

# A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 17:1-13

Topic

Micah appoints his own disqualified son,  
then an unqualified Levite, to be his household priest

Title

*“Fraudulent Priests & Where to Find Them”*

At the Council of Elrond, convened to determine what to do with the one ring of power, Boromir immediately dismisses the opinion of Strider, saying, “What would a Ranger know of this matter?”

Legolas steps forward, chastising Boromir, revealing that Strider was no mere Ranger. He was Aragorn, son of Arathorn, heir to the throne of Gondor, and Boromir’s rightful king.

Angered, and taken aback, Boromir answers, “Gondor has no king. Gondor needs no king.”

The major note of the remaining five chapters in the Book of Judges is stated in verse six, “In those days *there was no king* in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.”

This phrase will repeat in chapter twenty-one. In between we will be told twice more that Israel had no king.

When the author of Judges (who we believe is Samuel) says “there was no king,” he didn't only mean that it was before the time of the monarchy that would begin with Saul. He meant that the Israelites had rejected God’s governance over them.

Way back in Deuteronomy 33:5, Moses wrote, “Thus **the LORD became king** in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together.”

Refusing to submit to God as their King, they did what was “right in their own eyes.”

It was a disaster - producing one of the most sordid episodes not just in the Bible, but in the history of mankind. In these closing pages of Judges there is wife abuse, homosexuality, gang rape leading to murder, injustice, brother killing brother, kidnaping, and the mutilation of a corpse.

As we work through these final chapters (and are thankful we’re not in them) we nevertheless want to discover honest application to our lives as believers in Jesus Christ. Since He is our King, and is coming again to reign over the Kingdom of God on the earth, we can ask a couple of pertinent questions: #1 What Does Your Household Reveal About Who Is King?, and #2 What Does Your Household Of Faith Reveal About Who Is King?

## #1 What Does Your Household Reveal About Who Is King?

(v1-6)

There are a couple of things we need to know about chapters seventeen through twenty-one:

1. First, they are not chronological, but are, in fact, a prequel. They happened *before* the heroes emerged in the previous chapters.
2. Second, they largely focus on the activities of two Levites.

Levites were helpers to the priests. When Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land (Joshua 13:33), the sons of Levi were the only Israelite tribe that were assigned cities but were not allowed to be landowners "because the Lord the God of Israel Himself is their inheritance" (Deuteronomy 18:2). They were to be supported by the sacrifices and the offerings presented to the Lord at the Tabernacle.

Levites served on a rotation. When not serving at the Tabernacle, they were supposed to be teachers of the Word of God, and counselors, in their assigned cities.

The two Levites highlighted in these chapters were total failures, indicating that a good part of the problem in those days was with the religious authorities failing to preach God's Word.

The pew is often under attack as folks tell you how badly you are falling short in things like your giving and your serving. The pulpit needs to be examined as well; in fact, it ought to be examined more, since it is a calling that comes with great responsibility.

Jdg 17:1 Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

We get the feeling that a similar story could have been told about any of the Jews. What we will hear about Micah and his household was typical of the conditions throughout Israel. This was the average household.

Jdg 17:2 And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears - here *is* the silver with me; I took it." And his mother said, "*May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!*"

Right off you're shaking your head at their behavior. The adult son was a thief. And not a petty thief, either. He stole a fortune.

He seemed to have no conscience bothering him. It was only when he heard mommy utter a "curse" on the thief that he came clean.

I'm guessing mom knew all along it was her son who stole the money. Once she flushed him out, she uttered a blessing to cancel-out the curse.

The word, "superstitious" comes to mind. They were caught-up in curses and anti-curses, as if these meant anything.

Are you at all superstitious? Would you live at 666 Main Street? Does it bother you if the elevator has a button for the 13th floor?

Do you think there are any Christian superstitions? There are.

Some Christian superstitions seem spiritual. There's a famous saying about the Bible, "Sin will keep you from this book, or this book will keep you from sin."

How do you explain it, then, when a Bible teacher, often in his prime, falls into sin? Surely he has been "in this book," studying.

