

## Judges Chapter 17 Part 1

This week we start on chapter 17. The narrative is very different than previous narratives. So much so, that many commentators claim there was a second author. Whatever the history behind the text, we have an agreed to text that was inspired by the Holy Spirit. That is what we will study.

### **Judges 17:1 Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah.**

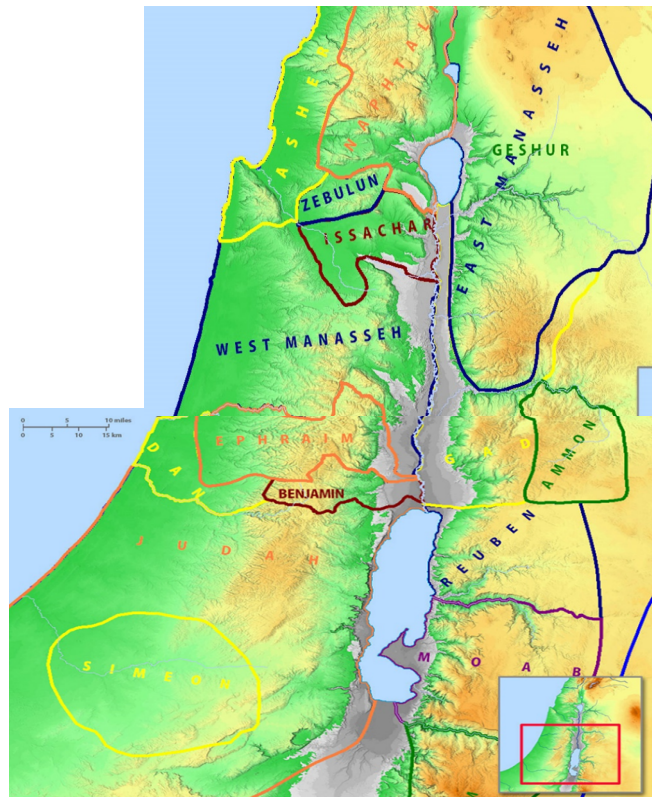
**Now there was.** This marks the beginning of a new narrative. However, this narrative and the one that follows are not in the same form as the previous ones. There is no judge here. Preachers and commentators alike point to chapters 17-21 as the abyss of Israelite spiritual life. This chapter is about a man and his mother and the various sins they commit. These people are very religious so you don't see anyone getting murdered. That comes later in the book. But in the first few verses of chapter 17 you do see sins none the less.

**Hill country of Ephraim.** Literally the “mountain/hill of Ephraim.” Per Merrill Unger, “The rendering “hill country” is misleading. “With their usual exactness the Hebrews saw that these regions (i.e. the mountains of Judah, Ephraim, and Naphtali) formed part of one range, the whole of which they called not by a collective name, but singularly—the mountain” (Smith, *Hist., Geo.*, p.53).

On the following map, note the mountains in the area of Ephraim, Judah and Benjamin. Also note the area labeled as “Dan.” When we get to chapter 18 we will deal with the relocation of the tribe of Dan. When we get there we will mention that the tribe of Dan, and the tribe of Ephraim, are not mentioned in the list of the twelve tribes of Revelation 7:4-8.

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Now that I mentioned that, there would be someone who would ask, “Why?” The answer to that question may in part be derived from a study of Judges. Ephraim has previously been mentioned as a problem for judges. Dan in chapter 18 is a problem. Here is a quote from Walvoord’s “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” “In the apocalyptic enumeration, Dan and Ephraim are omitted. Both these tribes were remarkable as being connected with idolatry in Israel, the probable reason for blotting out of their names here (Deut. 29:18-21). But in the end grace triumphs, and Dan is named first in the future distribution of the land amongst the tribe (Ezek. 48:2), but, while first named, it is the farthest removed from the temple, being situation to the extreme north.” (he is quoting Walter Scott).



From FreeBibleImages.org  
Note the yellow area in Ephraim

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**Micah.** Means, “Who is like Ya(weh).”

Now let us read the “Ten Commandments” for a review since they are clearly violated in the text that follows. The numbering of the commandments varies depending on different traditions.

The scheme I used below is from Reformed tradition. Also, Deuteronomy 5:4-21 also contains a version of the ten commandments. The Ten Commandments do not apply to Christians from the Mosaic Law. They do however apply to the Church when the New Testament either implicitly or explicitly constrains us to that standard. That is, all except the “Keep the Sabbath” commandment. That is nowhere in the Epistles. But the commandment under which all other commandments fall is the Law of walking by the Spirit which is the same as saying to “love,” which is fruit of the Holy Spirit. By New Testament or Church, I am referring to the epistles. The Gospels were written during the Church Age for the edification of the Church, but they narrate Jesus’ life in the Jewish Dispensation.

