

AFRICA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

SYNCRETISM IN JUDGES 17

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A Thesis submitted to the University in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity  
in Biblical Studies.

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November 2020

## **STUDENT'S DECLARATION**

### **SYNCRETISM IN JUDGES 17**

I declare that the work presented herein is my original work and has not been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of Africa International University or the Examiners

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November 2020

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes religious elements in Judges 17 that are contrary to the instruction of Yahweh in the Torah. This chapter paints a picture of syncretism where the characters worship Yahweh in the wrong way by incorporating other borrowed forms of religious practices. The pattern of the curse made by the mother of Micah follows the common understanding of cursing among the neighbors of the Israelites. The dedication of silver to make a carved and cast image in the name of worshipping Yahweh violates the ten commandments. The ordination of the non-Levitical priest failed to observe the appointment rules in the Torah. Micah's confidence in the Levite for prosperity conforms to the pattern outside Levitical laws. These patterns fall outside the Torah but have more in common with practices among the Canaanites, though in some cases there is more clear evidence of syncretism than in others. The implication is that there is the worship of Yahweh in the wrong way.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I first most acknowledge God as Almighty and controller of everything that takes place in Heaven and here on earth. Regarding this theses paper, I acknowledge the encouragement and the criticism of both my two supervisors: Dr. Viands and Dr. Yohannes. Their comments shaped this research paper and made it better. I also acknowledge the encouragement of my class colleagues at Africa International University. This is especially my classmates whom we pursued the Mdivbs program (Master of Divinity in Biblical studies). I also recognize my prayer partners Pastor Charles Yumbya, Pastor Joseph Mburu, Pastor Hellen Loina and Pastor Clement Kaelo who stood by my side in every level of this research paper. I also recognize the support given to me by my biological parents Mr. Mathew Langat and Mrs. Emmy Langat. Finally, I appreciate the emotional support given to me by my then fiancée, Miss Rop Cheptoo.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Syncretism is the mixing of elements of worship from different religions. The word “syncretism” cannot be found in the Old Testament which indicates that this is only a concept that is spoken about in the Bible. The relationship between God and His people in the Bible was meant to be exclusive and not inclusive of other things that will take away his glory. It is in Isaiah 42:8 that He declares that the LORD “Yahweh” is His name, and He does not give glory to another and praise to carved images. This is an exclusive statement that began when the LORD introduced Himself to the Israelites through Moses in Exodus 6:3 that He appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but He did not make Himself known by His name LORD “Yahweh”. Syncretism therefore in the Bible is a concept of not only worshipping Yahweh in the wrong way but incorporating borrowed religious practices.

The background of this paper stems from the idea that different elements of one religion may be incorporated into another religion unknowingly or knowingly.

Unknowingly is when some practices pass through generations, and some people later in the future will get mixed up with it assuming that it is the right thing to do.

Knowingly is when an individual intentionally entertains elements of another religion despite knowing the truth that it is forbidden. The paper will focus on Judges 17 where some elements of worship will be analyzed to evaluate its consistencies with the instructions given by the God of the Hebrews through the Torah.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study looks at religious practices in Judges 17 that violate the Torah and that incorporate foreign religious practices. These areas of syncretism have not been adequately appreciated by many commentators. Recognizing the concept in Judges 17 of worshipping Yahweh in the wrong way by incorporating foreign religious practices is necessary for resetting some of the perceptions people have regarding God of the Bible.

## 1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the religious elements of Judges 17 and to evaluate whether they are consistent with the instruction of Yahweh as recorded in the Torah and the entire Bible.

## 1.4 Objectives

The objectives of this study include the following.

1. To do an exegesis of Judges 17 in order to understand religious elements that are at play in this chapter
2. To compare these religious elements to what is prescribed for Israel in the Torah
3. To study and understand Canaanite practices that may be influencing religious elements in this chapter.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study will encourage the Bible-believing community to watch for religious practices that are not consistent with the Bible. These religious elements could appear pious but may not be consistent with the Bible as the standard of measure. Such religious practices could include attitudes towards offering, church ordinances, the place of the “men of God/priests” or the interpretation of Scripture. God through Moses in the Torah warned his people that entertaining foreign religious practices is an abomination. Identifying practices that seem innocent but are syncretistic is therefore important as it will help the Bible-believing community to honor God the way He expects them to.

### 1.6 Limitation of the Study

The limitation of this study is the pre-monarchical period and its historical period. Historical information is found in the Bible may not be substantial to build the argument of syncretism in this research and therefore extra-biblical will be examined.

### 1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The application of the study will be with the African church and specifically in Kenya.

### 1.7 Research Methodology

#### ***1.7.1 Presuppositions***

The authorship and dating of the book of Judges are unknown and have little impact on the exegesis of Judges 17, so these issues will not be considered.

### ***1.7.2 Hermeneutical Method***

This study will employ the historical-grammatical approach. With special attention to the setting of Judges 17 within the entire book of Judges, various characters found in Judges 17, and the plot at play in the 13 verses, the researcher will employ narrative criticism to make observations and interpretations of the text. The researcher will also analyze extra-biblical materials to construct the historical and cultural background of Judges 17.

### 1.8 Summary

In seeking to study the religious elements in this chapter, the researcher seeks to evaluate the inconsistencies found in Judges 17 that go against the Torah and the instructions of Yahweh that were given to the Israelites through Moses.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This section contains journals and books that address issues of syncretism in Judges 17. It also contains information about the perception of Yahweh in the Ancient East as written in both Ugaritic and Punic inscriptions. There are also thesis and published papers regarding some of the characters found in Judges 17.

Walter, Daniel, *The foundation Curse of Micah's Shrine: Judges 17*. Academia.Edu.” Accessed July 3, 2020.

[https://www.academia.edu/32500924/The\\_Foundation\\_Curse\\_of\\_Micahs\\_Shrine\\_Judges\\_17](https://www.academia.edu/32500924/The_Foundation_Curse_of_Micahs_Shrine_Judges_17).

A study comparing Judges 17 with several Punic, Greek, and Latin texts containing public oaths revealed that appealing to a deity in a public setting to compel a thief to restore stolen goods was a common practice in the ancient polytheistic Mediterranean Milieu. Like the oath of Micah's mother, “nearly all the Greek curses and half the Latin ones aim at frightening the thieves and thereby forcing them to confess or return the stolen property or both. Additionally, most of them involve a dedication or consecration of valuables “to the god or goddess at the very beginning as a precondition for getting the deity to punish the malefactor. These suggest that the mother's oath was unorthodox, falling with the norm for ancient “curses against thieves” practiced by the surrounding polytheistic nations. Her dedication of 200 out

of 1100 silver pieces to make an idol also falls well within the range of percentages recorded in the Latin texts. To expect that the mother would have dedicated every coin is unreasonable.

Millard, Alan, R, and Hoerth J. Alfred, and Mattingly L. Gerald, and Yamauchi, Edwin M, *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 120, 157-178.

In the ancient world, powers were personified as deities, and ancient people responded to such powers with beliefs and practices that were shared experiences and explanations of life in living communities. What can be known about the Canaanite religion derives from two general sources of information: written records and material remains. As much as the Bible is an important source, it provides a biased point of view that deprecated the Canaanite religion. There is the Ugaritic texts, some scanty written information, Phoenician and Punic inscriptions, references in Greek and Roman sources, and the writings of Phoenician priest Sanchuniathon which provides insight into Canaanite religion. There is also major work of excavation of sanctuaries, deity figurines, incense burners, altars, and related paraphernalia.

Webb, Barry G, and Clines, David J, and Davies, Philip R, *The Book of the Judges: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 46* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 182.

The story in Judges 17 features a confessed thief and a Levite priest who has connections with Bethlehem Judah and the hill country of Ephraim. The Levite journeys from Bethlehem to the Hill country. He becomes part of a story where a cast image is installed by Micah and he later becomes part of another story of the Danites installing the same cast image.

Schneider, Tammi J, *BERIT OLAM: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, Judges* (Collegeville, Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book, 2000), 229-236.

The focus of Judges 17 is the migration of the tribe of Dan who came into contact with an Ephraimite, a Levitical priest, and a statute of dubious legitimacy in the eyes of the Israelite cult which has been made from money from an unknown, possibly tainted source. Micah's name is indicative of the irony of the book, this story, and Michah's action which oscillates between Michayahu (Judges 17:1, 4) and Michah (Judges 17:5, 9, 12, 13). This variation seems well attested because the name in its long form means "who is like YH(WH)" which expresses the notion of the deity's incomparability. This story, and the book, have strong ideological interests and Michah's name serves ironic purposes since the person whose name glorifies the deity, by suggesting the deity's incomparability, was a thief who helped establish what was in the eyes of the later cult, illegitimate worship of the Israelite deity. The installation of the carved image and later a Levitical priest also follows an illegitimate process.

Kratz, Reinhard G, and Kurtz, Paul Michael, *Historical and Biblical Israel: The History, Tradition, and Archives of Israel and Judah* (Great Clarendon Street, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15, 48-50.

Around 1200 BCE, a group of people bearing the name "Israel" was located in Palestine and surrounded by Canaanite cities likewise subject to the king of Egypt. Apart from the Bible, the name "Israel" first appears again in an inscription from the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (858-824 BCE) and in a roughly contemporary one from the Moabite king Mesha. They later settled in the Palestinian hill country and

gradually diffused throughout Iron Age 1 (1150-900 BCE) and they were organized into families, clans, and tribes.

Liverani, M., Peri, C, and Davies, Philip R., *Israel's History, and the History of Israel* (Oakville, London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2003), 292-307.

From 587, first under the Babylonian kings and then the first Achaemenid emperors from Cyrus to Darius, for almost a century (at least until 515, when the second tabernacle was consecrated), Judah remained without formal political authority, with all its local affairs run by judges and elders. The period of the judges in the history of Israel refers to a quite different timeframe, preceding and not the following monarchy and recounted in the book of Judges. The reasoning used by the Deuteronomistic historian is a clear and simple one: after Joshua had destroyed all the Canaanite kingdoms, and before the advent of an Israelite monarchy, first under Saul and then David, the country had no king and was entrusted to the care of judges over all matters of local government.

Smith, Mark Stratton, "*Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel,*" *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East Vol III* (New York: Simon & Shuster Macmillan, 1995), 2031-2041.

Early Israelite religion did not contrast markedly with the religion of its first millennium Levantine neighbors. Some Old Canaanite deities continued within an Israelite pantheon dominated by a national god. Early Israel knew El; Baal; Yahweh, the new dynastic or national god; the divine council; and perhaps the cult of a goddess. Yahweh was not the original god of the group that first went by the name Israel. It appears that El was the chief deity, an inference based on the name Israel,

which contains the element El and not Yahweh. Baal in Ugaritic literature and Yahweh in Israelite tradition, as well as the later Jewish and Christian literature, holds that these divinities were a constellation of motifs describing their material and meteorological natures. Yahweh was frequently associated with such Edomite locations as Mount Paran and Mount Seir.

Toorn, D, Karel, V, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Canaan and Ancient Israel," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East Vol III* (New York: Simon & Shuster Macmillan, 1995), 2043-2057.

Unlike the widespread modern view that gods belong to a metaphysical world that can be entered only by speculation or revelation, the gods of the ancients were believed to inhabit this world. The tabernacle was built to accommodate the deity; it was not primarily designed for devotional purposes. The fundamental difference between God and humanity was perceived as a difference in power and permanence. Although several Syro-Palestinian deities were worshiped through the area, each community had singled out one or two gods on which it focused its worship. The oscillation between transcendence and immanence in the Syro-Palestinian conceptions of the divine should not be construed as a form of pantheism.

Ringgren, Helmer, *Religions of the ancient near East*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press: 1973), 124-175.

The Israelites belong to the West Semitic group of peoples, although their religion came to develop in a very distinctive manner. The highest god is El and he is by no means identical with the natural phenomenon nor his character fully explained by a reference to the natural phenomenon. The usual word for "god" contains the root 'el which is also the name of the highest deity. In the Ugaritic texts, El takes first place

among the gods. One of the most common epithets of El is the “the bull” which is meant to emphasize either his strength or his power to procreate. There is a clear connection with other epithets containing element El preserved in the Old Testament and particularly in the patriarchal narratives: El Shaddai (God Almighty), El Olam (God of eternity), El Bethel (God of Bethel). Baal means the “lord” or “owner” and the Old Testament always had a definite article. One of the pictorial representations of Baal is in the form of a bull calf who rides upon the clouds. The Old Testament associates Asherah or Asherahs with a cultic object of wood, a pole, or something similar, which represented the goddess upon the cultic site.

Allen, Spencer. L, “The Splintered Divine.” *A study of Istar, Baal, and Yahweh Divine Names and Divine Multiplicity in the Ancient Near East* (Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations, 2011): 309.