A statement like that reduces the Bible, and Bible reading, to a superstitious charm.

Here's a more subtle version I came across: "The Gospel brings man to God; devotions keep him close to God." Daily devotions, that is. It's one of many such sayings that elevate the importance of having daily devotions.

This is a tough one because I absolutely want to encourage you to have daily devotional time with Jesus. No question.

With that said, ask yourself, "Why am I having devotions?" Let me give you an illustration. Do you have a daily time with your wife (or your husband)? If you do, why is it? Is it because you love them, and would rather be with them than with anyone, or anywhere, else?

Or is it to maintain a bare minimum standard of communication?

Or, worse, because you want to keep him or her happy so they will continue to bless you by performing their part in the marriage?

**Have devotions with Jesus because you love Him. Period.**

One blogging pastor wrote, "any object, behavior, or belief that you invest with the power to save you - or give you good things apart from the power of the living God - is a pious talisman and is driving you away from the gospel."

I would be willing to say that we all have subtle superstitions. Ask the Lord to show you yours.

So far nothing remotely spiritual has taken place in Micah's household. Everyone's actions and reactions are outside the context of the Old Testament Law. They were making this stuff up as they went, as if they had no standard.

Jdg 17:3 So when he had returned the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you."

Micah stole the silver and gave it back. The Law required Micah to add a fifth to what he had stolen, but there is no record of him doing so. The theft cost him nothing; there were no consequences. In fact, he benefitted, as we read next that mom indicated she had set it aside to make two household idols for her son.

Jdg 17:4 Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.

I'm not good at math, but it seems that the silver mom returned to Micah was nine hundred shekels less than the original amount. Micah had learned his thieving ways at home, from his mom.

Jdg 17:5 The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

The Jews were supposed to worship at one central location - at the Tabernacle, where the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat were.

The Tabernacle was in Gilgal for the first fourteen years of capturing and dividing the land. It was then moved to Shiloh for the next 369 years.

**Shiloh was in the territory of Ephraim.** It therefore wasn't even a long, hazardous journey for Micah to worship as prescribed by the Law.

I don't want to belabor it, but this would be a good time to check my attendance at the gatherings of the church. We shouldn't make attendance a superstition. But we are, as believers, exhorted to not forsake gathering together as often as possible, especially as we see that we are living in the End Times (Hebrews 10:25).

Priests must be descended from Aaron. The high priest wore the ephod, a kind of outer vest with precious stones on it representing the tribes of Israel as he ministered before the Lord.

Making your own ephod and household idols; worshipping at a home shrine; appointing your own Ephraimite son to be your priest; these were heresies of the highest order.

Several commentators point out that Micah and his mother managed to break seven of the Ten Commandments *without even stepping outside their household*.

The son didn't honor his mother; instead, he stole from her and then lied about it. First, he coveted the silver, and then he took it. (According to Colossians 3:5, covetousness is idolatry). Then he lied about the whole enterprise until the curse scared him into confessing.

Thus he broke the fifth, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments; and he broke the first and second commandments by having a shrine of false gods in his home. According to Proverbs 30:8-9, when he stole the silver, he broke the third commandment and took the name of the Lord in vain.

For her part, Micah's mother broke the first two commandments by making an idol and encouraging her son to maintain a private "shrine" in his home.

I'm sure you've heard some Bible teacher say of them, "They are the Ten Commandments - *not* the Ten Suggestions!" Behind that clever statement is this fact - the Word of God is objective, *not* subjective. Here's a quote that better explains what I mean:

Biblical truth is objective. It is true by itself. It is true whether or not we feel it's true. It is true whether or not it has been validated by someone's experience. It is true because *God* says it is true. It is wholly true, and it is true down to the smallest jot and tittle. Psalm 119:160 says, "The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever."

The world sees the Bible, at best, as being subjective. If they read something in it that they disagree with, they go with their own sin-inspired wisdom.

We should expect nonbelievers to ignore and oppose the Bible. The Book of Romans describes them as those who "did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge" (1:28).

