

CHAPTER 17

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 17

This chapter relates the first rise of idolatry in Israel after the death of Joshua, which began in Mount Ephraim, occasioned by a sum of money stolen by a man from his mother, which being restored, part was converted to an idolatrous use; two images were made of it, (^{<0710>}Judges 17:1-5) and there being no king in Israel to take cognizance of it, the idolatry took place and continued, and afterwards spread, (^{<0710>}Judges 17:6), and this idolater not only made one of his sons a priest, but took a Levite for another, whom he hired by the year to serve him, (^{<0710>}Judges 17:7-13).

Ver. 1. *And there was a man of Mount Ephraim,* etc.] This and the four following chapters contain an history of facts, which were done not after the death of Samson, as some have thought, and as they may seem at first sight, by the order in which they are laid; but long before his time, and indeed before any of the judges in Israel, when there was no king, judge, or supreme governor among them, as appears from (^{<0710>}Judges 17:6 19:1 21:25) even between the death of Joshua and the elders, and the first judge of Israel, Othniel; and so Josephus^{f367} places them in his history, and the connection of them is with (^{<0710>}Judges 2:10) and so accounts for the rise of idolatry in Israel, how it got into the tribe of Dan, and spread itself over all the tribes of Israel, (^{<0710>}Judges 2:11) which brought on their servitude to Cushanrishathaim, in which time the Jewish chronology^{f368} places those events; but they were certainly before that, for the idolatry they fell into was the cause of it; yet could not be so early as the times of Joshua, and before his death; because in his days, and the days of the elders, Israel served the Lord; the reasons why they are postponed to the end of this book, and the account of them given here, are, according to Dr. Lightfoot^{f369}, that the reader observing how their state policy failed in the death of Samson, who was a Danite, might presently be showed God's justice in it, because their religion had first failed among the Danites; that when he observes that 1100 pieces of silver were given by every Philistine prince for the ruin of Samson, (^{<0710>}Judges 16:5) he might presently observe the 1100 pieces of silver that were given by Micah's mother for the making of an

idol, which ruined religion in Samson's tribe; that the story of Micah, of the hill country of Ephraim, the first destroyer of religion, and the story of Samuel, of the hill country of Ephraim, the first reformer of religion, might be laid together somewhat near. That the facts after related were so early done as has been observed, appears from the following things; the priest of the idol Micah made was a grandson of Moses, (^{<0703>}Judges 18:30), the Danites' seeking to enlarge their possessions, related in the same chapter, was most probably as soon as they were driven into the mountains by the Amorites, (^{<0703>}Judges 1:34). Mahanah Dan, from whence they marched, and had its name from their expedition, (^{<0718>}Judges 18:12) is mentioned before in the history of Samson, (^{<0713>}Judges 13:25 *marg) and therefore the expedition must be before his time. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was alive at the battle of Gibeah, (^{<0728>}Judges 20:28) and Deborah speaks of the 40,000 Israelites slain by Benjamin at it, (^{<0708>}Judges 5:8). This man with whom the idolatry began was of the tribe of Ephraim, and dwelt in the mountainous part of it:

whose name was Micah; in the original it is Micajehu, with part of the name Jehovah affixed to it, as Dr. Lightfoot ^{f370} remarks, till he set up his image, and thenceforward was called Micah; but, according to Abarbanel, the former was his name while he was a child, and in his youth, and with his mother, being a diminutive term, and when he became a man he was called Micah, (^{<0717>}Judges 17:5).

Ver. 2. *And he said unto his mother*, etc.] Who seems to have been a widow, and an ancient woman since Micah had sons, and one of them at age to become a priest:

the eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee: which were taken away by stealth from her, though it may be rendered "taken to thee" ^{f371}; which she had taken to herself out of the rest of her substance, and had separated and devoted it to religious uses; but Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it as we do, and which seems to be the best sense; of the value of this sum, (see Gill on "^{<0716>}Judges 16:5") and because the like sum is there offered, and was given to Delilah, hence some have thought, as Jarchi relates, that this woman was Delilah; but, as he observes, it is a mistake; for this woman lived long before the times of Samson and Delilah:

about which thou cursedst; which when she perceived was stolen from her, she fell into a passion, and cursed and swore, cursed the thief that took it, whether of her own family or another; or adjured her son, that if he knew

anything of it, that he would declare it, suspecting him of the robbery; some think this refers to the oath she had made, that she would devote the silver to a religious use:

and spakest of also in mine ears; of the sum how much it was, and of the use she had designed it for; or rather the curse was delivered in his hearing, and cut him to the heart, and wrought that conviction in him, that he could not retain the money any longer, not being able to bear his mother's curse; though Abarbinel connects this with the following clause, "behold, the silver is with me"; as if the sense was, that she spake in his ears, and charged him with the theft to his face; saying, verily the silver is with thee, thou hast certainly taken it; upon which he confessed it, "I took it"; but the former sense seems best, that not being willing to lie under his mother's curse, he owned that the money was in his hands, and he had taken it from her:

and his mother said, blessed be thou of the Lord, my son; she reversed the curse, and pronounced a blessing on him, or wished one to him, and that without reproving him for his sin, rejoicing to hear of her money again.