<http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/309>

The dissertation investigates the issue of the singularity versus the multiplicity of ancient Near Eastern deities who are known by a common first name but differentiated by the last names or geographic epithets. Defining “god”, “deity”, or “divine” of the ancient world involves, among other things, understanding how they treat a god, what they explicitly call a god, and what qualities are common to those called “god”. Baal simply meant “lord” or “master” and it is said to have been used to identify many gods including El. The discovery of Kuntillet Ajrud in the 1970s brings a different consideration that there could be a possibility that Yahweh as the first name was used for more than one deity. The Hebrew Bible describes the name to have numerous epithets that were attributed to him including the God of Israel (Psalm 68:36) and God of Heaven (Psalm 136:26). There is also another earliest extra-

biblical text in the 9<sup>th</sup> century called Mesa Inscription (KAI 181) which mentions the deity Yahweh and associate him with Israel, suggesting that he was their God. The Kuntillet Ajrud also links Yahweh with southern Transjordan which is known as Teman.

Freedman, N. David, “Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah” *Biblical Archaeologist*: (University of Chicago, 1987), 241-249.

An inscription was found during the excavation of Quntillet Ajrud conducted between October 1975 and May 1976 that expresses a religious sentiment and more particularly, a blessing. It says, “I bless you by...” and then there is the tetragrammaton which is the sacred personal name of the God of Israel, followed by the name of a city “Shomeron” which was Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom. Following this name of a city is a controversial word that is not clear, but which has been translated as “his Asherah” which reveals widespread worship of Asherah.

Viands, Jamie, “The ‘Man of God’ and the Priesthood of All Believers in Africa”, *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 37.2 (2018), 91-130.

In many contemporary African churches, the pastor or “man of God” fills a priestly role, serving as a mediator between God and his congregants. The functions associated with the priesthood in the Old Testament boiled down to the major function that a priest is a mediator through whom God is brought near to people and people are brought near to God. It has been recognized that the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2 is portrayed as the first “tabernacle” bearing a resemblance to later descriptions of the Old Testament tabernacle and the eschatological tabernacle of

Revelation 21:1-22:5. God launches a mission to redeem the descendant of Abraham as a “kingdom of priests” through a covenantal relationship with them.

Jason S. Bray, *Sacred Dan: Religious Tradition and Cultic Practice in Judges 17-18*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 449 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

At the center of this textual unit is the פִּסֵּל and it is very clear that this object is to be distinguished from at least the ephod and teraphim, if not the מַטְקָה. The importance of it could be attributed to the cost it was used to manufacture it; annual wages for 20 people was used to make it. It is by examining the evidence of the whole Hebrew Bible on this subject that we will obtain a clearer picture of the meaning and the uses of the פִּסֵּל of Dan. It is in the classic use of the word “idol” by the prophets, most notably in Deutero-Isaiah’s great attacks on idols, idolaters, and idol makers. There is a consideration that this image of Royal Dan is an image of Yahweh in the form of a bull. It is in 1 Kings 12:28 that Jeroboam’s royal cult counsel advised the king to make two calves of gold. The origin of the bull iconography of ancient Israel could be traced to the bull iconography in Egypt. The closest parallel to the monotheism of Israel is the cult of Amun-Re, in the New Kingdom the dynastic god of the Pharaohs, and thus the god of all Egypt.

McCann, J. Clinton. *Judges: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011)

Though the book of Judges has a bad reputation because it is full of violence, war, and killing, it is necessary for teaching and preaching. Given the noticeable paucity of references to God’s activity in chapters 17-21, especially chapters 17-18, it is interesting that the name “Micah” automatically poses the God question; “Who is like

Yah(weh)?" This family of Micah and his mother broke at least half of the Ten commandments in only five verses; created another god besides God, they have made an idol, they have used God's name wrongly, Micah stole thereby failing to honor his mother. We later observe that Danites plundered and stole from the family of Micah idol and slaughtered the people of Laish. Everybody in this chapter is painted with a bad picture because everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.

K. Lawson Younger, *Judges, Ruth*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 2002)

The specific episodes in Judges 17 escalate through parallels and complications with the previous episodes (Accounts of Samson) and climax in the promotion of Micah's family-cult apostasy to the level of tribal-cult apostasy by the Danites in chapter 18. This section of Joshua 17:1-18:31 should be read in the light of Deuteronomy 12:1-13:1; Cult in Deuteronomy 12:2-3 should be destroyed and cut down but in Judges 17, they are constructed and manufactured; ideal central shrine in Deuteronomy 12:4-27 is repeatedly endorsed but it is repeatedly ignored in Judges 17 and Judges 18; What is right in own eyes is prohibited in Deuteronomy 12:8 but practiced in Judges 17:6.

Don Slager, "How Many Idols Did Micah Have? Judges 17.1-18.31," *The Bible Translator* 65, no. 3 (December 2014): 337-348.

Judges 17-18 which comprises the first appendix of Judges, tells the story of Micah and the Danites. The story illustrates well how the behavior of the Israelites went from bad to worse during the time of the Judges, especially in the religious realm. According to Judges 17:6, every man did what was right in his own eyes. Micah steals 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother, instead of punishing her son, Micah's mother blesses him. Then she promises to give all the money to Yahweh but cheats by

keeping most of the money for herself. She takes 200 pieces and eventually has a silversmith make idols for Micah. Later Micah has even more idols made, sets up a shrine for these idols, breaking God's directive that there be only one sanctuary for all the Israelites (Deuteronomy 12:4-14; 16:1-7). The central sanctuary at that time was the tabernacle in Shiloh. He later installs an improper clergy.

Mark Walter Bartusch, and Andrew Mein, and Claudia V. Camp, *Understanding Dan: An Exegetical Study of a Biblical City, Tribe, and Ancestor, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.* (London; New York, NY: Continuum, 2003), 172.

In verse 2, many medieval manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament read (יָרָא) as the qere, which is the more usual form of the second person feminine singular pronoun. The *kethib*, which is an earlier form of the pronoun (Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic; Jeremiah 4:30). After “in my hearing”, the editor of the book of Judges in BHS supposes that one or a few words have dropped out. Lacking any textual support for emending the MT (the LXX corroborates the reading of the MT), the MT, while admittedly difficult, is to be preferred. After “I took it”, the editor suggests transposing “and now let me bring back to you” from verse 3. There is no manuscript for the proposed emendation. While the MT is difficult, apparently verse 2-3 is to be read as though Micah, who had taken the silver, returns all of it to his mother. Then, after having designated 200 pieces of silver for the manufacture of the idol and the molten image, his mother returns the balance to Micah (verse 3b).

William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh, and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, The Jordan lectures, (1965 Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1968), 153-200.

Though the Patriarchs of Israel were unmistakably immigrants from Mesopotamia, they were largely of West-Semitic (Amorite). From biblical tradition, confirmed by the alphabetic inscriptions from Sinai (dating between c. 1525 and 1450 B.B) and Egyptian sources, it is known that the pantheon of the authors of the inscriptions consisted chiefly of a mixture of the old Semitic divinities with Egyptian deities: not a single Canaanite god or goddess can be identified with certainty. The long debate over the original meaning of the name *Yahweh* shows no sign of abating, and the most incredible etymologies are still advanced by otherwise serious scholars. The indicative form of the name is demonstrated by the ending; otherwise, we should expect to have a jussive as in the case of hypocoristic form *Yahu*, which can be traced back as far as the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C, thanks to Assyrian transcriptions. The sanctuary at Shiloh was discredited after its abandonment by Yahweh and it was also later destroyed by the Philistines.

Day, John., *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 265*, (London; Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2000), 15-129.

Interestingly, the Old Testament has qualms in equating Yahweh with El, something which stands in marked contrast to its vehement opposition to Baal, let alone the equation of Yahweh with Baal. Since Yahweh and El were originally separate deities, the question is raised where Yahweh originated. Yahweh himself does not appear to have been a god in origin: for example, he does not appear in Ugaritic pantheon lists. El is recorded to have existed in the Ugaritic texts. There are some aspects of El of Ugaritic that came to be accepted by the Israelites but rejected in the Old Testament: the appropriation of Asherah as the wife of Yahweh, where El is symbolized as the

“bull El” for it was thought to symbolize El’s strength rather than fertility. The golden calves set by King Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:26-30) reflect ancient Yahwistic symbolism deriving from the god El. When the Old Testament speaks of Israel’s apostasy to other gods, the most prominent deity in this connection is the Canaanite storm and fertility god, Baal.

Marcus, David, *“In Defense of Micah: Judges 17:2: He was not a thief”*, *Shofar*, volume 6, number 3, (Spring 1988), 72-80

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42941223>

Most scholars believe that the carved image was financed with stolen money and that the thief was none other than Micah. There is an assumption that a blessing can neutralize or cancel a curse. The phrase closer to *בָּרַךְ יְהוָה לֵהֲנַחֵהוּ* has been used in 7 other places (1 Samuel 15:13, Psalms 115:15, 1 Samuel 23:21, 2 Samuel 2:5, Ruth 2:20, Ruth 3:10, and Genesis 14:19) and in all these places it has been used either as a simple greeting or as a blessing for some act of goodness performed. The context in Judges 17 favors more the idea that the mother of Micah was congratulating him for a good deed. It also appears that the mother did not curse the son at all because the word *אָלִית* in comparison to 1 Samuel 14:24 brings out the idea of “charging/adjuring”. This therefore must be related to mother dedicating the silver by repeating to the ear of his mother “that I have dedicated the money”. It will be easy to say that Micah said to his mother: “you charged me face to face to set aside this money for you, now I have done what you asked me to do ‘I have taken it (aside).’” His mother would have replied, “Blessed of the Lord be my son.” Micah’s return of money was also not because he had stolen it, but because he was bringing it back from another location.

Moster, David Z, "The Levite of Judges 17-18", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, number 4, (2014): 729-737.

The Levite of Judges 17-18 is not introduced with a proper name. Some exegetes however identify him as Jonathan the son of Gershom the son of Manasseh, a priest mentioned at the end of the story in 18:30, the text does not explicitly make this connection. He is introduced in 17:7 with the title נַעַר which usually means "youth" or "servant". He is a servant and could also be a youth but the use of "man" in 17:8 favors the idea that he was a servant. He is also geographically introduced to be from Bethlehem of Judah. This could be because there were two Bethlehems: nine miles south of Jerusalem in Judah (Judges 19:1, Ruth 1:1-2, 1 Samuel 17:12) and the other in the northern territory of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15, Judges 12:8-10). He is portrayed as a wanderer without a destination. He is hired by Micah after establishing a tabernacle to be a father to him. The Levite is called a "father" "אב" by Micah, and, for comparison, many points to Joseph who was referred "father to Pharaoh" אב לפרעה even though he was only the viceroy of Egypt (Genesis 45:8). He is paid 10 shekels, given an allowance of clothing, and his living. He is no different from the instruction of providing for food, clothes for a female slave in Exodus 21:10.

Faraone, C. A., and Garnand, B., and Lopez-Ruiz, C., "Micah's Mother (Judges 17:1-4) and a Curse from Carthage (KAI 89): Canaanite Precedents for Greek and Latin Curses against Thieves?", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Volume 64, Number 3. (July 2005): 161-186.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/491573>

In a story preserved in the Book of Judges, an unnamed woman discovers that 1,100 pieces of silver are missing and utters aloud some kind of curse against the unknown

thief. At first glance, the sequence of events seems clear enough: Micah's mother discovers the theft and makes a proclamation, described first as a "curse" and later as a "consecration". A Canaanite text with obvious similarities to the Greek and Latin curses reveals that the curse in the Punic period contained some "binding spell" which carries some "prayer for justice" against any offender. There are therefore some shared important features in the curses of Micah's mother, the Punic inscription, and the Greek and Roman curses against thieves. There is some evidence of dates and proveniences of the curses against thieves that is because of persistent and probably overlapping waves of diffusion between the curses in Judges 17, Greeks, and Roman curses and that of Punic inscription. In 1913, Fox, suggest that the genre of "curses against thieves" originated in the Canaanite world in the sixth or fifth century at the very latest and that it moved steadily westward in the late classical and Hellenistic periods, most likely first to areas of the central and western Mediterranean where Phoenician trade and colonization was greatest.

Frederick E. Greenspahn, "An Egyptian Parallel to Judg 17:6 and 21:25," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101, no. 1 (March 1982), 129.

The formulae of "בְּיָמֵם הָהֵם אֵין מְלֹךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הִיָּשֵׁר בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה" serve to frame the stories which make up the last section of the book of Judges. Whatever the relationship between this statement and the stories which it punctuates, its literary affinities are clear. To "do good in the eyes of..." is a common characteristic in Deuteronomic literature. The force of this formula is illustrated by an almost identical assertion found in Egyptian literature dealing with a nearly contemporary period, describing the chaos that preceded the accession of Setnakhte (ca. 1184-82). It states that "the land of Egypt had been overthrown with every man being his standard of

right since they had no leader for many years. Although the exact statement is unique, Egyptian pharaohs often contrast their effectiveness with which had come before. There is no need to claim that these two statements are directly related; neither, however, is there reason to interpret them in any but a straightforward and literal fashion. Just as the Egyptian text intends to demonstrate the effectiveness of a pharaoh, so too should there be little doubt as to the pro-monarchic sentiment of the statement in Judges.