More-and-more, however, it is professing Christians who are handling God's Word as if it was subjective. The topic of marriage, divorce, and remarriage is the most obvious example.



Now, I don't mean to pick on marriage all the time; it's just that we all can relate to it. There's nothing more fundamental to a talk on the household than to assess the current state of marriage.

God's Word is clear: Marriage is to be monogamous, heterosexual, and to last as long as you both shall live. That is the basic objective truth by which all things regarding marriage must be measured. Things like polygamy, and homosexual marriage, are subjective. It is people doing what is right in their own eyes, contrary to what is objectively right.

The biblical grounds for a divorce are somewhat narrow - sexual sin and abandonment by a nonbeliever.

Sadly, professing believers also act as though they have the freedom to divorce and remarry for almost any reason, as long as it makes them feel good. They don't see God's Word as providing the grace-filled objectivity they need in order to obey the Lord in His power.

We expect the world to redefine marriage, and to council divorce. We are right in preaching to the world about the sanctity of marriage. But we ought to do so from a strong position with regards to our own obedience to God's Word.

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

There was no human king; no man sat on the throne, ruling the tribes. There would be, one day; God spoke of them having a king in Deuteronomy, and outlined his qualifications.

Their current lack of a human king was no excuse, because God was their King. Micah had all the governance he needed, from the Word of God.

It might be bumper-sticker theology, but you've seen it: *"God said it; I believe it; That settles it."*

If that's too juvenile, here is how a scholar put it: "Our faith is grounded in the conviction that God has spoken, and His Word is objective truth. What He has given us is absolute and unshakable - and it is the truth by which all other truth-claims are measured."

If you have children in the home, you probably have a wall with lines on it where you measure their physical height at different ages.

The Bible is a measuring tool. With it you measure your behavior. God's objective truth is for His glory, and it's for your good. Always go with objectivity - **not** your own subjective feelings.

Subjective Christianity may not make ephods and shrines and carved images, but the spirit behind it is just as heretical.

Know and believe that as you submit to God's objective truth, He knows the plans He has for you - "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

## #2 What Does Your Household Of Faith Reveal About Who Is King?

(v7-13)

One of the names for the church on earth is "the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

We're told, "You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God" (First Timothy 3:15). Also, "You are fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household" (Ephesians 2:19).

It's the Lord's household; we are the family of believers who occupy it. We are the stewards, and the servants, who minister to one another in it. Our behavior communicates something about who we really believe is the King.

For example, in the church at Corinth - in that household - the believers gathered each Sunday evening for a pot-luck, followed by a Communion service. At the pot-luck, the wealthier believers were hoarding their food, and were getting drunk on too much wine.

It was a terrible representation of the household of faith. No onlooker would get the impression that Jesus was inspiring such behavior.

As we work through these verses, we want to pay attention to any prompting from God's Spirit, to see ourselves, and what we are revealing about Jesus to onlookers.

Two Levites dominate these remaining chapters. We meet the first one right now.

Jdg 17:7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he *was* a Levite, and was staying there.

If you've got your thinking cap on, you're wondering how this guy could be both a "Levite" and "of the family of Judah."

One solution is that there are two cities called Bethlehem - one belonging to Zebulun and the other Judah (Joshua 19:15). The text emphasizes that the city under discussion is the Judean Bethlehem. Thus the words “of the family of Judah” might not be referring to the Levite, but rather to the city.

The Levites received no inheritance of land. Instead, there were (I think) forty-eight cities they were assigned to throughout the land. When it wasn't their rotation to serve the priests in the Tabernacle, they were to be teachers of God's Word, and counselors, in their assigned cities.

Right away we know that this Levite was a little off, because neither of the Bethlehem's were on the list. He was in an area that was unassigned, and that was itself wrong.

In chapter eighteen, we'll learn that the Levite's name was Jonathan (v30).

