

A Lack of Instruction

Devotional Reading: [Deuteronomy 6:10–16](#)

Background Scripture: [Judges 17–18](#)

[Judges 17:1–6](#)

¹ Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim ² said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it.”

Then his mother said, “The LORD bless you, my son!”

³ When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, “I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make an image overlaid with silver. I will give it back to you.”

⁴ So after he returned the silver to his mother, she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who used them to make the idol. And it was put in Micah’s house.

⁵ Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest. ⁶ In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

[Judges 18:18–19, 27](#)

¹⁸ When the five men went into Micah’s house and took the idol, the ephod and the household gods, the priest said to them, “What are you doing?”

¹⁹ They answered him, “Be quiet! Don’t say a word. Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn’t it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man’s household?”

²⁷ Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a people at peace and secure. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city.



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Key Text

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.—Judges 17:6

Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount the story of Micah and his mother.
2. Compare Micah's worship with proper Levitical procedure ([Exodus 20:4](#); [29:4–9](#); [Numbers 3:5–13](#)).
3. Listen to the hymn “Be Thou My Vision” and pray for God's directives to guide their life.

Lesson Outline

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- B. Lesson Context

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- B. Imaged Idol (vv. 3–4)
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Shrine of the Times

II. Misguided Engagement (Judges 18:18–19, 27)

- A. Persuaded Priest (vv. 18–19)
- B. Cruel Conquest (v. 27)

Conclusion

- A. Maintaining Continuity
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Amorites	<i>Am-uh-rites</i>
ephod	<i>ee-fod</i>
Laish	<i>Lay-ish</i>
Levitical	<i>Leh-vit-ih-kul</i>
Micah	<i>My-kuh</i>

Introduction

A. Muddling Along

I took a job one summer that lacked training and access to information. It meant that one afternoon, I found myself hopelessly driving around, trying to locate a storage unit. The only tip I had was a street name. After an extended search, I learned it was the wrong street. Ultimately, I broke down and called my predecessor, who told me where to find it—but I’d wasted a lot of time on a futile hunt!

There are numerous reasons people “muddle through” tasks. Although lacking in expertise, organization, or preparation, a person may take on an unfamiliar project out of a sense of pride, a commitment to self-teaching, or feeling bothersome asking questions. It’s a human tendency to put our heads down and move forward with brute force.

Today’s text narrates an egregious case of muddling through religious rites and practices.

B. Lesson Context

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](#)).

I. Misguided Worship ([Judges 17:1–6](#))

A. Stolen Silver (vv. 1–2)

1. Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim

The *hill country of Ephraim* refers to a hilly, forested region that extends from Bethel to the plain of Jezreel ([Joshua 16:5–9](#)). The name is associated with the tribe of Ephraim, named after one of the sons of Joseph ([Genesis 41:52](#)). The region spreads approximately sixteen miles from north to south and twenty-seven miles from east to west. Ephraim's locality is central to the land claimed by God's people.

The name *Micah* means “Who is like the Lord?” In naming their son in association with the Hebrew God, Micah's parents identify themselves as Israelites. There is more than one individual named Micah in the Old Testament, and we should not get confused about which one the text refers to here. The Micah of today's lesson is not the Micah of the biblical prophetic book that bears that name; that Micah won't come on the scene for another five hundred years or so.

2a. said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it.”

Micah's story begins midstream with a verbal response to a spoken curse. A large sum of *silver* was stolen from Micah's *mother*, and in reaction, she condemned the person who took it. She harbors a desire for retribution and wishes injurious harm on the thief—whoever he is.

The sum of *eleven hundred shekels of silver* represents remarkable wealth. It is one hundred ten times more than the annual stipend offered to Micah's priest ([Judges 17:10](#)). In terms of weight, 1,100

shekels weigh more than twenty-three pounds! Additionally, this specific and sizable amount matches what each Philistine ruler paid Delilah to betray Samson in the previous chapter (16:5). There is no direct link between the two events or amounts (Delilah's total is multiplied by five). Still, readers naturally connect the figures and are meant to do so. In both instances, the sum is linked to betrayal, faithlessness, and grand liberality.