## 2.2 Summary

This literature review implies that there existed another Yahweh in the Ancient East during the time of Edom. Jacob knew God of His father Isaac, but some of his family members may have migrated to Egypt with some Canaanite cultic practices. Their stay in Egypt for 400 years may have also either exposed them to Egyptian cultic practices or passed down some of the Canaanite cultic practices that some of the 70 members of Jacob migrated with them to Egypt. Their exodus from Egypt meant that they did not leave their religion behind but also interacted more with the Canaanite religion along the way. This could be true especially with the worship of Baal at Peor on their way to the promised land which is recorded in Numbers 25. These materials from the literature may paint an idea on the reasons for the need of Yahweh to reintroduce Himself to the Israelites in Exodus 6. That however, did not guarantee that they would be faithful to their God who introduced Himself as Yahweh. Judges 17 paints a picture of embedded foreign worship in the name of worshipping Yahweh.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXEGETICAL STUDY JUDGES 17:1-13

#### 3.1 Outline

Below is an outline that is structured according to the issues of syncretism in Judges 17.

- The curse of the mother of Micah (vs 1-2)
- The dedication of silver to make a carved and a cast image (vs 3-4)
- The “house of God” in Micah’s house (vs 5)
- The priestly position (vs 5-12)
- The divine expectation on wealth and prosperity (vs 13)

#### 3.2 Authorship and Date of Writing of the Book Of Judges

The book of Judges does not disclose its author and there has therefore been a lot of debate about the authorship of this book. Some biblical scholars have suggested that it was Samuel who wrote it while others believe that the various sections of the book were written by different authors from some school of prophets.<sup>1</sup> Modern authors have therefore invested their time and resources to look for sources that will help them identify the author or authors of this book, but with no success.

Because of the phrase “In those days there was no king in Israel” (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25), some modern scholars have suggested that most likely the author was

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<sup>1</sup> A. R. Fausset, *Commentary on the Book of Judges* (James & Klock, 1977), 8

enjoying a form of an organized government when some parts of the book were being composed.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that the writing of the book may have been during the reign of Saul or at the beginning of the reign of David. This is may be supported by the existence of the image of Micah installed by the Danites until the time of captivity (Judges 18:30). This may suggest that the composing of the final chapters may have taken place during the period when the Israelites were being taken to exile. This period may have been anywhere between 722 and 586 BC.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars agree that this period was characterized by oppressions and judgeships. It was a period when the Israelites were influenced by their neighbors to deviate from their God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt. The stories captured in this book reveal a series of societal, cultural, and religious activities that dominated most of the communities that existed during this period of the book of Judges.

### 3.3 Literary Context of Judges 17

The book of Judges speaks about a society who were chosen by God for His glory (Deuteronomy 7:6). The main context of the book is about a people who were chosen to be a royal nation but who repeatedly corrupted themselves with foreign societal elements and religious elements that were not in line with Deuteronomic instructions. The instruction was for them to dispossess all the inhabitants of the land that their God promised to give them (Deuteronomy 7:2). Some however did not complete this conquest (Judges 2:27-33) and the consequences were that their God promised not to drive the foreigners away from their land, but they would instead be thorns in their side and that their gods shall be a snare to them (2:2).

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<sup>2</sup> Fausset, *Commentary on the Book of Judges*, 8

<sup>3</sup> K. Lawson Younger, *Judges, Ruth: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Grand Rapids, 2002), 23.

The period of Judges is observed to begin from Judges 2:6 until 1 Samuel 12. This is because it is observed that Samuel's great speech in 1 Samuel 12 appears to correspond to Joshua's last speech in Joshua 23.<sup>4</sup> There is observation of pre-Deuteronomistic connection between each of the individual stories in the book of Judges. These individual stories lacked thematic unity and Deuteronomy supplied them with connecting material. It is observed that there is a historic pattern that the author appears to follow within the book: there is obedience to Yahweh, followed by worshipping other gods, then there is divine punishment and suffering at the hands of other nations, followed by a cry to God for deliverance, then God raises a deliverer to judge Israel but that deliverer does not leave a lasting positive influence.<sup>5</sup> Some judges (Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar) appear have followed the pattern of obeying God and delivering His people, but other judges (Abimelech and Samson) completely broke the pattern of obeying God and delivering his people.

The twist of the story is when with the demand for the king in the last chapters of the book which appears to depict the Deuteronomic perspective of showing imperfect motivation for a monarchical leadership. It is around this period of judges that the sons of Samuel who served as Judges were corrupt (1 Samuel 8:1-3). It appears that the office of the king functioned like that of a judge (1 Samuel 8:6) only that the king was meant to unite the entire nation of Israel unlike judges that served regions.

The structure of the book is clustered into three sections: the first section highlights the main reason for the unfaithfulness of Israel in the book of Judges (Judges 1:1-3:6), the second section highlights a downward spiral of Israel's unfaithfulness (3:7-16:31),

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<sup>44</sup> Noth, Martin, *The Deuteronomistic History*, (JSOT Press: Sheffield, 1981), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Butler, Trent C, *Word Biblical Commentary, Judges* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2009), xxxvi.

and the last section highlights the depth of the Israel's unfaithfulness (17:1-21:25).

The structure of the book highlights a picture of the cause and the depth of the Israel's unfaithfulness. The structure of the book, therefore, appears to create parallelism of an ideal Deuteronomic picture of a nation expected to honor their God and the stories of judges that are far from meeting that Deuteronomic picture. The imperfect motivation was guided by the need to be like their Canaanite neighbors (1 Samuel 8:6).

The book, therefore, shows a sad reality of how this chosen nation is rebelling against their God. It is worth mentioning that the phrase "and the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" has been repeated in chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, and chapter 13. This emphasized picture of the Israelites corrupting themselves will continue with another repeated phrase "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" which appears (17:6) and (21:25). This again emphasizes the idea that these people defined their morality by not acknowledging the sovereign will of their God.

For example, the story of Gideon in Chapter 8:22-27 refused to be made a ruler over the Israel because he acknowledged the rulership of Yahweh over Israel. However, in the same context, Gideon makes an ephod out of gold and earrings from the spoils (vs 24) which the Israelites "whored" after it. Gideon set the ephod in his city in Ophrah and became a snare to him and his family. Gideon goes into biblical records of being the first leader in the promised land to lead the Israelites in going against Torah and especially the charge of Moses in Deuteronomy 4:15-20.

Samson in Chapter 13 to chapter 16 goes into biblical records of being not only a judge but a Nazirite that falls outside the expectations of Numbers 6. Though his story and that of Micah in Judges 17 may not follow each other chronologically, his life

highlights raises questions as to whether to categorize him as a deliverer or a troublemaker because he caused trouble to not only his parents but also to the nation of Israel. Since his life contradicts the expectations of a Nazarite in Numbers 6, the assumption is that he was influenced by the Canaanite nations around him. The first form of Canaanization is observed where he appears to operate within a degenerative effect of male-female relations.<sup>6</sup> It is observed that women were viewed as either sex objects or persons to be controlled by men. Samson, in the entire narrative, operates in his lustful interests to the point he commanded his parents to get him a woman because she was right in his own eyes (Judges 14:3). This attitude appears to be motivated by male superiority where women are only to meet the command and the wishes of the men. This goes against the intention of God regarding the male-female relationship where they were equally created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The second form of Canaanization is where Samson being in the highest form of leadership operated based on his senses rather than based on principle.<sup>7</sup> Samson prepared a feast to celebrate his marriage just like other men in the region used to do (Judges 14:10). By sleeping with a prostitute (Judges 16:1) and having sexual affairs with Delilah appears to demean women created in the image of God and the process disregarded sex as a sacred activity reserved only for a husband and wife. The third form of Canaanization in the life of Samson is that he appears to get sidetracked from pursuing the divine agenda to pursuing his adventures. He spent most of his days with the Philistines and the nations that the Israelites were expected to destroy (Deuteronomy 7:2, Deuteronomy 16:16-17). He wasted God-given gifts in indulging

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<sup>6</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 470.

<sup>7</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 471.

in every sensual adventure he desired.<sup>8</sup> In reactions to his wife being given to another man, he caught 300 foxes, tied them into pairs, put torches between each pair of tails, and released the foxes into the land of the Philistines (Judges 15:1-4).

Chapters 17-21 appears to illustrate some form of discontinuation of history in the book of Judges.<sup>9</sup> The story of Samson marks the end of an era where Judges ruled the people in the book of Judges. Samson will become the last judge as the next chapters consist of two appendices (17-18, 19-21) that do not mention any judges until the period of Eli and Samuel who were more of high priests than judges. Aside from judges disappearing, there is also no mention of any kind of societal leader and it also appears that divine deliverance is scarce in this section. However, the emphasis turns to the need for a king and the loss of national morality.<sup>10</sup> It is observed that violence increases within the nation of Israel and there is intertribal hostility where the tribe of Benjamin is destroyed by the other Israelite tribes. Moreover, it is only in these last chapters that there is a rise in the place of priests. Each narrative of this last section of the book of Judges appears to divide the section into major parts. The first part is that the moral vagueness and the cursing resulted in religious vagueness with expectations of a blessing.<sup>11</sup> The second part in chapter 18 appears to begin with territorial oblivion and ends in territorial conquest and religious syncretism.<sup>12</sup> It points out the true cause of the Israelites' descent in an era where the refrain "everyone did what right in his own eyes" paints a perfect picture of a human heart that tends to move away from its

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<sup>8</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 471.

<sup>9</sup> Millar, J.P., *The preacher's Complete Homiletic: Commentary on the Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House. 1980), 516.

<sup>10</sup> Butler, Trent C., *Word Biblical Commentary, Judges* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2009), 372.

<sup>11</sup> Trent, *Word Biblical Commentary, Judges*, 376.

<sup>12</sup> Trent, *Word Biblical Commentary, Judges*, 376.

God. Because of the religious atrocities and broken social systems, it is observed that these two appendices introduce the need for a king.<sup>13</sup>

The story in Judges 18 is a continuation of the story of Micah in chapter 17. In this chapter, five men were sent by the tribe of Dan to go and spy a land that they could inherit (18:1-2). On their way, the five men came into the house of Micah and met a Levite priest who happened to have been familiar to them (Judges 18:3). The spies asked the priest to enquire of God if their journey would be successful and the priest gave them a favorable oracle (18:6).

After they spied the land and had taken back the report to their tribesmen, the tribe set out to dispossess of the inhabitants and inherit the land. They passed near the house of Micah and the five spies told the rest of the people about the existence of an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal in the house of Micah (18:14). They, therefore, went into the house of Micah and having taken all the items, they also convinced the Levite to be a father and the priest of the entire tribe contrary to serving as a priest in a single-family unit (18:19-20). The Levite was glad and took the offer with little hesitation. Micah would later pursue the tribe to reclaim back his items and the tribe threatened him to stop shouting or else angry fellows would fall on him. They, therefore, went away with the items to their new home (18:25-26). In their new home, the tribe of Dan set up Micah's household gods, which remained within the tribe all the period the house of God was at Shiloh. In Judges 18:30 the name of the Levite priest is revealed to be Jonathan's son of Manasseh who served as Danite's

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<sup>13</sup> Trent, *Word Biblical Commentary, Judges*, xxxvii.

priest and later his sons also served as priests within the tribe of Dan until the day the tribe of the Danites was taken into captivity.

### 3.6 Analysis of Judges 17:1-13

#### **3.6.1 Introduction**

This section has been treated according to the issues of syncretism in Judges 17.

These issues include the cursing against a thief by the mother of Micah, the dedication of the silver to Yahweh for Micah to make forbidden images, a private ownership of a “house of God”, and the hiring of a Levite for personal prosperity. All these issues will be examined individually within the context of the entire story.

Micah is said to have come from the hill country of Ephraim. The tribe of Ephraim had been allocated inheritance “from the Tappuah the boundary that goes westward to the brook Kanah and ends at the sea” (Joshua 16:8). They had been given instructions by God through Moses in Numbers 33:50-52 to drive out all the inhabitants of the land once they pass over to the land of Canaan. Moreover, they were to destroy all their figured stones, metal images, and demolish all their high places. However, the tribe did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer and they, therefore, lived among them (Joshua 16:10). It is observed that they became part of the tribes that did not drive out the Canaanites and chose to live in their midst (Judges 1:29). God was not pleased and declared that He will not drive the Canaanites out of the territories but shall become thorns in their sides and their gods shall be a snare to them (Judges 2:3). This, therefore, provides a background of factors that might be influencing issues in Judges 17.

### 3.6.2 *The Syncretistic Curse of the Mother of Micah (vs 1-2)*

The curse of Micah's mother appears to instill fear in anyone who took her silver. Proclamation of curses which is just like the opposite proclamation of blessings operates by a power inherent in the words themselves and thus takes on a life of their own once it is proclaimed.<sup>14</sup> This mother uttered a curse  $\pi\lambda\gamma$  against the thief, and her son called Micah approaches her and tells her that the silver that was taken away from her is with him. The treatment of  $\pi\lambda\gamma$  as a verb "cursing" is comparatively infrequent and it serves as a truncated version of the curse formula which involves more often a verb with the noun  $\pi\lambda\gamma$ .<sup>15</sup> The qal form of this verb only appears in Judges 17:2, 1 Kings 8:31, 2 Chronicles 6:22, Hosea 4:2, and Hosea 10:4 while the hiphil appears in 1 Samuel 14:24, 1 Kings 8:31, and 2 Chronicles 6:22. The verb of this word appears eight times in the bible. It appears four times in the context of the oath (1 Kings 8:31, 2 Chronicles 6:22, Hosea 4:2, Hosea 10:4) while the last two occur in a context where it refers to false swearing. The difference appears to be its legality where an oath is used in the tabernacle in the process of arbitration while false swearing is done outside the tabernacle. It is only in 1 Kings 8:31 and 2 Chronicles 6:22 that the context is within the tabernacle. Its noun appears over 30 times and it is usually translated as "oath".