Jdg 17:8 The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find *a place*. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

Times were lean for the priests and the Levites. They depended upon the people bringing their sacrifices and offerings to the Tabernacle, and that wasn't happening. Jonathan was, in essence, looking for work, instead of trusting in the Lord where he had been assigned.

Do you think it is up to you, or up to God, to determine things like where you live, where you work, and where you attend church?

With so much freedom in our great nation, and with so many choices, it can seem as though God has left our life's path totally up to us. He hasn't; He wants to lead us.

Is your plan God's plan for your life? Only you can answer that; but you first need to ask the question.

Jdg 17:9 And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I *am* a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find *a place* to stay."

In other words, "I'm available, if you're looking to hire a Levite."

We've already seen that Micah is not spiritual; he's an idolator. That's why he overlooks the facts that this Levite was from the wrong town, looking for the wrong ministry. Those things ought to have been red flags.

Jdg 17:10 Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *shekels* of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in.

"Be a father" meant that Jonathan would advise Micah. Of course, since neither of them had any concern for the objective Word of God, the advice would always be subjective.

And because Jonathan was directly beholden to Micah for his sustenance, the advice would always be in agreement with what Micah wanted to do. He'd only hear what he wanted to hear.

I know that is so, because right off the bat Jonathan says nothing about Micah having household idols. He ought to have rebuked Micah and demanded he destroy them, along with the ephod and the shrine.

One characteristic of a good, properly functioning, household of faith is that we don't always hear what we want to hear. That depends upon at least two things:

1. First, we need to be going through the Word of God, all of it, verse-by-verse. We need to be teaching all of it - not just parts we like.
2. Second, the Word of God must challenge us. It must expose us, and then direct and redirect us.

Jdg 17:11 Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him.

Jonathan was a father... And a son... to Micah. That had to get confusing. On top of that, Micah's own blood son had been serving as the family priest, but got muscled out when Jonathan arrived. And don't forget mom was given to superstitions.

This would have been great fodder for reality television. What we're reading is like the pilot episode for *Micah & Me*; or *Real Levites of the Mountains of Ephraim*. It's compelling.

Jdg 17:12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah.

"Consecrated." I don't even know what that means. An Ephraimite idolator couldn't "consecrate" his own non-Levitical priest to serve in his idolatrous household shrine.

A lot of folks had shrines and ephods and carved images. Few could boast of their own personal Levite. Micah had succeeded in establishing his own entirely self-sufficient religion.

Jdg 17:13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

This is as good a definition of religious superstition as you're likely to find. You can fill-in the blank: "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since \_\_\_\_\_."

I don't doubt that Micah was sincere. He was sincerely wrong, however.

Jonathan was unqualified to be a priest; he wasn't a descendant of Aaron. He was not in his assigned city. He wasn't even teaching Micah God's Word, but was only telling him what he wanted to hear.

He was on the payroll, when Levites were supposed to live off of the free-will offerings of the nation.

When the author says "everyone did what was right in their own eyes," he meant the religious leaders as well. Jonathan was tragically typical of the Levites.

Any church ought to hold up to scrutiny. We ought to have objective, biblical reasons for what we do, and for what we don't do. We want to reveal, among other things, that Jesus is the Head of our household of faith, and that He is the King Who is coming to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth.

If there is one take-away from today, it's this word, and this concept, of objectivity. We have the inspired, authoritative Word of God - the Bible. In it we find everything we need for life and for godliness.

The apostle Peter used that phrase, saying, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (Second Peter 1:3).

- The "life" he was talking about was our lives right now, as believers waiting for the Lord's return.
- "Godliness" is life as it's meant to be lived - life that is pleasing to God.

If God says it, I am to believe it - even if it does not sit well with me, or is contrary to what I feel, or what I want to do. His Word ought to settle the matter. No matter how much pressure I feel from myself or from the world to do what is right in my own eyes, I must go with God's assessment.

Further, I must understand and believe that what God commands, He enables me to do. It isn't by my will power that I obey the Word of God, but by His empowering through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

All the things for life and godliness are set out in Scripture; and I can do all those things through Jesus, Who strengthens me.