**Exodus 20:2 [1<sup>st</sup> Commandment] “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**

**Exodus 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.**

The essence of the first commandment is in many places in the New Testament and is assumed to apply to us. Here is one

**1 Corinthians 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,**

**1 Corinthians 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.**

**1 John 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.**

1 John 4 is a powerful passage on love. Not only do we love God but we should manifest that love for other believers.

**Exodus 20:4 [2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment] “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.**

**Exodus 20:5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,**

**Exodus 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**

**1 John 5:21 Little children, guard yourselves from idols.**

**Exodus 20:7 [3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment] “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.**

**1 Timothy 6:1 All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.**

**Exodus 20:8 [4<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.**

**Exodus 20:9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,**

**Exodus 20:10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.**

**Exodus 20:11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.**

**Exodus 20:12 [5<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be**

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**prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.**

**Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**

**Ephesians 6:2 Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),**

**Ephesians 6:3 so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.**

**Exodus 20:13 [6<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “You shall not murder.**

**1 Peter 4:15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;**

**Exodus 20:14 [7<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “You shall not commit adultery.**

**Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**

**Exodus 20:15 [8<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “You shall not steal.**

**Ephesian 4:28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing**

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**with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.**

**Exodus 20:16 [9<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

**Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.**

**Exodus 20:17 [10<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”**

**Ephesians 5:5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

My original plan was to stick to Judges chapter 17. But, it was evident that individuals in chapter 17 were violating the Ten Commandments. That brought up questions of what are the Ten Commandments and do they apply today to Christians.

### ***Points on the Ten Commandments***

1. The “Ten Commandments” refer to what the Hebrew calls the “Ten Words/Matters” found in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:4-21.

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2. They are identified as “ten” in Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13, 10:4. The word for “commandment” is actually the word for “word” or “matter,” not commandment.
3. The Hebrew text does not identify individual commandments with a number. As a result, there are a variety of different numberings as summarized by Wikipedia:

LXX	P	R	S	T	A	C	L	Commandment (KJV)
—	—	(1)	—	1	—	1	—	I am the Lord thy God
1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	Thou shalt have no other gods before me
2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image
3	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
4	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy
5	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	Honour thy father and thy mother
6	8	6	5	6	5	5	5	Thou shalt not murder
7	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	Thou shalt not commit adultery
8	7	8	7	8	7	7	7	Thou shalt not steal
9	9	9	8	9	8	8	8	Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour
10	10	10	9	10	10	10	9	Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house
10	10	10	9	10	9	9	10	Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife
10	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	or his slaves, or his animals, or anything of thy neighbour
—	—	—	10	—	—	—	—	You shall set up these stones, which I command you today, on Aargaareezem. (Tsedaka)

**LXX**  
**P = Philo**  
**R = Reformed**  
**S = Samaritan**  
**T = Talmud**  
**A = Augustine**  
**C = Catholic**  
**L = Luther**

Table copied from  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten\\_Commandments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Commandments)

4. A question in Christian circles is, “Do the Ten Commandments apply to Christians today. The short answer would be no. Christ gave us “a new commandment.”



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**John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**

But we cannot fulfill this apart from the commandment to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the mandate in the Christian life. To walk in the filling of the Holy Spirit.

**Ephesians 5:17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

**Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,**

**2 Corinthians 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight**

Back to the issue of the applicability of the Ten Commandments to the Christian. They only apply if indicated in the New Testament epistles. The longer answer is yes they apply except for the Sabbath because they are stated in the New Testament either explicitly or implicitly. Nowhere is the Sabbath said to apply to Christians. In many cases, the remaining nine commandments are not given as a command but are implicit in the text of the New Testament. In the quotes from Exodus I included applicable New Testament passages.

**Judges 17:2 He said to his mother, “The eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.” And his mother said, “Blessed be my son by the Lord.”**

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**1100 pieces of silver.** That is a lot of silver. It might have been the woman's life savings. In the foregoing narrative, each of the five lords of the Philistines gave Delilah 1100 pieces of silver. I suspect this had some significance in the culture at that time.

**I took it.** Micah admits to stealing the 1100 (pieces) of silver. He just admitted to breaking one of the ten commandments.

**Exodus 20:15 [8<sup>th</sup> Commandment] “You shall not steal.**

If the woman used the Lord's name in vain, she may have committed a sin against another of the ten commandments.

**Exodus 20:7 [3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment] “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.**

Here is an extended quote from the TDOT concerning curses. It focuses on our passage.

“It is clear from Jgs. 17:2 that one function of such curses is to protect a person's property: Micah returns the pieces of silver which he had stolen from his mother, because she had pronounced a curse upon the thief, and he must have been afraid that calamity would strike him because of it. When his mother learned that her son was a thief, she made the curse ineffective by pronouncing a blessing on Micah. Unfortunately, only the wording of the blessing is preserved in the text, and not the wording of the curse. But it must have had a form similar to that of the blessing, as is customary even today among the Bedouins in such cases. If a Bedouin loses something, he declares among his own tribe and among neighboring tribes: “I hold the person who finds this thing responsible for it. If he keeps it, may Allah cut him off from his property and his

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family.” Then no one dares keep this article which he has found; he returns it immediately in order to escape the curse. It is on this basis that one can best understand Lev. 5:1: “If any one sins in that he hears an audible curse to testify and, though he is a witness, having either seen or come to know about the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity.” The “audible curse” is the conditional imprecation which the person who has been wronged pronounces on the thief, the thief’s partner, or the dishonest person who finds what he has lost. According to Prov. 29:24, the thief’s partner “hates his own life” because he has heard the curse and yet shares the spoil with the thief. In these cases, a private person legally pronounces the imprecation as soon as his property loss has been discovered, in order to make the thief or person who finds it return it. Thus, the curse is in effect only under certain condition, viz., when the thief or the one who finds the lost article does not return it. Furthermore for the curse to be in effect, it is necessary for it to be pronounced publicly or made known openly.”