To understand the syncretistic issue in the "curse" of Judges 17:2, it is important to analyze some aspects that the author is trying to communicate to the readers. This section of Judges 17:1 introduces a man called Micah who is from the hill country of

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<sup>14</sup> Toorn, Karel, Van, Der, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 212.

<sup>15</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 478.

Ephraim. The text does not give further information on the identity of this man: his tribe is not directly revealed other than the readers are left to assume that since he was from the hill country of Ephraim, he must be an Ephraimite. The name of this man has a Hebrew meaning of “who is like YH(WH)?”<sup>16</sup> Whoever gave him the name may have hoped that this man will have a strong devotional lifestyle to a deity who is incomparable to any deity. The impression created here is that his life will reflect the wish of the person who gave him the name and that he will be a pious person who honors the deity, Yahweh, with his conduct.

In Exodus 6:3 we are introduced to a deity who introduces Himself as Yahweh. God tells Moses that He had made Himself known to the patriarchs of Israel as God Almighty  $\text{אל שׁדַי}$  but He never appeared to them as Yahweh  $\text{יהוה}$ . The name “Yahweh” is a proper name of God which is very distinct from the generic name *el*. “Yahweh” was a very special name because God was revealing Himself to Moses as a very relational and promise-keeping God who would redeem Israelites from slavery.<sup>17</sup> The naming of Micah therefore may have had an intention of identifying with this Supreme Being who is not only Mighty but a promise-keeper.

The author of Judges introduces this man as Michayahu/Michahu (17:1,4). This name *mi + ka + yehu* translates “who is like Yahweh?” is a rhetorical question anticipating the answer, “No one”.<sup>18</sup> It is observed that such theophoric names which have reference to god in the ancient world represented the faith of the person who is

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<sup>16</sup> Schneider, Tammi J, *BERIT OLAM: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, Judges*. (Collegeville, Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book, 2000), 229-236.

<sup>17</sup> Walvoord, John, F, and Zuck, Roy, B, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 1985), 117.

<sup>18</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 478.

named. In this context, readers are left to assume that the faith of the parent was a devotee of Yahweh. It is however strange that the author will later change the name of this man to simply Micah (17:5, 9, 12, 13). The oscillation of his name from Michayahu/Michahu to just Micah within the narrative could reflect the author's awareness of the incongruities in the story. It presents some irony of a man who breaks the instructions given by Yahweh through the Torah and goes against the faith of the people who gave him the name Michayahu. His name presents him as a pious man, but his behaviors seem to suggest that he disregards the instructions of Yahweh in the Torah. He took some silver from his mother and he seems not to be remorseful for he returns the silver only because he heard her pronounce the curse upon the criminal thus breaking the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment.<sup>19</sup> He will also make images of worship that were forbidden by Yahweh thus breaking the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment.

Micah out of fear after hearing the curse of his mother confessed that the silver was with him. The use of the phrase “behold the silver is with me” הִנֵּה הַכֶּסֶף אִתִּי may express some form of ownership. It could be true that he took the silver intending to never return it to his mother. However, the use of the ל with a passive verb in the phrase הִלָּקְחָהּ לִי may not necessarily indicate that he stole the silver, but that the mother authorized him to access the silver. According to Choi, this category of lamed is a quasi-datival with a subcategory which may be used to mark the person to whom the action is directed.<sup>20</sup> If that is true, then the Hebrew phrase הִלָּקְחָהּ לִי may not necessarily mean that the silver was taken from the mother but may also mean it was taken for the mother and she gave him some form of access to it. There is a possibility, therefore,

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<sup>19</sup>, Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 478

<sup>20</sup> Arnold, Bill., & Choi, John, H., *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 112.

that the mother instructed the son to set aside the silver for some specific duties or some religious dedications and then he should report back on the progress. If indeed the mother of Micah had taken the silver, what was the point of uttering the curse? I support the argument that the silver had been stolen and that she uttered a curse against anyone who had taken it.<sup>21</sup> It seems the mother of Micah uttered the curse as the only resort to make the person who took the silver to return her silver.

This behavior of cursing thieves is very strange within the book of Law. It is however true that curses were found in the Old Testament and were portrayed negatively and associated with the consequences of disobeying the laws given by God. In Deuteronomy 29:19-20 anybody who walked in stubbornness against the commands of the LORD met the curses written in the Book. Curses appeared to have originated from God to anyone who disobeyed His commands. There is, however, no place in the Old Testament where curses have been used by humans against thieves except in Judges 17.

However, in Numbers 22 Balak hired Balaam to curse the Israelites after he was intimidated by their vast number trespassing through his territory. The angel of the LORD cautioned Balaam and instructed him to only say what the LORD will tell him (Numbers 22:35). Each time Balak prepared an altar for Balaam to curse the Israelites, the LORD put a word of blessings in his mouth and he proclaimed blessings instead of curses. Balak was frustrated because Balaam could not curse the Israelites. It is therefore clear that the curses and blessings in this context were still

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<sup>21</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *"Ariel Bible Commentary: The Book of Judges and Ruth,"* 205; Brensinger *"Believers Church Bible Commentary";* Walvoord, *"The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament,"* 117; Roger, *"Judges: A New Biblical Commentary,"* 131.

controlled by God. Where then did the idea of cursing thieves come from in Judges 17?

Ugaritic texts reveal that the general use of curses was very common in the ancient middle east. There is 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Egyptian inscriptions known as “Execration Texts” that is dated around 1850 to 1750 BC that describes some act of magical annihilation where after writing the names of individuals on pottery vessels, some curse formula was pronounced.<sup>22</sup> The inscriptions hold that curses were proclaimed in foreign places and against people considered enemies of Egypt.<sup>23</sup> The series of curses creates the equivalent of the Canaanite geopolitical map for the Middle Bronze Age. The washing of the curses written on the book because of the accused unfaithful woman in Numbers 5:23-24 is very similar to some Egyptian practices of making Seth, Apophis, and Pharaoh’s enemies of wax and consigning them to the flames.<sup>24</sup> There was also a curse against grave robbers mentioned in the Keret story (KTU 1.14 iv: 34-36).<sup>25</sup>

There is also another primary source that records a testimony given in the trials of suspected thieves and embezzlers of royal property. There is a tablet that was found in the great temple of the lower City (quadrant L/19) and it is believed it was kept there because it contained statements supported by oaths administered in the temple of Lelwani.<sup>26</sup> The plaintiff was the queen Pudehepa who was the consort of Hattusili and the accused was Ura-Tarhunta who was an overseer of Ten. It appears the accused

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<sup>22</sup> Redford, Donald, B., *Egypt, Canaan, And Israel in Ancient Times*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 88.

<sup>23</sup> Golden, Jonathan, M., *Ancient Canaan, and Israel: New Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC CLIO, Inc, 1928), 45.

<sup>24</sup> Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, And Israel in Ancient Times*, 383.

<sup>25</sup> Toorn, Karel, Van, Der., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 111.

<sup>26</sup> Hallo, William, W, *The Context of Scripture: Vol III Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, ed by Younger, JR, K. Lawson (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2003), 58, 68.

was not faithful with the items entrusted to him by the queen and there was, therefore, suspicion of misappropriation. The items said to be misappropriated happened to be gold-plated bows. The accused defended himself by taking an oath in the temple of Lelwani saying that he took his mother's gold to plate the bows and not the queen's gold. Hallo William has a footnote that the events described in this primary source remind readers of the events of Judges 17. Though the evidence may seem farfetched, but the fact that there is a comparison made of the events taking place creates some similarities. There is the mention of gold in both events, theft of the gold, and an "oath" taken as a proof of innocence. In a tablet from Buyukkale that is not yet completed being translated, there is a curse mentioned that is made by a father or mother on their child before gods.<sup>27</sup> In the compilation of these tablets, Hallo creates a comparison between the curse of Judges 17:2 and the curse of Buyukkale.

There are no passages in the Hebrew Bible where curses operate independently of the agency of the deity.<sup>28</sup> The legitimacy of curses of the woman in Numbers 5:23-24 depended on the presence of the authorized sanctuary. It appears that the mother recognized this fact because after her son confessed his mistake, the mother invoked the name of "Yahweh" probably to nullify the curse. There have been some debates regarding the purpose of these blessings. Curses operate in the opposite direction of blessings. There is an observation that the power of the curse was pegged on the mysterious power of souls to react upon each other and creates some effects.<sup>29</sup> Whether that is true or not, it will seem the mother of Micah recognized the

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<sup>27</sup> Hallo, William, W, *The Context of Scripture: Vol III Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, ed by Younger, JR, K. Lawson (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2003), 68.

<sup>28</sup> Toorn, Karel, Van, Der, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 214.

<sup>29</sup> Van, Der., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 212.

consequences of her curse for she may have understood that its effects could only be nullified by invoking blessings in the name of a deity. The fact that she had to invoke the name of a deity “Yahweh” and not Baal or any other Canaanite deity could affirm her devotion to Yahweh. It may also be suggested that by invoking “Yahweh” it may have been a way “to increase chances of sealing the blessings to reward the honesty of her confessing son”.<sup>30</sup> However, curses against thieves is a foreign concept in the Torah. There may not be enough evidence to trace it outside Israel, but the reality is that the bible does not endorse curses proclaimed against thieves. The punishment for any person cursing mother or father was death (Exodus 21:17). It is forbidden to curse a deaf person (Leviticus 19:14) and the LORD tells Moses that any person who curses in the camp shall be put to death by being stoned (Leviticus 24:14). The emphasis is that a curse against another person, whether superior or inferior was forbidden in the Torah. The story of the mother of Micah cursing the person who stole her silver may have been to construct a picture of wrong concepts that found its way into the nation of Israel.

### ***3.5.3 The Syncretistic Dedication of Silver to “Yahweh” for the Making of a Carved and a Cast Image (vs 3-5)***

To understand this syncretistic issue, the process of the dedication of the silver will be analyzed. “Yahweh” as a deity mentioned in this process of dedication will also be analyzed to examine his place. At the center of this syncretistic issue is the פֶּסֶל or מַסֵּכָה that was made after the silver was dedicated. We shall first begin by understanding the process of dedication of the silver and the hipil הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי will be examined.

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<sup>30</sup> Walvoord, John, F, and Zuck, Roy, B, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 1985), 409.

After the son returned the silver, the mother proclaimed with her mouth that she is dedicating שִׁדְּקָה the silver to the LORD for her son to make a carved image לְפָסֵל and a metal image מִטְּכָה. She, therefore, went ahead and said she is restoring the silver to him. In the making of the sanctuary, the contribution of silver to Yahweh was within what was needed to take into the sanctuary (Exodus 25:1-8). It is however strange within the Torah to dedicate שִׁדְּקָה silver to make a carved image and a molten image.

The hiphil of הִקְדִּישׁ has the causative idea of making clean, holy, set apart, devote, or consecrate. The following verses highlight the usage of this word in its hiphil form.

The word has been used in Zephaniah 1:7 where the LORD (subject) is setting apart guests (Babylonians) to bring wrath on the house of Judah for entertaining syncretism.

The use of the word by prophet Jeremiah highlights how the LORD has set apart the wicked for slaughter (Jeremiah 12:3). In 2 Chronicles 2:3, Solomon describes how he wants to build a house and dedicate it to the LORD. King Ahaz (subject) in 2

Chronicles is consecrating utensils to be used in the altar. In the situation where the people were initiating the process, it appears that the place of worship authorized by God must come into the picture. It is observed that the priest had to value any property that is being set apart, clean or holy as either good or bad (Leviticus 27:14-25). There was also a process of approaching its valuation which was proportioned to its seed (Leviticus 27:16, 17, 18, 22). This may emphasize the special place of an authorized place of worship and a legitimate priest according to Levitical command must inspect an item for setting apart or making holy.

In all the passages where hiphil has been used to dedicate things, only in Judges 17:3 that there is the dedication of silver outside the authorized tabernacle: Leviticus 22:2, 3 (most likely sacrificial items to be offered as burnt offerings), 2 Kings 12:19 (sacred

gifts), 1 Chronicle 23:13 (holy things to be used for offerings), 1 Chronicle 26:26, 27, 28 (sacred gifts and plunders from the battlefield), Nehemiah 12:47 (most likely provides for the sustenance of the Levites), 2 Samuel 8:11 (silver and gold acquired as spoil from the battle), Leviticus 27:16, 17, 18, 19, 22 (field), Leviticus 27:14, 15 (house), Deuteronomy 15:19 (firstborn animals). The use of the word in Judges 17:3 appears to bring out the idea of making clean, pure, or holy. It is an hiphil that brings out the idea of causing the silver to be clean or holy. It is therefore puzzling that the process of making it clean was being done outside the authorized tabernacle.