Micah admits that he heard his mother's *curse* and that he is the thief. Presumably, he does so because he wants her to withdraw the denunciation. Otherwise, he fears it spells his doom. People throughout the ancient Near East understood such declarations as effective in revengeful power.

Micah may be assumed to be the head of this household because the narrative does not mention his father.

What Do You Think?

Why does Micah confess to his theft?

Digging Deeper

What is the function of confession in human relationships? In the spiritual life of believers?

2b. Then his mother said, “The LORD bless you, my son!”

Micah's mother quickly blesses him, hoping to reverse the curse she previously pronounced. As with curse formulae, residents in the ancient Near East believed declarative blessings like this to be effective in power. She invokes the name of *the Lord*, suggesting her devotion to the God of Israel.

The Lord's name is used similarly, however, even in non-biblical writings of the time, alongside the fictitious gods of other nations. Ancient artifacts like scrolls of magic and stone inscriptions named deities in such ways. So, we can't assume the level of this woman's fidelity from her words alone. The Law of Moses addresses this irreverent use, warning the Israelites not to misuse the Lord's name ([Exodus 20:7](#); [Deuteronomy 5:11](#)). Micah's mother is doing everything she can to revoke her earlier wish for harm.

God, give us Your vision.



Sheet 6—Fall 2026, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Lesson 8

Visual for [Lesson 8](#). Lead a prayer time centered around asking for God's vision rather than doing what is right in our own eyes.

Resolved Mystery

Many years ago, my diamond and sapphire ring disappeared. I often wondered if I had misplaced it. Every time I searched for it, the thought crossed my mind that someone might have taken it. If that were the case, I knew my search was in vain.

If someone stole it, only one person could have done so. Each time the thought flashed through my mind, I pushed it away. He was my son—I couldn't bear to consider it seriously. However, I knew my son was lost and trying to find his way. He was barely an adult and making unwise decisions. He'd done a lot of things, but stealing? From me?

A few years later, my son came to me and confessed. He had indeed taken that ring, and it was gone for good. Unexpectedly, I was relieved and thankful. It wasn't my inattentiveness that had lost such a beautiful gift from my husband! I finally knew what had happened to it. The admission birthed newfound respect for my son, and our relationship began mending.

Micah's mother met his confession with thankfulness rather than anger. More than that, she gave him a blessing. That forgiveness, that relief, that blessing—they resonate with me. When your flesh

tells you to hate—to retaliate—do you have the strength to bless instead?

—PM

B. Imaged Idol (vv. 3–4)

3. When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, “I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make an image overlaid with silver. I will give it back to you.”

To further avoid the repercussions of the curse, Micah returns the money, and his mother consecrates it to *the Lord*. In the process of making idols, it was considered necessary to first dedicate (or sanctify) the materials used. They were consecrated, or set apart, for this particular use. Micah’s mother’s words are confusing because they twist the idea of things declared holy *to the Lord* with an action expressly forbidden by the law. Silver can certainly be sanctified for the Lord’s purposes, as with offerings for use in the tabernacle (compare [Exodus 25:3](#); [26:19–21](#); [31:4](#); [38:19–27](#)). But the law prohibits making idols ([20:23](#); [Deuteronomy 7:25](#)). Nevertheless, the Israelites frequently struggle against forming idols—or worse, they *don’t* struggle against doing so ([Exodus 32](#)). Such figurines were common in the ancient Near Eastern cultures that surrounded them.

The description of the *image* made here denotes both a sculpting process and the overlay of molten metal. Ancient idol makers often carved an image out of wood and covered it with bronze, silver, or gold (compare [Jeremiah 10:2–4](#); [Revelation 9:20](#)).