The use of this word in other context is not covered here.

**Judges 17:3 He then returned the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother, and his mother said, “I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you.”**

There may be an issue with the text as far as where a phrase is to be located, either in verse 2 or verse 3. We will deal with the text as given in the NASB 1995.

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**I wholly dedicate.** Two words as an infinitive absolute for emphasis. The root word means to “dedicate,” “separate,” “be holy.” This sounds like a vow.

**Graven image and a molten image.** These are idols.

This is a violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment:

**Exodus 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.**

Both of these items were forbidden under the Mosaic law:

**Deuteronomy 27:15 ‘Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’**

The “curse” in Deuteronomy 27:15 is a different word than the one we encounter in Judges 17. But this is coming from God. Note that this word in Deuteronomy is also used in the curses of Genesis chapter 3 after the fall.

**Judges 17:4 So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah.**

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Question here concerns the amount of the silver that Micah's mother kept. Was the entire amount still dedicated to God or did she take 200 pieces of silver out of the 1100 for the idols and keep the rest violating what she said was dedicated to God? Did she steal from God?

The silversmith, if he was an Israelite was also violating the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. But he was making money out of this. Paul, in the New Testament encountered strong opposition from the locals when he condemned the use of idols as not gods at all. This led to the reduction in the silversmith's income. (Acts 19:23-41).

**Judges 17:5 And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons, that he might become his priest.**

Micah had a shrine. This reminds of Gideon's father's altar to Baal and Asherah. In this case, here in Judges, this is a personal household shrine instead of a shrine for the community. An unanswered question is, was this a shrine to Yahweh or to a pagan god? Either way, there were not supposed to be images made as Exodus 20:4 says. The Tabernacle was the place of worship toward God, not some local shrine.

**Ephod.** From the Jewish Encyclopedia:

“The word "ephod" has an entirely different meaning in the second group of passages, all of which belong to the historical books. It is certain that the word can not here mean a garment. This is evident in Judges viii. 26-27, where it is recorded that Gideon took the golden earrings of the Midianites, weighing 1,700 shekels of gold, and made an "ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah," where it was worshiped by all Israel. In Judges xvii. 5 Micah made an ephod and teraphim for his sanctuary. I Sam. xxi. 9 records that an ephod stood in the sanctuary at

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Nob, and that Goliath's sword was kept behind it. In these passages it is clear that something other than a mantle or article of attire is meant. Even where the phrase "to carry" the ephod occurs, it is evident from the Hebrew "nasa" that reference is made to something carried in the hand or on the shoulder (comp. I Sam. xxiii. 6).”

“The most natural inference from all these passages is that "ephod" here signifies an image that was set up in the sanctuary, especially since the word is cited with Teraphim, which undoubtedly refers to an image (comp. Hosea iii. 4). This assumption obtains strong confirmation from the fact that in Judges xvii. 3 et seq., which is compiled from two sources, the words "pesel" and "massekah" (graven image and molten image) are used interchangeably with "ephod" and "teraphim.””

**Judges 17:6 In those days there was no king  
in Israel; every man did what was right in his  
own eyes.**

Interesting that this phrase is used three additional times in the book of Judges (18:1; 19:1; 21:25). There was no absolute authority, neither human nor divine. Judges chapter 2 tells us that the Israelites had abandoned Yahweh.

**Judges 2:11 Then the sons of Israel did evil in  
the sight of the Lord and served the Baals,**

**Judges 2:12 and they forsook the Lord, the  
God of their fathers, who had brought them  
out of the land of Egypt, and followed other  
gods from among the gods of the peoples who  
were around them, and bowed themselves**

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**down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.**

In Judges chapter 2, the accusation was a general one, summarizing the acts of the sons of Israel. But here in chapters 17-21, some specific examples are given. This is the background against which the God-appointed judges operated.

What we may want to list here are the sins which were committed in this chapter:

1. The son stole from the mother. He violated the **eight** commandment.
2. The son stole from the mother. He disrespected her, dishonored her. He violated the **fifth** commandment.
3. The **second** commandment prohibits the making of “graven images” or idols.
4. The mother blessed the son in the name of Yahweh. Did she violate the **third** commandment which prohibits taking the Lord’s name in vain.
5. By worshiping man made idols, they violated the **first** commandment. God is invisible. So we have to worship God in spirit, not a physical substitute. Besides, the place of worship was the tabernacle.