Ver. 3. *And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother*, etc.] The whole sum, having embezzled none of it:

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; this she had done either before it was stolen, and it troubled her the more, and caused her the rather to curse the man that had taken it; or after it was stolen, that if it should be recovered again she would appropriate it to such an use; so Abarbinel; and by the Lord, or Jehovah, she doubtless meant the true God; for she had no intention to forsake him, but to worship him in and by these images, and which she designed for the use of her son and his family, that they might not go so far as Shiloh to worship at the tabernacle there:

therefore I will restore it unto thee; for that use, and so gave him the money again, to be laid out in images, or to make images of it.

Ver. 4. *Yet he restored the money unto his mother*, etc.] Gave it to her a second tithe, not as disapproving her idolatrous intention, as the sequel shows, but being desirous to be entirely free of it, and not have his mind disturbed with it as it had been, and that she might do with it as she thought fit:

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; the other nine hundred pieces she kept to herself, repenting of her vow, and being unwilling to part with so much money for such an use; or else they were laid out in an ephod, and teraphim, and what else were thought necessary for the idolatrous worship they were about to set up; though Kimchi is of opinion, that the two hundred shekels were what she gave the founder for making the images, and of the nine hundred the images were made; and indeed the images must be very small ones, if made out of two hundred shekels of silver only; some have thought there was but one image, called both molten and graven; because after the silver was melted, and cast into a mould, it was fashioned with a graving tool, as the golden calf was by Aaron; but they are manifestly distinguished and represented as two, (^{<07817>}Judges 18:17,18) and they were in the house of Micah; in an apartment in his house, peculiar for them, as appears by the next verse; here they were put and continued.

Ver. 5. *And the man Micah had an house of gods,* etc.] Having two images in it, besides teraphim, which were a sort of idols; and the Targum is, an house of images, or idols; though it may be rendered “an house of God”; a temple, a place for religious worship:

and made an ephod; a priestly garment, a linen one very probably, not so rich an one with a breastplate to it as the high priest had, which was very costly. Ben Melech interprets it a girdle, and there was a curious girdle of the ephod, with which it was girt; this may be here put for the rest of the priestly garments which Micah provided:

and teraphim; which were a sort of household gods, like the Lares and Penates of the Romans, and by which consultations were made; (see Gill on “^{<288B>}Hosea 3:3-4”) (see Gill on “^{<380D>}Zechariah 10:2”) Micah proposed to have an oracle in his house, whereby he might consult the Lord about future things, and not be at the trouble of going to the tabernacle, and consult there by Urim and Thummim; and the same some take the teraphim to be:

and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest; or, “filled the hand”^{f372} of one of them; that is, with offerings, as Ben Melech interprets it; in which way priests were initiated, and consecrated to their office; (see ^{<0284>}Exodus 28:41 29:9,24) or, as Kimchi expresses it, he offered his

offerings by the hand of one of his sons, and appointed him to be a priest, very probably his eldest son.

Ver. 6. *In those days there was no king in Israel*, etc.] That is, no supreme magistrate, judge, or ruler, Joshua being dead and Caleb also, and the elders contemporary with them; for what the Samaritan Chronicle says ^{f373} is without foundation, that Joshua a little before his death cast a lot in the presence of the congregation, to know who should govern after him, and the lot came to one Abel, of the tribe of Judah:

[but] every man did that which was right in his own eyes; which accounts for the idolatry of Micah, there being no supreme magistrate to take cognizance of his sin, and restrain him from it, or punish him for it according to the law of God.

