

Dr. David Howard, Joshua - Ruth, Session 29, Judges 17-18 – First Appendix Micah and Levite Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 29, Judges 17-18 – First Appendix Micah and Levite, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Howard's lecture analyzes Judges 17-18, focusing on the stories of Micah and the Levite. **Micah's creation of a private shrine** with idols and a self-appointed priest highlights the moral decay in Israel's decentralized worship during a period without a king. **The tribe of Dan's actions**, including their forceful seizure of Micah's shrine and their violent conquest of Laish, further exemplify this decline. The lecture emphasizes the lack of divine intervention and the pervasiveness of religious corruption and violence within Israel. **The narrative's placement at the book's end underscores its depiction of Israel's spiritual nadir.**

**2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 29 – Double click icon to
play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Old Testament → Historical Books → Joshua-Ruth).**



**Howard_Josh_Ruth
_Session29.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 29, Judges 17-18 – First Appendix Micah and Levite

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, with quotes included for emphasis:

Briefing Document: Judges 17-18 - The Story of Micah and the Levite

Introduction: This document reviews Dr. David Howard's analysis of Judges 17-18, often considered an "appendix" to the book, focusing on the story of Micah and the Levite. These chapters serve as a stark illustration of the moral and spiritual decline within Israel during the period of the Judges, highlighting a lack of centralized religious authority and a departure from God's laws. Dr. Howard emphasizes the author's purpose in placing these stories at the end of Judges is to highlight the desperate need for a godly king to lead the people.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. **Moral and Spiritual Apostasy:** The core theme is the rampant religious corruption and moral decay within Israel. This period is marked by a lack of adherence to God's laws and a syncretic approach to worship.
 - **Quote:** "The author decided to place these stories at the end of the book because they are some of the most sordid and tawdry stories in the entire book. And so just to make that point, the way the book reads as a literary document, this is sort of the nadir, the lowest point of the book."
1. **Absence of a King:** The phrase "there is no king in Israel" is repeated four times in the final chapters of Judges, (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25) with the added note that "everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (17:6, 21:25) This emphasizes the leadership vacuum and the resulting chaos and self-centeredness.
 - **Quote:** "This is a section where four times we are told that there is no king in Israel...And in the first and the last of those instances, we are also told there's no king in Israel. I'm sorry, everybody was right in their own eyes."
1. **Internal Conflict vs. External Threats:** The conflict in these chapters is not from external enemies but internal corruption, highlighting that Israel's biggest threat comes from within, and their own lack of faith.

- **Quote:** "In chapters 2 to 16, we see what we might call external threats to Israel, whereas the conflicts in 17 to 21 are internal to Israel and the problems are festering from within, not from without."
1. **Syncretism and Idolatry:** The story of Micah demonstrates the practice of syncretism, mixing the worship of Yahweh with pagan practices and the creation of idols, directly violating God's commandments.
- **Quote:** "She wants to do something for the Lord, dedicating this silver to the Lord, but she's doing it in a way that's totally inappropriate and essentially totally wrong, sinful... So they are trying to have the best of both worlds, including worship of Yahweh, who we know, of course, is the true God, but they wanted to also mix worship of him with other things."
1. **Private Religious Practices:** Micah's creation of a private shrine and priesthood demonstrates a disregard for the centralized worship ordained by God, showcasing the breakdown of religious order.
- **Quote:** "There's no provision anywhere in the law about people having private priests for themselves, let alone all these images that he's created and the shrine that he has there."
1. **The Levite's Ambition and Moral Flexibility:** The Levite's willingness to abandon his position and serve as a private priest, motivated by personal gain, highlights the corruption even within the religious class.
- **Quote:** "And so, he follows sort of the career trajectory of advancement now promoted to a bigger company, I suppose you could say. And the priest's heart was glad. He took the Ephod and the household gods, the carved image, and went with the people..."
1. **The Tribe of Dan's Migration and Violence:** The story also describes the tribe of Dan's migration from their allotted territory to the north after failing to drive out the Canaanites, culminating in the violent takeover of Laish. This further illustrates the breakdown of order and lawlessness in Israel.
- **Quote:** "So, the Danites, in a rather savage way, attack them, put them to the edge of the sword, and burn the city."
1. **Perversion of Worship:** The Danites taking Micah's idols and his priest to establish their own idolatrous practices in Laish shows a complete perversion of worship that was not meant to be practiced outside of God's ordained system.

- **Quote:** "Here, this is a private set for one tribe. That's not certainly sanctioned at all in the law."
- 1. **Absence of God's Presence:** The story is marked by an absence of direct divine intervention, highlighting the consequences of Israel's rejection of God's will. There's no indication that God is involved or condoning any of their actions.
- **Quote:** "Before the Lord seems to be involved here, God does not speak at all... That continues here. God's not part of this story."