Dedicated items to the LORD were mostly to be used within the tabernacle. They were in the form of silver, gold, and other precious metals that were used to make the sanctuary (Exodus 25). Some dedicated items to the LORD were also used to make the turban, ephod, and the garments that became part of the requirements for the serving priests in the tabernacle (Exodus 28:4). Dedicated animals to the LORD were used for the sacrifices within the tabernacle (Exodus 29). Even the dedicated items in Leviticus 27 appeared to be under the custody of the authorized priests.

The mother of Micah proclaimed that she is dedicating the silver to the LORD. The first time God required silver was during the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25:3. In this context, the silver was treated as part of contributions and the necessary items to complete the constructions of the sanctuary. The second time silver was mentioned was in Deuteronomy 14:25 when there was a need to convert the tithe of produces from the land because of the distance to the place chosen by God to offer sacrifices. In this context, the Israelites were told to tithe the produce from their land and take it to the place chosen by God. However, they were given the option of converting the product into money and take it to the chosen place of worship where

they will spend the money on buying food. The basic requirement was that the silver should be taken to the place chosen by God for worship.

The process of dedicating this silver by the mother of Micah in Judges 17:3 raises eyebrows. The first thing is that there is a twist in this story where the mother of Micah dedicated the 200 pieces of silver to Yahweh for his son to make a carved and a cast image. In the usage of *שִׁדְדָה* in the Bible, there is no other place where silver was dedicated to “Yahweh” for the silver to be converted into a carved image *לְפָסֵל* or a cast image *מִצְבֵּה*. The second thing is that there is no mention that the mother of Micah directed the rest of the silver to be taken to the place chosen by God for worship (Deuteronomy 12:5-6). “The chosen place for worship was at Shiloh which was within the location of Ephraim”.<sup>31</sup> There was therefore no excuse for the mother of Micah not to take the silver to the house of God in Shiloh. That goes against the requirement that tithes and contributions needed to have gone to the house of God (Exodus 35:4-9). The third thing as will be observed in verse 4 is that after the silver landed in her hand, only 200 pieces of silver out of 1,100 pieces of silver were used to make the carved and cast images. It is not clear from the passage the intention of retaining the rest of the silver, but the readers expected that the entire amount of dedicated silver would have been used to make the images. The use of infinitive absolute *שִׁדְדָה הַקֶּדֶשׁ הַקֶּדֶשׁ* brings out an emphatic idea that the mother of Micah will give the whole of the amount to Yahweh. However, the hiphil of the word *שָׁב* has been used three times in verse 3&4 which expresses some didactic purpose highlighting the irony of the passage. She seems to go against her word of giving the entire 1,100 pieces of silver and retain more than half of the silver.

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<sup>31</sup> Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, G., *Ariel Bible Commentary: The Book of Judges and Ruth* (San Antonio: Ariel’s Ministries, 2007), 112.

From a word study פֶּסֶל or מַסֵּכָה, these are two different items of worship. Some scholars have argued that the phrase וּמַסֵּכָה פֶּסֶל is hendiadys and that it refers to only one molded object possibly made of wood but overlaid with silver.<sup>32</sup> “However, some scholars seem to suggest that these two items are two different items of worship because the same items that were later stolen by the Danites are listed parallel to each other in Judges 18:18”.<sup>33</sup> Prophet Isaiah also mentions the items parallel to each other suggesting they should be treated separately (Isaiah 30:22, 42:17).

The פֶּסֶל appeared to be a portable wooden deity that is usually associated with Asherah (2 Kings 21:7, Isaiah 45:20). Torah seems to suggest any tree can be converted into Asherah and that people should therefore not set it beside an altar of the LORD (Deuteronomy 16:21). In Habakkuk 2:18 the word has been used as a noun פֶּסֶל “image” and the verb פָּסַל “hew or cut or shape” has also been used. The idea in Habakkuk is that there is a shaping of an image/idol by a maker out of something. This image פֶּסֶל seems to be made from wood or stone that can easily be cut or chiseled or shaped out of it. The word פֶּסֶל in Judges 3:19 seems to suggest that the images at Gilgal were stone images. There is however more biblical evidence that פֶּסֶל was made from wood. This is true especially with the evidence that the carved image of Asherah that was set by Manasseh in 2 Kings 21:7 was carved out of a tree as indicated in Deuteronomy 16:21. A wood that could not rot was chosen, and a skillful craftsman was given the responsibility of carving out an image out of it (Isaiah 40:20). It is observed in Isaiah 44:15 that the same material used to carve out this

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<sup>32</sup> Ahlstrom, “*Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion*,” 26; Walvoord, “*The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*,” 409.

<sup>33</sup> Spencer, “*The Pulpit Commentary, Deuteronomy, Joshua, & Judges*,” 179; Block “*An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*,” 480; Gray, “*New Century Bible Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*,” 340.

image can also be used to kindle fire to bake bread. That material was some wood from the cedar that he cut down (Isaiah 44:14).

In all the highlighted Biblical contexts where the word לִפְסֵף has been used, it seems to convey the idea that it was an object of worship. It appears to be a deity that people can worship and pay some reverence to it. It was a portable wooden god (Isaiah 45:20) that could be worshipped. If that being true, then there is a high possibility that the לִפְסֵף of Judges 17:3 was also carved out of wood or stone for the main purpose of worshipping it. It is however puzzling where to place the use of the 200 silver in this context. There is no evidence to support but there could be a possibility that silver was solely intended to make the cast image מִסֻּכָּה.

The etymology of מִסֻּכָּה which is פָּסַף brings out the idea of “pour” as observed in Isaiah 29:10; “For the LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep”.<sup>34</sup> The same word also has the idea of casting פָּסַף metals metal into images (Isaiah 40:19, Isaiah 44:10). The noun formation of מִסֻּכָּה brings out the idea of an image. The word has been used in a context where worship of idols is been mentioned. This, therefore, seems to suggest that the word referred to a sort of an image of something made to be worshipped. The first time the word was mentioned in the Bible referred to a calf made from gold that the children of Israel “whored” after it (Exodus 32:8). The מִסֻּכָּה was an image of a calf made from gold that Aaron had received from the people (Exodus 32:4). Gold needs to be passed through fire or melted to cast it into an image of choice. It is, therefore, true that מִסֻּכָּה was an image of something made from a material that should be passed through fire to cast it into the desired image. In the

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<sup>34</sup> Spenser, H, D, M, and Exell, Joseph, S, *The Pulpit Commentary, Deuteronomy, Joshua, & Judges: Vol 3*, (McLean, Virginia: Macdonald Publishing Company), 179.

highlighted Old Testament passages above, most of the contexts seem to suggest that  $\text{מַסְכָּה}$  was an image molded out of metal into an image of something that represented a deity.

It is therefore clear that  $\text{מַסְכָּה}$  was an image made of metal (Exodus 32:8, Exodus 34:17, Leviticus 19:3) and made of silver in the context of Judges 17. The tone of the Torah and the general message in the Old Testament is that no image is meant to take the place of “Yahweh”. The words of “Yahweh” to Moses and the Israelites are that “you should not make for yourself a carved image  $\text{פְּסֵל}$ , or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath” (Exodus 20:4). The warning was also that they should ‘beware lest they act corruptly by making a carved image  $\text{פְּסֵל}$  for yourself in the form of any figure’ (Deuteronomy 4:16). ‘Cursed be the man who makes a carved  $\text{פְּסֵל}$  or cast metal image  $\text{מַסְכָּה}$ , an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman and sets it up in secret’ (Deuteronomy 27:15). The implications are that the mother of Micah making these images or worshipping them is that she is opening a door of curses upon her life. This is ironic as she had uttered curses after the silver was lost but her action is more of calling a curse upon herself. It is, therefore, puzzling for this mother to be convinced that she can dedicate silver for her son to make a  $\text{פְּסֵל}$  and  $\text{מַסְכָּה}$  to “Yahweh”. Could there be a possibility that she got mixed up with deities?

After Israelites moved out of Egypt, they worshipped Baal for the first time at Peor (Numbers 25). They interacted with Baal in the southern region among the Moabites and God was not happy with them. There is an Israelite called Gideon who had an original name called Jerubbaal (Gideon 6:25) and who would later lead people to worship a forbidden image. His father had a Yahwist name called Joash yet he gave

his son a name born out of “Baal”. This is very ironic that an Israelite gave his son a name born out of “Baal”. William Albright suggested that this theophoric name may have been used by the name “Baal” as an appellation of Yahweh in the sense of “lord”.<sup>35</sup> To complicate the whole issue is that Gideon is observed to have led the Israelites away from the true worship of God to the worship of a golden ephod in Ophrah. Though not much evidence to support this claim, there could be a possibility that the mother of Micah got herself mixed up with deities and that may offer some explanations why she instructed her son to make forbidden images in the name of Yahweh.

The narrator has not served the readers with the name of the silversmith that the mother of Micah approached to make the cast image and the molten image has not to be revealed. However, with the little evidence from other verses outside Judges, this research holds speculation that the silversmith was not an Israelite. In 1 Samuel 13:19, the silversmiths among the Hebrews had been banned by the Philistines lest they make swords and spears and revolt against them. Chapters 16 and 17 may not chronologically follow each other, but the setting of this story is believed to be in the same period as Samson. Moreover, the setting of the book of Judges is believed, to begin with, the death of Joshua (Joshua 24:29) and ends with the transitions into Monarchy.<sup>36</sup> There is no concrete evidence but since the enemy of 1 Samuel 13 and Judges 13-16 was the same (Philistines), there is a high possibility that Ephraimites interacted with the Philistines. The ban in 1 Samuel 13:19 appears to blanket all the

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<sup>35</sup> Albright, William, F, *Yahweh, and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, The Jordan lectures, 1965 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1968), 200.

<sup>36</sup> Webb, Barry G, and Clines, David J, and Davies, Philip R, “The Book of the Judges”: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 46* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987): 28.

land of Israel and there could be a possibility that it was still effective during the period of Judges 17. The implication of this is that the mother of Micah went outside the tribe of Ephraim and most likely also outside the nation of Israel to seek a silversmith. In Joshua 16:8-10 and Judges 1:29 the readers are served with the information that the Ephraimites had not driven out the Canaanites who lived among them. God made a declaration that because they did not drive out these Canaanites, their gods will become thorns in their sides (Judges 2:3). The mother of Micah may have not had to travel great distances to access a non-Israelite silversmith to make the carved and molten images for her. That silversmith could have just been in their backyard. The speculation is that the Mother of Micah may have had dealings with non-Israelite and possibly a Canaanite. This violates the instructions in Leviticus 18:3 that they should not do as the Egyptians did nor according to the Canaanite practices they will find in the land. It also violates Deuteronomy 12:3 where the LORD was not to be worshipped in the high places and worship of Asherim and carved images should not be heard among them. Furthermore, after the LORD has destroyed and cut off the nations of the land (Canaan), they were warned not to get curious about how they worshipped their gods (Deuteronomy 13:29-31).

There is some evidence that these gods were found among the non-Israelites. The words of the LORD Himself attested that the nations in the land He has given to the Israelites is full of customs, worship of idols and gods He has detested (Exodus 23:23-24). The LORD wanted inhabitants of the land to be driven out because they practiced idol worship (Numbers 33:50-52)<sup>37</sup> and it is because of this wickedness that the LORD wanted to destroy them completely (Deuteronomy 9:5). Moses when leading

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<sup>37</sup> Num 33:52 specifically mentions מִסֻּכֹּת.

the Israelites to renew the covenant in the land of Moab recounted how they left Egypt and passed through nations where they saw “their idols of wood and stones, of silver and gold” (Deuteronomy 29:16-17). The warning was that they should “beware lest there be among them a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations” (Deuteronomy 29:18). Solomon who was entrusted with great leadership responsibilities entertained these gods by installing the high place for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites (1 Kings 11:6-7). Rabshakeh in boasting of the military might they possessed spoke about destroying the gods of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, and of Samaria (Isaiah 36:19). Isaiah will speak oracles against Moab because of the high places that hosted some of these gods (Isaiah 15:2). Isaiah speaks against some of these gods that seem to originate from Assyria (Isaiah 10:5-11). The making of פְּסִל and מְסַכָּה by the mother of Micah appears to conform to the pattern of worship of idols that were worshipped by these non-Israelites.

#### ***3.5.4 The Syncretistic “house of God/gods” in Micah’s House (vs 4-5)***

There are varying reasons to explain the logic behind the existence of the house of God/gods בֵּית אֱלֹהִים in the house of Micah. The use of בֵּית אֱלֹהִים is rather ambiguous because it can be “house of God” or “house of gods”.<sup>38</sup> The treatment of בֵּית אֱלֹהִים may appear ambiguous and rather not easy to solve, but the presence of teraphim and ephod alongside the carved and the cast image helps to give a hint on how to solve this ambiguity.

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<sup>38</sup> Webb, Barry G, and Clines, David J, and Davies, Philip R, “The Book of the Judges”: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 46*. (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 407.