The text mentions two restorations: Micah returns the *silver* to his mother, and then she states she will return it to him. It is unclear whether she is communicating that she intended the silver for use in constructing an idol before it was stolen or that her intention is new. If the purpose is new, Micah’s mother desires the idol’s creation as an additional protection against the curse she uttered.

4. So after he returned the silver to his mother, she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who used them to make the idol. And it was put in Micah’s house.

After Micah returns the funds, *his mother* moves forward with her plan and uses a portion of the money to make *the idol*. The difference in sums is confusing. Although the woman claims she’s dedicated the full amount to making the idol, she ultimately uses only *two hundred shekels*. The remaining nine hundred units disappear from the story.

The Hebrew term translated *silversmith* signifies a worker who specializes in refining various metals. These craftsmen purified, poured, shaped, dipped, and cast metals (compare [Isaiah 40:19](#)). Occasionally, Scripture refers to the Lord utilizing a similar refining process as he molds, shapes, and purifies his people ([Psalm 66:10](#); [Isaiah 48:10](#); [Malachi 3:3](#)).

The metal worker specifically makes a graven image for Micah’s family. The creation of this idol goes directly against God’s second command to Israel: “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” ([Exodus 20:4](#)). The specific form of this image is unknown, but idols in the region often take anthropomorphic (human-like) shapes ([Psalm 115:4–7](#); [Isaiah 44:13](#)). The family not only commissions the creation of the false god, but then they set it in a prominent place in *Micah’s house*!

C. Private Priest (vv. 5–6)

5a. Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods

A *shrine* was a sacred space in an ancient Near Eastern home that was designed for the residence of a deity. A shrine like this one, on a family's property, is thought to be a way to secure divine favor. The Hebrew phrase translated *shrine* here is the same as is used to refer to the tabernacle at Shiloh ([Judges 18:31](#)).

The Lord prohibited setting up sanctuaries like Micah's as alternatives or even supplements to his designated place of worship ([Deuteronomy 12:1–7](#)). There was to be a single place of worship for the Israelites as a protection against the pagan worship practices of the surrounding nations. Despite his family's relative proximity to Shiloh and God's instructions, Micah creates a personal shrine.

The sacrilege goes on: Micah makes an *ephod*. This is a garment the priests wear while serving in the tabernacle ([Exodus 28:2–14](#); [39:2–7](#)). Micah's replication of this priestly attire copies pieces of God's instructions but is a departure from God's stated intentions. The exact use of such an item outside of the tabernacle is unclear.

The exact nature of *household gods* remains debated as well. The most common interpretation is that they were representations of ancestors who maintained a link with the family beyond the grave. This veneration of the dead was yet another prohibited practice ([Leviticus 19:28](#); [Deuteronomy 14:1–2](#)).

5b. and installed one of his sons as his priest.

The word *installed* translates a Hebrew idiom also found in [Leviticus 16:32](#). It refers to what may be called ordination or consecration; the same term also appears, with slightly different Hebrew spelling, in [Exodus 29:9](#). The expression is literally “filling the hand,” symbolizing endowing the person with authority. Either physically or metaphorically, Micah places the idol(s) in his son's hands, installing him as a *priest* over their household cult.

What Do You Think?

What was wrong with Micah's choices in worship?

Digging Deeper

How do [Exodus 20:4](#) and [29:4–9](#) enlighten your answer?

Shrine of the Times

My husband and I had dinner at a friend's house one evening. The conversation turned to hockey, a very well-loved subject for the men. During their discussion, the friend showed my husband his “hockey room” devoted to celebrating the LA Kings. There were signed jerseys on the wall, albums of hockey cards neatly shelved, patches galore, and pendants lined up like crown molding. Bobbleheads, ornaments, signed pictures, and game pucks filled the room. Honestly, it was a bit overwhelming, and the *reverence* on this man's face was unmistakable. Even my husband was taken aback—and the Kings are his favorite team as well!