Ver. 7. *And there was a young man out of Bethlehemjudah*, etc.] As there were two Bethlehems, one in the tribe of Zebulun, (¹⁶⁹⁵-Joshua 19:15) and another in the tribe of Judah, the place here designed, Judah is added to it, to distinguish it from the other:

of the family of Judah: which refers either to the young man, who was by his father's side a Levite, and by his mother's side, as Jarchi thinks, of the tribe of Judah, which seems very probable, though the genealogies of families were not reckoned from the mother; wherefore he might be so called because he had lived chiefly in the tribe of Judah, and particularly at Bethlehem; but Kimchi, and several other Jewish commentators, refer this to the city of Bethlehem, that was of the tribe of Judah, family being put for the tribe; or belonged to the children of Judah; though one would think there was no need to have added this, since it was fully expressed before by calling it Bethlehemjudah; the former sense therefore seems best:

who was a Levite; his father being, as before observed, of that tribe, though his mother might be of the tribe of Judah: and he sojourned there; that is, at Bethlehem; he was not a native, nor an inhabitant there, but a sojourner, it not being a Levitical city.

Ver. 8. *And the man departed out of the city from Bethlehemjudah*, to sojourn where he could find a place, etc.] Either being a man that had a rambling head, and of an unsettled mind, and could not easily fix any where; or else there being no supreme magistrate, to take care that the Levites had their due maintenance, for which there was a sufficient provision made by law; and the people being negligent of paying their

tithes, there being none to oblige them to it, and they indifferent to the true worship of God, and prone to idolatry; this man was obliged to go abroad, and seek for a livelihood where he could get it, and sojourn in a place the most convenient for him:

and he came to Mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed: not with a design to stay there, but called by the way, having heard perhaps that Micah was both a wealthy and an hospitable man, and he also might have heard of the new form of worship he had set up in his house.

Ver. 9. *And Micah said unto him, whence comest thou?* etc.] For as he might ask for a meal, or for a night's lodging, it was but natural to put such a question to him, as from whence he came, and what was his business in these parts? or whither he was going?

and he said unto him, I am a Levite of Bethlehemjudah; the tribe he was of was Levi, and so a Levite by tribe and office, and the place he came last from, and where he had sojourned awhile, was Bethlehem, a city in the tribe of Judah:

and I go to sojourn where I may find a place; the most convenient to abide in, where he could get a livelihood.

Ver. 10. *And Micah said unto him, dwell with me,* etc.] Hearing that he was a Levite, he thought him a fit man for his purpose, and would give some credit to, and put a better face upon his new form of worship, and therefore, without further inquiry after him and his character, invites him to make his abode with him:

and be unto me a father and a priest; a father to instruct him in the knowledge of divine things; so prophets were called fathers, and their disciples their sons; and a priest to offer sacrifices for him, and to consult before him by his teraphim upon occasion:

and I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year; or yearly, which was but a small sum, a poor salary for a priest, at most amounting but to twenty five shillings, and scarce so much:

and a suit of apparel; or “an order of apparel”^{f374}; such as was fit for one of his rank and order as a priest to wear, so Jarchi and Abarbanel; or a couple of garments, as the Targum and Septuagint, a double suit of

apparel, according to the order of the season, one for summer and another for winter, as Kimchi and Ben Melech:

and thy victuals; his meat and drink:

so thy Levite went in; into his house, and it looks as if the parley was made, and the bargain struck at the door, Micah being at it as the Levite passed by, or came to it upon his knocking at it; he went after his counsel and advice, as Jarchi, or to do his business, as Kimchi.

Ver. 11. *And the Levite was content to dwell with the man*, etc.] To continue with him; after he had made trial for some time, he liked his service, and his wages, and way of living; it was all agreeable to him:

and the young man was unto him as one of his sons; as dearly beloved by him, and used as kindly and tenderly, as if he had been one of his own children; so strong were the affections of Micah to him, and so well pleased was he with his service.

Ver. 12. *And Micah consecrated the Levite*, etc.] Installed him into, and invested him with the priestly office; in like manner he had consecrated his son before, by filling his hand with sacrifices; (see ^{<QTT>}Judges 17:5)

and the young man became his priest; and did the work and office of one; this was a very daring piece of presumption in them both; in Micah, to take upon him to consecrate a priest, who was himself of the tribe of Ephraim; and in the young man, to suffer himself to be put into such an office, which did not belong to him, for though every priest was a Levite, or of the tribe of Levi, yet every Levite had not a right to be a priest, only those who were of the family of Aaron:

and was in the house of Micah; and continued there.

Ver. 13. *Then said Micah*, etc.] Within himself, pleased with what he had done, and with what he engaged in:

now know I that the Lord will do me good; that I shall enjoy his favour, be a happy man, and prosper; and by this it appears, that notwithstanding the idolatry he had fallen into, he had not utterly forsaken the Lord, but worshipped him in and by his images; there was a mixture of the worship of God, and of the worship of images:

seeing I have a Levite to my priest; who was of the same tribe the priests were, and so the nearest to them of any, and which he thought would be acceptable to God, and an omen of good to himself.