The ephod אֶפֹד was a garment that was used to cover the torso of a priest as they served in the tabernacle or a tabernacle. In Exodus 39 there is a description of how the ephod is made as part of the garments that the priest was required to wear each time when approaching the tabernacle. There are at least two types of Ephod recorded in the Bible. The first one was a simple linen garment and an elaborate ephod that was worn by the high priests as described in Exodus 39. The second type may have been some sort of an idol and is described to have been made by Gideon in Judges 8:24-27 with which the Israelites was “whored” and which ensnared the family of Gideon. Gideon will become the first judge to lead the Israelites away from the tabernacle worship and will provide a ground for the worship of Baal.<sup>39</sup> The same type of Ephod is also spoken about by Hosea that Israel will stay for a long period without a sacrifice, pillar, ephod אֶפֹד, or household gods (Hosea 3:4). By Hosea speaking about it in the context of sacrifice, a pillar and household gods create a conclusion that the ephod אֶפֹד was a form of an idol that was worshipped. With the reference to Gideon’s ephod in Judges 8:27, “this ephod may have been some special garment draped over a cult image”.<sup>40</sup> This could therefore suggest that it was to be draped over either the carved image (פֶּסֶל) or the molten image מִטְּקָה.

The first ephod was associated with the authorized tabernacle where the Levites served as priests. It will, therefore, be unusual to find the high priest’s ephod in Micah’s shrine which was maintained by a non-Levitical family. There is, therefore, a high possibility that the second type of an ephod was found in the shrine of Micah.

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<sup>39</sup> Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, G, *Ariel Bible Commentary: The Book of Judges and Ruth*. (San Antonio: Ariel’s Ministries, 2007), 112.

<sup>40</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery. (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 481.

The mention of the household gods תְּרָפִים makes it clear that this kind of ephod found at Micah's shrine was an item of worship.

The definition of תְּרָפִים is that it was kind of an idol. It appears 15 times in the Hebrew Bible occurring only in the plural even when referring to one image (Genesis 31:19; 34,35, Judges 17:5; 18:14, 17, 18, 20, 1 Samuel 15:23; 19:13, 16, 2 Kings 23:24, Ezekiel 21:26[21], Hosea 3:4, Zechariah 10:2). There is an etymology that originates from the root word “*tapris/tapras*” with the meaning “to heal” that associates this word with healing.<sup>41</sup> In 1 Samuel 19:12-14 Michal, after letting David through the window, laid a תְּרָפִים on her bed and pretended to be sick. It is in the context where תְּרָפִים has been mentioned that sickness is also mentioned. Some extrabiblical sources have helped to give a hint on how to treat תְּרָפִים mentioned in the Bible. Zechariah 10:2 is observed to link תְּרָפִים with diviners who prophesy through visions and dreams which can be compared to alabaster and hematite stones known from Akkadian sources.<sup>42</sup> There are also some early studies using some Akkadian texts (Nuzi and Emar) that has concluded that תְּרָפִים was some “household gods” that “is linked to some form of patriarchal inheritances, property rights, adoptions, or designation of family-headship”.<sup>43</sup> It is observed that after Rachel and Leah complained that they no longer have an inheritance in her father's house (Genesis 31:14), Rachel stole her father's תְּרָפִים (Genesis 31:19). There could be a high possibility that this תְּרָפִים was a treasure not to lose as Laban would later pursue Jacob because of it.

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<sup>41</sup> Toorn, Karel, Van, Der, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 844.

<sup>42</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 481.

<sup>43</sup> Van, Der., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 845.

With the little evidence available for תְּרַפִּים, the object can easily be inferred with the verbs associated with it; “making” (Judges 17:5), “finding” (Genesis 31:35), “removing” (2 Kings 23:24), “stealing” (Genesis 31:35), “taking, putting and covering” (1 Samuel 19:13, Genesis 31:34).<sup>44</sup> It appears to have been some figurines or cultic mask that served cultic purposes in the Hebrew Bible. The term is used in the settings of worship and Hosea 3:4-5, it is observed that the prophecy is describing the punishment of how the children of Israel shall dwell for many days without king, prince, sacrifice, ephod, and teraphim. This could suggest that these items including ephod and teraphim were items of worship. In Genesis 31:19, they were small enough to be hidden and sat on it by Rachel when her father went from tent to tent looking for it (Genesis 31:34). In 1 Samuel 19:11-16, it is also observed that Michal saved the life of David by letting him down the window and prepared a teraphim in a bed that was big enough to deceive people that someone was sleeping on the bed. This word has therefore been translated as household gods, idols, and idolatry that came in all sizes. They were all found in the context of worshipping idols.

The tone of the message in the Bible was against any form of worship of תְּרַפִּים. Though not explicitly mentioned, worshipping of any images including תְּרַפִּים violates the command of Deuteronomy 12:15-23. Outside the Pentateuch, the Bible has also portrayed the worshipping of תְּרַפִּים negatively. It was when Saul spared some loot that Samuel rebuked him saying that presumption is as iniquity and idolatry תְּרַפִּים (1 Samuel 15:23). Josiah, when he started reigning, resolved to put away the mediums, necromancers, household gods תְּרַפִּים, and the idols that were seen in the land of Judah

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<sup>44</sup> Toorn, Karel, Van, Der, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 846.

(2 Kings 23:24). These household gods תַּרְפִּים are items of worship associated with the Babylonians in Ezekiel 21:21 and the tone of Zachariah is that the household gods uttered nonsense (Zachariah 10:2).

The implication, therefore, is that the household gods were a foreign element of worship that the Bible condemns. Finding them in the house of Micah could solve the ambiguity and the conclusion was that בַּיַּת אֱלֹהִים was not the house of God of Israel, but the house of gods' "shrine".

Part of the common items that were found in the typical shrines in the ancient Mediterranean region included תַּרְפִּים. It is believed that the etymology of תַּרְפִּים can be traced from the stem ".rp'..." derived from Rephaim in which in Ugaritic, Phoenician and Hebrew mean "the spirits of ancestral heroes".<sup>45</sup> It is not surprising that it is translated as "household gods" in Genesis 31:19 because it is believed the items were passed down through generations. Jacob in Genesis 35:2 was told to put away foreign gods that are in their midst. The speculation is that foreign gods in their midst may have included this "household gods" that may have been in the house of Rachel, a wife who was treasured the most by Jacob. Finding them in Micah's house has implications that they were foreign gods. The presence of these items degenerates Micah's "house of God/gods" to "a mere shrine that appears to have dominated the landscape of Syria and Palestine".<sup>46</sup> This practice appears to share some similarities with that of Syria-Palestine though there is no evidence that there is influence across these societies. It is recorded in Ezekiel 21:21 that the kings of Babylon consulted

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<sup>45</sup> Albright, William, F., *Yahweh, and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, The Jordan lectures, 1965 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1968), 168.

<sup>46</sup> Sasson, Jack. M, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Simon & Shuster Macmillan, 1995), 2050.

תִּרְפִּים. All these foreign practices were not pleasing God (Genesis 35:2). The instructions in Deuteronomy 12:2 was for them to destroy all the places of worship and the gods of the dispossessed of nations. Micah became part of the problem when he owns a house of gods that was in complete violation of these instructions. The shrine however was not complete without a serving priest.

### ***3.5.5 The Syncretistic Place of a Priest (vs 5-12)***

Micah ordained one of his sons to become his priest. The Hebrew word used is מָלַא which is a piel stem that commonly means “to fill.” The true meaning of מָלַא in Judges 17:5 is dependent on the phrase מָלַא+וּ. There are three instances in the Bible when a combination of these two words מָלַא+וּ has been used in a context where a person was being consecrated. The first instance is when Moses who was unequivocal leader consecrated מָלַא+וּ Aaron and his sons to serve in the sanctuary as priests (Exodus 29:33, 35). The second instance was when unrepentant king Jeroboam used his executive powers to consecrate מָלַא+וּ some of the people to serve as priests of the high places (1 Kings 13:33, 2 Chronicle 13:9). The last instance is found in Judges 17:5 when Micah used his authority as a biological father to consecrate מָלַא+וּ his son to serve as a priest in his shrine. These instances appear to have entailed the placement of authority or responsibility into the hand of the person being installed. It may have been a common practice among every society in the Ancient Near East. There is an occurrence in the Akkadian text of an exact practice “*mulla qata*” “to fill the hands” that also “transferred a symbol of authority or responsibility to the person being installed”.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 482

Cultic activities within the tabernacles and shrines in the Ancient Near East were done with much secrecy and in sacred places.<sup>48</sup> Most of these sacred practices were done in private places and little is known of the appointment or conduct of the staff or the cultic personnel. With the recent excavation activities in Hazor, the city has revealed that little can be known of the cultic ritual activities, but speculation can be reconstructed out of the presence of several cultic objects.<sup>49</sup> The presence of much cultic paraphernalia has helped in creating theories of the activities that may have taken place there. It appears that the serving clergy was granted access to a divine room that contained expanded cultic acts and several cultic installations. Combined with the cultic paraphernalia, it appears the place of the serving priest played a very critical role in ensuring the authenticity of the tabernacles or the shrines. Micah's cultic objects make his shrine to be like some of these excavated shrines in Hazor.

It may be observed that the idea of ordination in Judges 17:5 was more of filling  $\text{ללל}+\text{לל}$  the vacancy of a priest to make his shrine operational. The intention may not have been about doing the right thing according to Torah but about “doing the right thing in their eyes” of filling up a vacancy or an office. Micah's use of his biological authority as a father to make his son a priest may have been a roadmap to make his shrine operational. Micah, however, appears not to have been satisfied with his son as a priest. As will be observed below, his encounter in verse 7 with a sojourning Levite proves this right. For the sake of the flow of syncretistic issues in this research, verse 6 appears to summarize everything that was happening in Judges 17. The researcher has therefore analyzed it towards the end of the research.

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<sup>48</sup> Nakhai, Beth, Alpert, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel*, (Boston: Billie Jean Collins ASOR Publications, 2001), 129.

<sup>49</sup> Nakhai, Beth, Alpert, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel*, (Boston: Billie Jean Collins ASOR Publications, 2001), 129.

In the introduction of the next character, the use of נַעַר brings out a lot of ambiguity because this word means either “youth” “boy” “retainer” or “servant”. The Hebrew readers are left to decide how to read this word. Most of the Bible translators have a consensus that the word should be translated as “young man” but whether a “servant” or “young man”, this person was, either way, a Levite. The name of this person has not been indicated other than he was from Bethlehem in Judah and of the family of Judah. His introduction by the author creates some similarities with how Micah was also introduced. In both introductions, some details are withheld by the author: readers are not told much background details in both. They are both to represent Yahweh, but their behavior tells a different story. This Levite departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place to have a living.

The fact that he was seeking a place may indicate that even Bethlehem may have not been his place. This is also true considering that Bethlehem is not one of the cities that was given as the allotted cities and pasturelands for the Levites (Joshua 21). The author has also repeated the idea that this Levite was from Bethlehem in Judah in the three successive verses. The same phrase has been repeated in Ruth 1:1 and may have served to distinguish this site nine kilometers south of Jerusalem from a Zebulunite place of the same name near Nazareth that is mentioned in Joshua 19:15.<sup>50</sup> That repetition speaks volumes as the author could be creating an emphasis on the Levite’s background information for the readers to understand. The first thing is that maybe the author is trying to create some association that “both Judah and Ephraim suffered from the same issue, spiritual disease”.<sup>51</sup> The second thing could be that the author is

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<sup>50</sup> Block, Daniel I. *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 485.

<sup>51</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 485.

trying to communicate that this Levite may have been misplaced. He was coming from Bethlehem that happens to be the city of the family of Judah. This man was a Levite and therefore suggesting that “his roots had not been firmly planted in Bethlehem”.<sup>52</sup>

It is in the process of sojourning for a place that he comes to the hill country of Ephraim. As per the instructions of the dwelling place of the Levites by Moses in Numbers 35 and Joshua 21:22, it could have been expected for this Levite to look for one of the allotted cities and seek to make it his home. The allotted cities in the land of Ephraimites are noted to include Gezer, Kibzaim, and Beth-Horon (Joshua 21:21-22). It appears that these cities provided some form of inheritance and sustainability as they were provided with pasturelands for their livestock (Numbers 35:2-4). It could, therefore, mean that they were expected to live on their farms and keep livestock and provide for themselves some form of sustainability apart from the contribution given to them through the tabernacle. Since there is no mention that a Levite can be a private priest in a private *בֵּית אֱלֹהִים*, his decision to seek a place for living in Micah’s house raises eyebrows.

The phrase *לְגוֹר בְּאֶשֶׁר יִמְצָא* “to sojourn wherever he could find (a place)” could hold some hint to his motivation of sojourning. Several Bible translations bring out the idea that this Levite was seeking a place to live, or rather, a source of living. The allotted cities appear to provide some form of shelter for the Levites (Numbers 35:2-4). However, their other needs like food and source of living for their household were taken care of out of the contributions to the sanctuary by the people (Numbers 18:30-31). The fact that this Levite is looking for a source of living could indicate two

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<sup>52</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 486.

possibilities: the first one is that there could have been an abuse of the sanctuary contribution that may have made this Levite leave where the Levites were designated to live. The psalmist describes how God out of anger forsook His dwelling place at Shiloh because the people moved him to jealousy with their idols (Psalm 78:58-60). “This sanctuary was destroyed in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C. after God discredited it”.<sup>53</sup> In Jeremiah 7:11-12, the LORD speaks of how His place at Shiloh was destroyed because of the evil of His people who had made it a den of robbers. Nehemiah noted in Nehemiah 13:10-11 that in his time, the portions of the Levites and those performing services at the sanctuary had not been given. This could, therefore, indicate misuse of the sanctuary. The second possibility is that maybe this Levite was never contented with what was being provided as a source of living for the Levites at the sanctuary. In either of the two possibilities, it is an indication that there was a systemic problem somewhere that misplaced this Levite.