My husband's friend didn't have a personal relationship with the team. He venerated their iconog-

raphy and identified himself with them—but he wasn’t a player. There is a line between fandom and idolatry. We must be on guard to know the difference. What or who holds the highest priority in your life?

—PM

6. In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

This verse summarizes the core problem: *Israel* lacks a central authority, and the people choose to dismiss God’s laws in favor of personal options. It is the first appearance of a refrain that echoes throughout the book of Judges (18:1; 19:1; 21:25). God explicitly declared that the Israelites were not to live this way—“everyone doing as they see fit”—after entering the promised land (Deuteronomy 12:8). Rather, God calls his people to do what is right in God’s eyes (Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 12:25–28; 13:18). Micah, his family, and the Israelites as a whole are mired in a place that God warned them to avoid.

What Do You Think?

Is choosing personal options over God’s directives a universal problem in all times and places?

Digging Deeper

What “guard rails” are necessary to help communities choose God’s ways over human ways?

II. Misguided Engagement

(Judges 18:18–19, 27)

A lot happens in the twenty-four verses that intervene between our lesson texts. A Levite from Bethlehem travels into the hill country and encounters Micah (Judges 17:7–8). Micah invites him to stay, and the opportunistic Levite is inducted into priestly service for Micah in the household shrine. Micah pays him an annual salary plus room and board (17:10–12). Micah believes the result will be to encourage the Lord’s blessings (17:13).

Eventually, spies from the tribe of Dan show up at Micah’s house (Judges 18:2). They are on a scouting mission, looking for a new place for their tribe to settle (18:1). The Danites have been assigned land like the other tribes (Joshua 19:40–48), but they have been unable or unwilling to take possession of it by overcoming the Amorites who dwell there (Judges 1:34). Therefore, the tribe looks elsewhere for suitable habitation.

While spending the night in Ephraim, the spies recognize the Levite’s voice and ask him to inquire of God whether their journey will be successful (Judges 18:3, 5). The Levite tells them what they want to hear (18:6). So, the spies return home, gather six hundred troops, and head back into the region of Ephraim to acquire the land (18:9–11). En route to their destination, the Danite army stops at Micah’s house and loots his sanctuary (18:17).

A. Persuaded Priest (vv. 18–19)

18. When the five men went into Micah's house and took the idol, the ephod and the household gods, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"

The Danites are no more attentive to the commands of God than Micah. Instead, they approach *Micah's house* as pillagers. They observe the standard practice of conquerors in the ancient Near East as they strip the "temple" of its valuables. The Danites take Micah's idols as talismans of favor for their mission. With a "might makes right" mentality, they act with impunity because they have six hundred armed men guarding the entrance (18:16–17).

The Levite protests the theft and sacrilege, blind to the irony of his complaint. His question, *What are you doing?*, could be asked of him too, as an illegitimate priest administering a household cult.

What Do You Think?

What blinds humans to the irony of our complaints?

Digging Deeper

How can believers guard truth and right practice?

19. They answered him, "Be quiet! Don't say a word. Come with us, and be our father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man's household?"

The offer the Danites make to the Levite is the same as the one Micah made—be *our father* and a *priest* to us (Judges 17:10). The position of a *father* means acting as an authoritative voice and advisor (compare Genesis 45:8). They ask him to halt his objection and then offer him a deal, which the opportunistic Levite takes (Judges 18:20). The Danites' offer amplifies the Levite's perceived influence. With Micah, he serves a single extended family. From the tribe, however, he will accrue more honor because he will serve a much larger community. The offer appeals to his sense of self-importance and the expansion of his authority.

What Do You Think?

What was wrong with the Danites' invitation to the Levite?

Digging Deeper

How does Numbers 3:5–13 affect your understanding?

B. Cruel Conquest (v. 27)

27. Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a people at peace and secure. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city.

Micah realizes his idols and *priest* are gone and calls his neighbors together, hoping to fight the looters (Judges 18:22). After catching up to them, the Danites easily convince Micah to return home, lest he suffer worse loss (18:25–26).