Specifics from the Story:

- **Micah's Idolatry:** Micah steals silver from his mother, returns it, and she then dedicates it to making idols. He establishes a private shrine with an ephod and household gods and ordains one of his sons as a priest.
- **The Levite's Arrival:** A wandering Levite from Bethlehem comes to Micah's home, and Micah hires him as his personal priest, believing it will bring him prosperity.
- **The Tribe of Dan's Migration:** The tribe of Dan, unable to secure their original territory, sends scouts to find a new place to settle. They encounter the Levite and decide to exploit him and Micah's shrine in their new endeavor.
- **Theft and Violence:** The Danites steal Micah's idols and convince the Levite to join them. They then violently conquer and destroy the city of Laish.

Conclusion:

Judges 17-18 presents a bleak picture of Israel's moral and spiritual condition. It serves as a low point in the book of Judges, illustrating the consequences of rejecting God's laws and the need for godly leadership. The story of Micah, the Levite, and the tribe of Dan demonstrate the extent of the internal decay of Israel. Dr. Howard emphasizes that these stories are strategically placed in the book to make a powerful case for the necessity of a godly king to lead the nation. The story ends with a pervasive sense of chaos and spiritual desolation, setting the stage for the even more disturbing narratives that follow.

4. Study Guide: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 29, Judges 17-18 – First Appendix Micah and Levite

Judges 17-18 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. Why does the author of Judges include the stories in chapters 17-21 at the end of the book?
2. What is the significance of the repeated phrase "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes"?
3. Describe the actions of Micah's mother in relation to her stolen silver, and what is wrong with them?
4. What is a Levite, and why is the Levite from Bethlehem significant in this story?
5. Why is Micah happy to have a Levite become his priest?
6. What challenge did the tribe of Dan face regarding their initial land allotment?
7. What was the original name of the city that the Danites conquered and renamed Dan?
8. Describe the actions of the Danite men who visit Micah's home and what they decide to do.
9. How does the Levite justify leaving Micah to go with the Danites?
10. What does the ending of the chapter tell us about the religious practices of the Danites and how long it lasted?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The author places these stories at the end to emphasize the depths of moral and spiritual corruption in Israel, as the stories are some of the most sordid and tawdry in the entire book. It is the author's literary way of marking the lowest point in Israel's history before the need for a godly king.
2. This phrase highlights the lack of centralized, godly leadership and the resulting chaos and moral relativism in Israel. It indicates that instead of following God's

law, individuals were setting their own standards and doing what they felt was right.

3. Micah's mother dedicates the silver to the Lord but then uses it to create a carved image, which is a direct violation of the Ten Commandments. She attempts to honor God but in a sinful and inappropriate way.
4. Levites were members of the tribe of Levi, who were designated to serve God as priests and temple assistants. The Levite from Bethlehem is significant because he becomes a private priest for Micah and later for the tribe of Dan, showing the perversion of the priesthood and religious practices.
5. Micah believes having a Levite priest will ensure Yahweh's blessing and prosperity, despite there being no provision for private priests. This reveals his ignorance of true worship and his desire to mix his own ideas of worship with God's law.
6. The tribe of Dan was unable to drive out the Canaanites from their initial land allotment along the seacoast. As a result, they were forced to find a new place to settle, leading them on their migration north.
7. The city that the Danites conquered and renamed Dan was originally called Laish or Leshem. This name change marked their new settlement after their migration north.
8. The Danites scouted Micah's home and saw his shrine, including the ephod, household gods, carved image, and metal image. They decide to take these items and the Levite priest with them, as they saw it as advantageous.
9. The Levite justifies leaving Micah by accepting the Danites' offer to become the priest of a whole tribe. This represents a career advancement, showing he was more interested in status and material gain than serving God faithfully.
10. The Danites set up Micah's carved image in their new city, and the family of Jonathan (a descendant of Moses) served as priests for the tribe of Dan for many years. This demonstrates the long-lasting, illegitimate religious practices and a departure from centralized worship, which they maintained until the Babylonian captivity.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following essay questions in a 5-paragraph essay format.

