

Judges 17:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

Analysis

And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah. This seemingly innocuous introduction opens one of Scripture's darkest narratives about syncretistic worship and spiritual corruption. The name Micah (Hebrew מִיכָּהּ) means "Who is like Yahweh?"—profoundly ironic given that this man will create idols in direct violation of the second commandment. The location "mount Ephraim" places this in the central hill country where Joshua himself had been buried (Joshua 24:30), highlighting how quickly Israel abandoned covenant faithfulness after the conquest generation died.

The phrase introduces the book's concluding section (chapters 17-21), which illustrates the moral and spiritual chaos resulting from Israel's apostasy. Unlike earlier judge narratives where God raised up deliverers, these chapters show Israel without divine intervention—abandoned to the consequences of their sin. From a Reformed perspective, this verse demonstrates the total depravity of humanity apart from God's grace—even covenant people with the law, tabernacle, and priesthood available fell into idolatry when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

Theologically, Micah represents the human tendency toward self-constructed religion. Rather than traveling to Shiloh where God's authorized tabernacle stood (Joshua 18:1), Micah created his own convenient worship system. This prefigures Jeroboam's golden calves (1 Kings 12:28-30) and warns against consumer

Christianity that reshapes faith according to personal preference rather than divine revelation.

Historical Context

Judges 17 occurs during the period of tribal confederation (approximately 1200-1100 BC), after Joshua's death but before the monarchy. Mount Ephraim was central tribal territory, originally allotted to Joshua's tribe (Joshua 16). The Levitical system was fully established with cities throughout Israel (Joshua 21), and the tabernacle was at Shiloh in Ephraimite territory (Judges 18:31), making authorized worship readily accessible.

Archaeological evidence from this period (Late Bronze/Early Iron Age transition) shows widespread syncretism in Israelite settlements, with Canaanite religious objects found alongside Yahwistic symbols, confirming the biblical narrative's description of compromised worship. After Joshua's generation died, successive generations "knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). Without godly leadership and with the seductive influence of surrounding Canaanite religion, Israel repeatedly fell into apostasy.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do we, like Micah, create convenient, personalized religion rather than submitting to God's revealed pattern for worship in Scripture?
2. What does Micah's name ("Who is like Yahweh?") teach us about the inconsistency between our professed faith and actual practice?
3. In what ways does contemporary Christianity reflect the "every man did what was right in his own eyes" mentality of Judges?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי

H1961

And there was a man

H376

וְיָשָׁן

H2022

מִגְּרֹר

H669

אֶפְרַיִם

H669

וְשָׁם

H8034

וְשָׁם

מִיכָּהָה

H4321

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