As the army arrives at the town of *Laish*, the men are well beyond the area designated as Dan's inheritance (Joshua 19:40–47). Their position marks the northernmost part of Israel.

The army's pillaging continues. The Danites overpower the people of Laish and eventually settle there themselves ([Judges 18:28](#), not in today's text). At first glance, their actions toward the city resemble God's instructions regarding entering the land and taking possession ([Deuteronomy 7:1–5](#)). Yet the Danites act against the Law of Moses, as [Judges 18:28–31](#) indicates.

Conclusion

A. Maintaining Continuity

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.

B. Prayer

Father God, we thank you for preserving your Word. Help us receive guidance from it in every way. May we remember your miraculous and loving provision from one generation to the next. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Know Scripture and put it into practice.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Invite participants to play an alternative game of “Simon Says.” Instead of doing the thing Simon says to do, tell them they must do something completely different. Example: If “Simon says, hop on one foot,” a player should do anything that doesn’t involve hopping on one foot. If they *obey* Simon, they are “out.” Add in complex actions such as, “Simon says, do a hula dance” or “Simon says, pretend you are a chef preparing a meal.” In addition, say the commands quickly. Play until everyone is “out.” At the end of the game, discuss what made this basic game challenging as an adult.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Basic Instructions” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Distribute a black marker to each group. Have participants work in groups of four to complete as indicated.

Say, “Following instructions may seem tedious at times, but if we don’t pay attention, things can quickly become confusing and chaotic. In today’s lesson, notice what happened when people neglected God’s instructions.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read [Judges 17:1–4](#) aloud. Allow time for learners to give a quick summary. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—How do you see Micah’s response reflecting what he observed and learned from his mother? 2—What do you know about Micah’s attitude toward God and God’s instructions for worship?

Ask a volunteer to read [Judges 17:5–6](#) aloud. Divide participants into four small groups and provide them with the following cross-references. Ask each group to discuss the differences between God’s intentions and Micah’s implementation.

Shrine Group. Read [Exodus 25:8–9](#); [29:44–46](#).

Ephod Group. Read [Exodus 28:1–14](#).

Idols Group. Read [Exodus 20:1–6](#), [22–23](#).

Priests Group. Read [Numbers 16:1–5](#); [17:1–10](#).

After calling time, have groups share their findings. Ask: What incorrect mindset or attitude did Micah have that led him to justify his actions as “right”?

Ask a volunteer to read [Judges 18:18–19](#), [27](#) aloud. Give the four small groups new themed names and provide them with these cross-references:

Rachel Group. Read [Genesis 31:14–19](#).

Aaron Group. Read [Exodus 32:1–6](#).

Gideon Group. Read [Judges 8:22–27](#).

Israel Group. Read [1 Samuel 4:1–11](#).

Ask groups to share a summary of their passage with the whole group. Identify as a class the commonalities between the passages and [Judges 18:18–19](#), [27](#). Have a volunteer read [Romans 1:21–25](#) to the group and discuss: When people exchange the glory of God for man-made idols, what does this indicate about their thoughts and beliefs?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Choose This Day” exercise from the activity page. Ask small groups to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Before the lesson, find a recording of the hymn “Be Thou My Vision.” Have the lyrics available and be prepared to play it for the class.

Distribute index cards and pens. Say, “The people in this story lost sight of God and his commands. They went their own way. Sometimes, we also forget God’s directions.” Allow a couple of minutes for silent reflection. Ask participants to identify ways they have deviated from God’s commands and write a prayer of confession. Then play the hymn, “Be Thou My Vision.” Encourage participants to write down phrases from the hymn that stand out to them. End the lesson with a prayer for all participants. Ask God for wisdom and the courage to faithfully follow and obey him.

Option. Print out (or bring songbooks) and distribute the lyrics of “Be Thou My Vision” to all participants. Sing the hymn together.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(October 25—A Lack of Instruction\)](#)
