
JUDGES 17:1 There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

Micah, an Ephraimite, restores to his mother eleven hundred shekels of silver, which he had taken from her, Jdg 17:1, Jdg 17:2. She dedicates this to God; and out of a part of it makes a graven image and a molten image, and gets them up in the house of Micah, Jdg 17:3, Jdg 17:4; who consecrates one of his sons to be his priest, Jdg 17:5. He afterwards finds a Levite, whom he consecrates for a priest, and gives him annually ten shekels of silver, with his food and clothing, Jdg 17:6-13.

Verse 1

And there was a man of Mount Ephraim - It is extremely difficult to fix the chronology of this and the following transactions. Some think them to be here in their natural order; others, that they happened in the time of Joshua, or immediately after the ancients who outlived Joshua. All that can be said with certainty is this, that they happened when there was no king in Israel; i.e., about the time of the Judges, or in some time of the anarchy, Jdg 17:6.

JUDGES 17:2 He said to his mother, "The eleven hundred 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." His mother said, "Blessed be my son of the LORD."

Verse 2

About which thou cursedst - Houbigant and others understand this of putting the young man to his oath. 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.

JUDGES 17:3 He restored the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother; and his mother said, "I most certainly dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make an engraved image and a molten image. Now therefore I will restore it to you."

Verse 3

I had wholly dedicated - From this it appears that Micah's mother, though she made a superstitious use of the money, had no idolatrous design, for she expressly says she had dedicated it ליהוה layhovah, to Jehovah; and this appears to have been the reason why she poured imprecations on him who had taken it.

JUDGES 17:4 When he restored the money to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made of it an engraved image and a molten image: and it was in the house of Micah.

 Verse 4

A graven image and a molten image - What these images were, we cannot positively say; they were most probably some resemblance of matters belonging to the tabernacle. See below.

JUDGES 17:5 The man Micah had a house of gods, and he made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

Verse 5

The man Micah had a house of gods - בית אלהים beith Elohim should, I think, be translated house or temple of God; for it is very likely that both the mother and the son intended no more than a private or domestic chapel, in which they proposed to set up the worship of the true God.

Made an ephod - Perhaps the whole of this case may be stated thus: Micah built a house of God - a chapel in imitation of the sanctuary; he made a graven image representing the ark, a molten image to represent the mercy-seat, teraphim to represent the cherubim above the mercy-seat, and an ephod in imitation of the sacerdotal garments; and he consecrated one of his sons to be priest. Thus gross idolatry was not the crime of Micah; he only set up in his own house an epitome of the Divine worship as performed at Shiloh. What the teraphim were, see the note on Gen 31:19; for the ephod, see the note on Exo 25:7; and for the sacerdotal vestments in general, see the note on Exo 28:4, etc.

Who became his priest - כהן cohen, which the Targum translates chumera. The word כהן cohen is the common name in Hebrew for a priest of the true God; but sometimes it is applied to idolatrous priests. When it is to be understood in the former sense, the Targum renders it cahen; when in the latter, it uses the word כומרא chumera, by which it always understands an idolatrous priest. But that this was not a case of idolatry, and that the true God was worshipped here, is evident from the word Jehovah being used, Jdg 17:4, and oracular answers being given at this house, as we see from Jdg 18:6, etc.

JUDGES 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Verse 6

There was no king in Israel - The word מלך melech, which generally means king, is sometimes taken for a supreme governor, judge, magistrate, or ruler of any kind; (see Gen 36:31, and Deu 33:5); and it is likely it should be so understood here.

Every man did that which was right in his own eyes - He was his own governor, and what he did he said was right; and, by his cunning and strength, defended his conduct. When a man's own will, passions, and caprice, are to be made the rule of law, society is in a most perilous and ruinous state. Civil government is of God; and without it the earth must soon be desolated. There was a time when

there was no king in England; and that was, in general, a time of scandal to religion, and oppression to men.

JUDGES 17:7 There was a young man out of Bethlehem Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he lived there.

Verse 7

Of the family of Judah - The word family may be taken here for tribe; or the young man might have been of the tribe of Judah by his mother, and of the tribe of Levi by his father, for he is called here a Levite; and it is probable that he might have officiated at Shiloh, in the Levitical office. A Levite might marry into any other tribe, providing the woman was not an heiress.

JUDGES 17:8 The man departed out of the city, out of Bethlehem Judah, to live where he could find a place, and he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah, as he travelled.

Verse 8

To sojourn where he could find - He went about the country seeking for some employment, for the Levites had no inheritance: besides, no secure residence could be found where there was no civil government.

JUDGES 17:9 Micah said to him, "Where did you come from?" He said to him, "I am a Levite of Bethlehem Judah, and I am looking for a place to live."

JUDGES 17:10 Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver per year, a suit of clothing, and your food." So the Levite went in.

Verse 10

Be unto me a father and a priest - Thou shalt be master of my house, as if thou wert my father; and, as priest, thou shalt appear in the presence of God for me. The term father is often used to express honor and reverence.

Ten shekels of silver - About thirty shillings per annum, with board, lodging, and clothes. Very good wages in those early times.

JUDGES 17:11 The Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was to him as one of his sons.

Verse 11

The Levite was content - He thought the place a good one, and the wages respectable.

JUDGES 17:12 Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

Verse 12

Micah consecrated the Levite - וַיִּמְלֵא אֶת יָדָיו vayemalle eth yad, he filled his hands, i.e., he gave him an offering to present before the Lord, that he might be accepted by him. He appointed him to be priest; God was to accept and consecrate him; and for this purpose he filled his hand; i.e., furnished him with the proper offering which he was to present on his inauguration.

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

Verse 13

Now know I that the Lord will do me good - As he had already provided an epitome of the tabernacle, a model of the ark, mercy-seat, and cherubim; and had got proper sacerdotal vestments, and a Levite to officiate; he took for granted that all was right, and that he should now have the benediction of God. Some think that he expected great gain from the concourse of the people to his temple; but of this there is no evidence in the text. Micah appears to have been perfectly sincere in all that he did.

I Have already remarked that there is no positive evidence that Micah or his mother intended to establish any idolatrous worship. Though they acted without any Divine command in what they did; yet they appear, not only to have been perfectly sincere, but also perfectly disinterested. They put themselves to considerable expense to erect this place of worship, and to maintain, at their own proper charges, a priest to officiate there; and without this the place, in all probability, would have been destitute of the worship and knowledge of the true God. His sincerity, disinterestedness, and attachment to the worship of the God of his fathers, are farther seen in the joy which he expressed on finding a Levite who might legally officiate in his house. It is true, he had not a Divine warrant for what he did; but the state of the land, the profligacy of his countrymen, his distance from Shiloh, etc., considered, he appears to deserve more praise than blame, though of the latter he has received a most liberal share from every quarter. This proceeds from that often-noticed propensity in man to take every thing which concerns the character of another by the worst handle. It cannot be considered any particular crime, should these notes be found at any time leaning to the other side.