The man Micah invited the Levite to be a father אב and a priest כהן to him. Micah inviting the Levite as “father” אב can be compared to Joseph who said that Pharaoh made him be his father (Genesis 45:8) even though he was just a representative and serving under Pharaoh.<sup>54</sup> It is also in the oracle against Jerusalem that the LORD declares that He will make his servant Eliakim be a father אב to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Isaiah 22:20) even though there existed a king above him. By being made the “father” does not mean the Levite will have a higher status than Micah, rather could be a wordplay by Micah of recruiting this Levite to be a father and a priest to him. This is also ironical as the narrator introduces this man as נער “boy” and “who is

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<sup>53</sup> Albright, William, F, *Yahweh, and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths*, The Jordan lectures, 1965 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1968), 196.

<sup>54</sup> Moster, David Z, “The Levite of Judges 17-18”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, number 4, (2014):729-737.

called upon to play a mature, fatherly role”.<sup>55</sup> There could be a possibility that Micah himself was having a father issue and his heart was seeking to fill that gap. Micah offered the Levite 10 pieces of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and his living, and the Levite went into his house.

The Levite went in and became like one of the sons to Micah. The initial terms of engagement as floated by Micah to the Levite were that the Levite will be a “father” and a “priest” to him. The attached ל in the word וְהָיָה לִי brings out the idea of the relationship of interest and the translation in this research is “and be for me a father and a priest”. It seems Micah understood the importance of the place of the Levites as priests. He was quick to replace his ordained son with a Levite.

The common thing in all the three instances where the phrase מָלַא+וּ has been used is that the consecrator assumed some authoritative power over the person being consecrated (Exodus 29:33, 35, 1 Kings 13:33, 2 Chronicle 13:9, and Judges 17:5). In all these cases, it was the priest being ordained. The difference however is that sometimes the priest was ordained illegitimately. It is only Moses who ordained Aaron and his sons legitimately, but unrepentant Jeroboam and Micah ordained priests illegitimately. In both, the ordained priests were not of Levitical lineage and they were to serve in unauthorized shrines. In Judges 17:12 Micah assumes the employer’s powers to hire a Levite to be a “priest” to him. These terms of agreement seem to elevate the relationship between Micah and the Levite to be more of an employer-employee relationship. This is unlike the instructions given in Leviticus 16:32 where “the anointment and consecration of the chief priesthood were hereditary

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<sup>55</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery. (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 488.

and followed the line of Aaron”.<sup>56</sup> The instruction of the ordination process (Exodus 29) will be executed inside the authorized sanctuary (Leviticus 16). In as much as this Levite was a grandson of Moses (Judges 18:30), the ordination by Micah violated these instructions (Leviticus 16:32) because it appears that only the lineage of Aaron was to be ordained as priests (Exodus 28:1). The ordination of these priests also took place outside the authorized sanctuary and therefore does not meet the description of Leviticus 16:1-2 where Most Holy Place played a crucial role in completing the process of ordination.

In the consecration of the Levites in Numbers 8, the LORD declared that all the Levites belonged to him. They were given as a gift by God to serve the people of Israel in the sanctuary (Numbers 8:19). They were not supposed to own anything (Numbers 18:20) nor be paid by anyone except from the tithe given by people into the sanctuary (Numbers 18:24). Mishandling of the people’s contribution by the Levites carried the risks of bearing sin because of it and even death (Numbers 18:32).

Micah owns an unauthorized place of worship, hires a displaced priest, and gives him payments in a similar manner that can be compared with master-slave engagement as described in Exodus 21:10. This shows a complete violation of the terms of engagement that the LORD made for the Levites. This idea that a priest could be hired in a shrine that does not meet the requirement to be a designated place of worshipping Yahweh of Israel is also a clear violation of the Levitical instructions (Deuteronomy 12:13). The hiring of the Levite to be a priest could have been an attempt by Micah to legitimize his shrine. The intention could have been ill-motivated as there was an

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<sup>56</sup> Spencer, H, D, M, and Exell, Joseph, S, *The Pulpit Commentary, The Book of Leviticus: Vol 2*, (McLean, Virginia: Macdonald Publishing Company, 2009).

existing house of God at Shiloh. As will be observed in vs 13, his motivation was prosperity rather than the worship of Yahweh. His motivation was more of worldly benefits and had nothing to do with the Torah and the will of Yahweh.

As much as the appointment of the biblical priests and the priests serving in the Ancient Near East followed almost the same script, Micah's intention to appoint the Levite priest for personal prosperity falls outside the will of God for the Biblical priest. The intention does not conform to the expectation of Torah. It is left for the readers to assume that the influence came from their surroundings. As will be observed in the next syncretistic issue, there is a likelihood that this intention was influenced by the perceived benefits that a regular shrine in the Ancient Near East attracted. The possibility, therefore, is that this intention of appointing the Levite as a priest for prosperity becomes syncretistic.

#### ***3.6.4 The Expectation of Wealth and Prosperity in Syncretism (vs 13)***

The closing statement of the chapter is about Micah declaring some form of prosperity from the LORD for having a Levite as a priest. Micah was thrilled that the presence of this Levite priest will translate into material wealth. It appears that "his ordained son who was non-Levitical casted doubts about the effectiveness of his cultic shrine and the divine provision".<sup>57</sup> He assumed that by engaging in the member of the Levitical clan will automatically enable him to access heavenly resources because maybe Yahweh will be impressed because he has a Levite as a priest.

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<sup>57</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery. (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 489.

But Micah values this Levite because of the material prosperity that comes with it.<sup>58</sup>

The Ugaritic texts reveal that some income was attached to the presence of a tabernacle or a shrine. “Most Syro-Palestinian tabernacles would contain several stocks of silver, gold, precious stones, and other valuables that were categorized as ‘treasures’”.<sup>59</sup> There were also goods and plunder from war, income from tabernacle prostitution, votive gifts, taxes from the tabernacle, and gifts that people gave voluntarily. For high places and shrines, it appears that there was income from the religious services offered by the ministering priest to anyone visiting the shrine. Having a curved image, molten image, ephod, and household gods created a perfect environment to attract people to come and be ministered to in the shrine of Micah. Moreover, it would be a plus with the presence of a ministering Hebrew Levite who complimented the worship elements by pronouncing pious oracles (Judges 18:6). This research proposes that maybe the Levite played the role of attracting shrine customers including Hebrews who needed religious services (Judges 18:3-6), and in return, apart from the divine blessings, Micah would benefit from the monies the shrine attracted. It is no wonder that Micah attached the Levite with material prosperity.

Aside from the prosperity that the shrine attracted, “Micah appears to have some high confidences in the favors of Yahweh because he owns an actual Levite as a priest”.<sup>60</sup> Micah did not have such confidence when he ordained his son. This confidence of the favors of Yahweh because of owning an actual Levite appears to be more of superstition than genuine trust in God. “This form of prosperity appears to be tied to

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<sup>58</sup> Moster, David Z., “The Levite of Judges 17-18”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, number 4, (2014): 729-737.

<sup>59</sup> Sasson, Jack. M, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Simon & Shuster Macmillan, 1995), 2051.

<sup>60</sup> Davis, R, Dale, *Such a Great Salvation: Expositions of the Book of Judges, Expositor’s guide to the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1990), 205.

the presence of human beings more than trusting in God. The Levite appears to be nothing more than a good luck charm”.<sup>61</sup> This Levite also appears to be blinded by this reality because of the employer-employee terms of engagement. He was going to benefit, and he could not resist the hefty offer of “fatherhood”. This kind of conformity to external religious externals for divine conformity has been compared to be like magical blessings which come automatically once there is the assurance of an actual Levite. This conformity violates the instructions of the LORD in Deuteronomy 28:1-13 where faithful obedience to the voice of the LORD and being careful to do all the commandments (vs 1) will attract blessings and the LORD will make them abound in prosperity (vs 11). It is very clear that blessings come after obedience and the warning is that they should not turn to the right hand or to the left to go after other gods to serve them (vs 14). The conformity of Micah, therefore, is a disobedience more than the obedience to the commands of the LORD.

Pegging prosperity on the place of a human being is not depending on God. This conformity of Micah is disobedience and there could be a possibility that it follows the patterns of many religions in the Ancient Near East. I have not been able to locate evidence from the Ancient Near East to support this conformity, but the suggestion is that because it is not supported in the Bible, it may be a foreign concept. More evidence is needed to identify these similarities but pegging prosperity on the Levite by Micah is elevating human beings more than God.

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<sup>61</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 489.

## 1.7 “Everyone did what was Right in his Own Eyes” (17:6)

It appears that “the primary tone of Judges 17 is to condemn not necessarily idolatry, but the worship of Yahweh in the wrong way”.<sup>62</sup> The dedication of silver to Yahweh and in the end, the use of the silver to make the carved and the cast images are the worship of Yahweh in the wrong way. The Levite who was expected to know better and be the champion of reading the laws to the people (Deuteronomy 31:9) is observed to be at the forefront of breaking the instructions of God and facilitating the worship of forbidden images. His ordination to serve in a shrine that contains assorted paraphernalia goes against the instructions given through Torah.

By owning a shrine that contained a cast image, molten image, ephod, household gods, and ordaining his son and a misplaced Levite to be a priest, Micah reflected a classic pattern of a typical society where everyone did everything right in their own eyes. The use of *בְּיַמָּיו* in verse 6 brings out the indication that this chapter was written as a reflective thought looking back at a specific period which had already passed. The use of a masculine singular *כָּל־אִישׁ* “everyone” in a context where Micah is consecrating his son who is not a Levite adds an emphatic tone that verse 6 may reflect a degraded society. As observed by Block, it “confirms the picture of a pervasively and increasingly Canaanized society”.<sup>63</sup>

The tone of the author in chapter 17-21 could suggest that the idea of “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” was mainly motivated by the fact that Israel had no king who would lead them to do the right things in the eyes of the LORD. However,

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<sup>62</sup> Davis, R, Dale, *Such a Great Salvation: Expositions of the Book of Judges, Expositor's guide to the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1990), 205.

<sup>63</sup> Block, Daniel I, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. edited by Kenneth A. Mathews and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Reference, 1999), 474.

even the solution to have a king would later be influenced by the Canaanite form of leadership. It would be later in the period of Samuel when his sons served as Judges that the elders of Israel approached Samuel and demanded a king who would judge them like other nations (1 Samuel 8:4). The main motivation for asking for a king was so that they will be judged like other nations. This, therefore, is an indication that there was a lot of influence from the nations around the Israelites. The Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites nations who thrived during these periods had kings ruling over them and it could be because of them that the Israelites demanded a king over them.

As much as it is clear that the author's statement of "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" in these appendices (17-21) is because this society had no king, Micah's action of having a private shrine could be viewed as a personal choice and not tied to the absence of a king. It is more of disregarding the authorized place of worship at Shiloh (Judges 18:31). Moses in Deuteronomy 12:8 tells the people that the idea of "doing what was right in his own eyes" was common during the migratory period where it was difficult to establish a permanent place of worship to do proper sacrifices to Yahweh and a place to do proper ceremonies of the days and feasts. It was expected that this would change once they crossed over Jordan to the promised land where the authorized sanctuary was to be established. They should bring all that they have been commanded (offerings, sacrifices, tithes, and the contributions that they would present) to the authorized place of worship that the LORD will choose (Deuteronomy 12:10-11). They were warned not to offer their sacrifices and offer burnt offerings at any place that they will see but shall offer them at places within their tribes that the LORD will choose. It is in this chosen place that the LORD will put His name and make it His habitation (Deuteronomy 12:5). This research assumes

that “everyone doing what was right in his own eyes” in Judges 17:6 may have been tied to Micah’s personal choice to disregard choice the place of worship at Shiloh and not only because they had no king to rule over them. Joshua assembled the congregation at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting when the land was being allotted to Israel (Joshua 18:1). The author of Judges 18 place Shiloh to have hosted the house of God (vs 31). Disregarding this place is discounting the name of God and His habitation. Micah disregarded it and made a shrine for himself, installed forbidden images of worship, and ordained a Levite to be a priest with the expectation of prosperity.

There is therefore a violation of the tabernacle worship where the culture, economic and religious activities had a lot of influence. The anthropomorphic culture in Ugaritic texts confirms some of the Canaanite practices that influenced a wrong misconception of Yahweh. The economic influence of owning a sacred place may have made Micah own a shrine in his house. The moral decadence and corruption within the authorized sanctuaries as a place of worship including Shiloh may have misplaced this Levite who was seeking a source of living.