1. Analyze the role of religious syncretism in the story of Micah and the Danites. How does this story illustrate the dangers of mixing true worship with pagan practices?
2. Compare and contrast the external threats to Israel in Judges 2-16 with the internal threats seen in Judges 17-18. How do these different types of threats contribute to the overall message of the book?
3. Discuss the portrayal of leadership in Judges 17-18. How does the absence of a king and the perversion of the priesthood contribute to the chaos and moral decline depicted in these chapters?
4. Examine the character of the Levite in Judges 17-18. How does his behavior contribute to the overall theme of moral corruption and what does this say about the role of spiritual leaders?
5. Evaluate the significance of the Danites' migration and conquest of Laish within the broader context of the book of Judges. What does their actions tell us about the moral and spiritual state of Israel during this time?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apostasy:** The abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief or principle.
- **Asherah:** A Canaanite mother goddess often associated with fertility and worshipped through sacred poles or trees.
- **Carved Image (or Graven Image):** A sculpted or molded figure representing a deity, which is forbidden by the Ten Commandments.
- **Ephod:** A priestly garment or vest, sometimes associated with divination, used to seek guidance from God.
- **Levite:** A member of the tribe of Levi, who were designated to serve as priests and temple assistants.
- **Laish/Leshem:** The original name of the city which the Danites conquered and renamed Dan.
- **Micah:** A man from the hill country of Ephraim who creates a private shrine and employs a Levite as his personal priest.
- **Syncretism:** The mixing or blending of different religious or cultural beliefs and practices.
- **Tabernacle:** A portable sanctuary or tent that served as the primary place of worship for the Israelites before the building of the Temple.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in the Hebrew Bible.

5. FAQs on Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 29, Judges 17-18 – First Appendix Micah and Levite, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Judges 17-18 - Micah, the Levite, and the Tribe of Dan

- **Why are Judges chapters 17-21 placed at the end of the book, and are they chronological?**
- These chapters are placed at the end of Judges not necessarily for chronological reasons but to emphasize the severe moral and spiritual decline within Israel. While the events might have occurred earlier in the period of the judges, they are strategically positioned to showcase the lowest point ("nadir") of Israel's condition, highlighting the need for a godly king.
- **What is the significance of the repeated statement "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes"?**
- This phrase, repeated four times in these chapters, is a key commentary. It highlights the lack of central authority and the resulting moral chaos. The absence of a godly king meant there was no spiritual leadership, leading to decentralized, individualized worship and behavior that did not align with God's law. It also implies that a good king would have guided the people to follow the Lord.
- **Who was Micah, and what was the problem with his actions?**
- Micah, a man from the hill country of Ephraim, sought to establish his own private shrine and worship. He initially stole silver from his mother, then restored it and she decided to dedicate the silver to the Lord. However, the silver was used to make a carved image which was a direct violation of the Ten Commandments, indicating a mixture of true worship with pagan practices ("syncretism"). He appointed his son as a priest and later hired a Levite, illustrating a complete disregard for the established religious order and laws of Israel.
- **Who was the Levite, and what is significant about his story?**
- The Levite, a young man from Bethlehem (not a designated Levitical city), was aimless and searching for a place to sojourn. He was hired by Micah to be his private priest, again violating the centralized system of worship the Lord established. The Levite's willingness to serve a private shrine for personal gain emphasizes the spiritual corruption of the time. His actions were opportunistic and not for the service of the Lord.

- **Why did the Tribe of Dan migrate, and what role did Micah's shrine play in that?**
- The tribe of Dan was originally allotted land near the seacoast but was unable to drive out the Canaanites. They migrated north, and during this journey, they encountered Micah's shrine. Lured by the "good stuff" of Micah's shrine, the Danites stole the religious items, and the Levite priest, and carried them north. This demonstrates their religious corruption, as they valued personal gain and convenience over God's commands.
- **How did the Danites' actions towards the people of Laish demonstrate their spiritual and moral state?**
- After stealing Micah's items and priest, the Danites brutally attacked the unsuspecting and peaceful city of Laish, murdering its inhabitants, and then renaming the city Dan. This violent and unprovoked assault highlights the moral depravity of the tribe, showing that they acted with savage cruelty, and demonstrated a lack of concern for innocent lives.
- **What was the ultimate fate of the carved image and the Levite priest?**
- The Danites set up the stolen carved image in their new territory and made the Levite, or rather his descendants, priests to their tribe, establishing their own corrupt religious system. This unauthorized priesthood and the false worship of the graven image persisted for many centuries, until the captivity of the land which was when the Babylonians took the Israelites into exile. It was a continual and consistent source of ungodly practice.
- **What overall message do these chapters convey about the state of Israel during the time of the Judges?**
- Judges 17-18 paint a grim picture of Israel's spiritual and moral decline. The lack of a godly leader led to religious syncretism, individualized worship, and violence. These chapters emphasize the urgent need for a king who would lead the people in righteousness and underscore the consequences of straying from God's laws. The stories are not about the intervention or hand of God, but the perversion of worship and savagery on multiple levels, illustrating a people without God.