inference, what his business was in passing by his house. The young man may not be handing Micah his resume, but he does tell him that he is a Levite and that he is looking for a job and a place to stay. In effect, he tells Micah that he is open to any kind of employment he can find.

This resonates with Micah. Just think of it; he could hire this young man and have a genuine Levite as his priest, rather than one of his sons. This would greatly enhance his religious status. Micah offers him a good salary, a car allowance, excellent health insurance, and a retirement program. Okay, so I've paraphrased a bit, but hopefully I've made the author's point more pointed (so far as our day and times are concerned). The young Levite was willing to prostitute his calling to be a private priest for Micah the idolater, with the tools of his trade being those forbidden idols housed in his sacred shrine. Over time, a close bond developed between these two so that the Levite was treated like a son. Things could hardly be better for Micah and for his new priest – or so it seemed. Micah was sure that things were going to be even better for him, because now he had a Levite as his personal priest. Things were about to change, however, and not for the better, so far as Micah assessed success.

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/16-danites-promised-land-judges-17-18)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Micah, his mother, the Levite, and the Danites all illustrate the problems associated with each person doing what is right in their own eyes rather than that which is right in God's eyes (Judges 17:6; compare Deuteronomy 12:28). There is a danger in establishing one's own rules, and every person plays a role in either furthering obedience to God or perpetuating degradation and dishonesty. Unfortunately, the choices of the players in today's account resulted in a cult being established in the northern region of Israel. Micah's idol(s) and the illegitimate priesthood led by his Levite are both reiterated and reinforced by later generations (compare 2 Kings 17:32). Hundreds of years later, first Jeroboam and then Jehu describe Dan as a pilgrimage site for idol worshipers (1 Kings 12:28-30; 2 Kings 10:29). God's covenant emphasized remembrance and the responsibility each family must take to pass along God's instructions (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Errors occur because of both pride and ignorance. It takes humility to correct and to be corrected. It takes time and intention to teach the ways of God. Believers must positively—not passively—reinforce consistency in faith. True discipleship requires lifelong learning, submission to instruction, regular remembrance, and communal accountability.