The dedication  $\psi\eta$  of the silver to make a carved image  $\text{פִּסֵּל}$  and a molten image  $\text{מִסֻּכָּה}$  is a violation of the expectations of the instructions given by God in Exodus 25:1-9. Micah’s ownership of a shrine violates the fact that the LORD was the only one to choose where to offer sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:11-13). The consecration  $\text{מלא+י}$  of a non-Levitical son to serve as priest and later being replaced by a displaced Levite is a well elaborate picture of a society that “everyone did what was right in his own eyes”. Micah’s attachment of this Levite with material prosperity is more of superstition more than obeying first God’s commandments then blessings shall follow

(Deuteronomy 28:1-2). The Levite himself also disregards the required Levitical expectations and duties as described in Numbers 18 where he falls a victim to some of the abominable practices described in Deuteronomy 18:9-14.

The Danites would (Judges 18) take away this Levite and Micah's assorted items found in his shrine. The Danites in their quest to find a new home had an encounter with Micah's home through the five spies who recognized this Levite. The Levite gave them a favorable oracle. It would be later when the spies are leading the rest of the tribe that they pass through Micah's home and picked the carved image, cast image, ephod, and teraphim, and convincing the Levite to be the father and the priest of the entire tribe.

There are a lot of similarities between this narrative (17-18) and the last narrative (19-21). In both, it appears the center stage is about a Levite. The Levite of the first narrative travels from Bethlehem to Ephraim (Judges 17:8) while the Levite of the second narrative travels from Ephraim to Bethlehem (Judges 19:2-3). In both narratives, "the personal fortunes of the two Levites ended up becoming a larger concern for the entire tribe".<sup>64</sup> The Levite of the first narrative was transported with Micah's images to be a cultic priest of the Danites while the Levite of the second narrative triggered a tribal genocide because of his concubine. The second narrative concludes with the acknowledgment of a house of God at Shiloh while the second narrative concludes with the daughters of Shiloh being abducted by the tribe of Benjamin.

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<sup>64</sup> Webb, Barry G, and Clines, David J, and Davies, Philip R., "The Book of the Judges": *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 46* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987): 403.

There are a few things the author seeks to communicate in these two final narratives. Though it is believed that these two narratives were initially separated and later joined to become the final stage of the book of Judges, the central theme of the narrator appears to communicate internal threats that may corrupt the morality and spirituality of the Israelites. At the center stage of this chaos is the place of Levites who were tasked with the great responsibility of ensuring that the spiritual state and morality of the Israelite is up to the standards of Torah (Numbers 18). It may also be said that the author seeks to affirm the critical responsibility of the Levites in maintaining both morality and the spiritual state of society. The Levites in this chapter became part of the problem when they facilitated the worship of assorted graven images and led people away from the worship of Yahweh. Though the first defense line depended on Judges who militarily defended the Israelites from any external threats, the last defense line is with the Levites in terms of defending the society from internal threats that could lead to collapse out of moral and spiritual corruption. These two final narratives seek to report that the last defense line was broken as the Levites became part of the chaos.

This research has demonstrated a certain amount of evidence for syncretism. The installation and the worship of graven images is a foreign concept that violates the Torah. As a researcher, I set out to prove that they are a foreign concept, but I had to work with the available data which confirms that several concepts in Judges 17 are foreign. The ownership of a shrine by Micah appears to disregard the house of God at Shiloh. The presence of *פְּסֵל*, *מִסְכָּה*, *תְּרָפִים* and *אֲפֹדִים* in this shrine bears similarities with many shrines that dotted the terrain of Syro-Palestine. The ordination of a Levite priest with the ill-motivation for prosperity places the focus away from “Yahweh.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

The results of this study are that it is easy to slide into syncretism by adopting other religious elements in the name of worshipping Yahweh. It appears that the main message of Deuteronomy 6:4 is a religious exclusivity. The famous Shema proclamation holds that “the LORD our God, the LORD is one”. This was to exclude any idea of religious tolerance as only Yahweh is to be worshipped. Having a poor understanding of Yahweh is dangerous as it can lead to a misconception about His personality. The danger is that after many people sliding into syncretism knowingly or unknowingly, the LORD may turn them away because he never knew them (Matthew 7:21-23). This research reveals that it is easy to be influenced by the world when believers have a poor misconception of His nature.

Based on the evidence, Judges 17 could be an illustration of a society that got mixed up. It is part of God’s word that will serve as a warning to be alert and to be watchful of religious elements that are not consistent with the Torah and the entire Bible. The following are the points of application.

### 4.1 The Place of “Symbols of Worship”

The Bible does not indicate that an image can be formed to represent the presence of Yahweh. It is observed that the mother of Micah was convinced that by carving and casting the images, she was dedicating them to Yahweh. The ark of the covenant as much as it was very holy functioned as a place where God met with Moses (Exodus 25:22). It never served as an alternative symbol of worship. In it was a testimony and

it is recorded to have had a jar that contained an *omer* of manna (Exodus 16:34-36, 25:16). It was therefore not an image of God but rather a symbolic throne of Yahweh.

The development of biblical theology since the resurrection of Jesus Christ has seen some religions creating relics that are associated with certain saints or some biblical characters. They use these relics in their religious activities and services. The crucifix has been venerated more than the finished works of Jesus Christ on the cross. In their perceptions, some of these items are so holy that without them, salvation is not assured. Some of these venerated items assure some form of protection if placed in some parts of the room or inside the car. Some people believe that by putting a crucifix with the figure of a crucified person assures them protection against any harm. There have been current trends of people venerating the physical Bible to the point of worshipping the book itself more than God who is communicated through the Bible. This is what the bible in Deuteronomy 4:16-19 forbids and tells His people to avoid them.

The great danger of syncretism for Africa today is not the adoption of Canaanite practices but the retention of the beliefs, worldview, and practices of African Traditional Religions. The concept of God in African Traditional Religion seems to have crawled into Christianity. The common observation is that many people in Africa seem to use different African names to refer to the Supreme Being.<sup>65</sup> This perception seems to affect the perception of Yahweh or the God of the Bible. The name of God in some African Bibles was translated into some African words that raise questions whether it is referring to the God of the Bible. For instance, in

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<sup>65</sup> Rowbory, David., & Rowbory, Julie, "A Christian Examination of the concept and Identity of the Supreme Being in African Traditional Religion" *African Traditional Religion Research Paper* (26<sup>th</sup> March 2008): 4.

Kalenjin, the name “Cheptolel” was she deity that was worshipped by the Kalenjin ancestors. The first Kalenjin Bible version translated God into “Cheptolel”. This mistake was later corrected but some Kalenjin Christian sects still refer to God as “Cheptolel”. This has encouraged syncretic worship of God of the Bible through the eyes of African Traditional Religion.

It is also observed how Africans subconsciously venerate some places or objects because they use to represent some sacredness. Some objects or arts carry sacred meanings and children are usually cautioned when handling them or approaching them. Among the Kipsigis community, it is observed that Mount Londiani “*Tulwap Kipsigis*” is still considered a sacred place to the present day. The Gikuyu believed in one God called *Ngai* who lives in the sky. He however has temporary homes in the mountains and his last official resting place is *Kere-Nyaga* (Mount Kenya). The sacred trees *Mogumo* served as a place of worshipping and offering sacrifices to *Ngai* as it was believed to symbolize mountains. This, together with many other places, was revered and regarded as sacred places that represented the mysteries of *Ngai*.<sup>66</sup> It has however been recently observed that there is a trend for some Christians to revere these places on some specific occasions. They hold the conviction that old way was good and that missionaries came to corrupt the good African culture.

#### 4.2 The Place of the Priests/Men of God

The “man of God” syndrome has dominated many churches in the modern world.<sup>67</sup>

The place of the priest from the Old Testament was to play the role of being a

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<sup>66</sup> Kenyatta, Jomo, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg LTD, 1938), 233.

<sup>67</sup> Viands, Jamie, “The ‘Man of God’ and the Priesthood of All Believers in Africa”, *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 37.2 (2018): 91-130.

mediator between the people and their God. He stood between God and the people as is observed in Numbers 16:47-48. Their work was not to take the place of God neither did their presence assure any form of prosperity. It is God who gives the power to make wealth and prosperity (Deuteronomy 8:18). Micah believed that he would be blessed because he had a Levite. The current trends in the church are that people are assured that their prayers are answered when the man of God prays or lays hands on them. Some are assured of their salvation because the man of God led them through the sinner's prayer. The torn curtain in the temple after the death of Jesus in Matthew 27:51, however, symbolized free access of the believers to the Father. Believers in Jesus, therefore, access the Father at any time and in any place.

Religious leaders in the African Traditional Religion played a very important role in ensuring that peace existed between the visible world and the invisible world.<sup>68</sup> It was done by offering libation and sacrifices to the ancestors. They were revered as they played the intermediate role between these two worlds. Some aspect of modern African Christianity has been influenced by this issue. The place of spiritual leaders in many African churches is so elevated to be almost equated with God. The presence of such spiritual leaders in the African church appears to influence the general atmosphere of the church or any place they set their foot. Their presence is interpreted to bring some good luck and well-being. It can almost be equated with the Levite priest whose presence at Micah's home brought some assurance for prosperity. However, as noted by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:5, there is only one God and one mediator between God and men namely Jesus Christ. Therefore, some African churches placing

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel, Kasomo, "The position of African traditional religion in conflict prevention" *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* Vol. 2(2) (February 2010): 25.

spiritual leaders to be like mediators and revering them like demigods is nothing short of syncretism.

#### ***4.2.1 The Divine Expectation of Prosperity***

Micah's expectation of divine prosperity in Judges 17:13 turns religion into magic and priests into magicians. He has confidence in a Levite who assures him divine blessings.<sup>69</sup> In some parts of Africa, people similarly have turned some of the church ordinances and sacraments into magic. Baptism and the Eucharist have been converted to bear more power than God. Some African church members believe attending church on Sunday assures them of a better and fruitful week. Some believe that partaking in the holy table or eucharist is an assurance of divine encounter, forgiveness, or even protections. Some church members also believe in child baptism as a way of converting their children to be future good people in society.

Some people preach the gospel in Africa by trying to convince people that once converted, challenges and troubles will end. It is a belief that if the person is a sinner, challenges will come their way. Converting and coming to church will assure them of some form of relief. There are therefore some people in Africa who converted to Christianity to escape from poverty and challenges. To them, being a churchgoer is an assurance of temporal blessings and prosperity. This may be traced to the ATR's perspective that visiting shrines to offer sacrifices and libation at the onset of rain will assure them abundant harvest. This perception converts the church to be a place to receive automatic blessings in the form of wealth, health, the fruit of the womb, or even protection from witchcraft and sorcery.

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<sup>69</sup> Davis, R, Dale, *Such a Great Salvation: Expositions of the Book of Judges, Expositor's guide to the Historical Books*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1990), 205.

The desire for blessings in Africa has also created a recipe for pastors to preach messages that assure blessings. Just as Paul in 2 Timothy 4:3 noted that a time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itchy ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their passions, some African churches have created a fertile ground for prosperity gospel to thrive. Some of the church leaders have stopped paying attention to sound doctrines and they have started to deliver this prosperity gospel that appears to be like magic making someone rich overnight. Some believers are assured of blessings only after carefully obeying the voice and the commandments of God (Deuteronomy 28:1). But under the new covenant, Jesus became the point of reference and we are blessed by God through Him (Ephesians 1:3). Believing in the finished works of Jesus Christ on the cross is the first step of obedience to the voice of God. God the Father being Sovereign has His ways of opening doors of blessings to us. It is therefore not up to up to believers to decide how the Father will pour His blessings, but it is in His nature as a Sovereign God to decide how the blessings will come to them.

#### ***4.2.2 The Reality of Syncretism***

The reality of syncretism is that some believers could be worshipping Yahweh in the wrong way knowingly or unknowingly. The danger is that the Lord will declare on those who performed miracles, prophesied in the name of the LORD but who were not known by the master (Matthew 7:21-23). This should serve as a reminder to every believer that even if it is invoking the name of Lord, but you are worshipping Him in the wrong way, the LORD does not recognize you. A blessed man is the one “who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked” but is the one “whose delight is in the law of the LORD and meditates on it day and night” (Psalms 1:1-2). The benefit of

spending time reading God's word is that it equips believers with the ability to recognize syncretism and avoid it.

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## APPENDIXES

Translation of Judges 17:1-13

וַיְהִי־אִישׁ מִהַר־אֶפְרַיִם

Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim

וּשְׁמוֹ מִיכָהוּ:

whose name was Micah

<sup>2</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר לְאִמּוֹ

and said to his mother

אֵלֶיךָ וּמֵאֵה הַכֶּסֶף

“The eleven hundred thousand pieces of silver

אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתָּ לְךָ (וְאֵתִי)

that was taken from you

[וְאֵתִי] אֵלַיִת וְגַם אָמַרְתָּ בְּאָזְנוֹי

about which you uttered a curse and said it in my ears

הִנֵּה־הַכֶּסֶף אֵתִי

behold the silver is with me

אֲנִי לָקַחְתִּיו

I took them”

וַתֹּאמֶר אִמּוֹ

And his mother said

בָּרוּךְ בְּנִי לַיהוָה:

“Blessed be my son by the LORD”

<sup>3</sup> וַיָּשֶׁב אֶת־אֶלְךָ־וּמָאָה הַכֶּסֶף לְאִמּוֹ

and he restored the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother

וּתְאֵמֶר אִמּוֹ

And his mother said

הַקִּדְשׁ הַקִּדְשֹׁתַי אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף לַיהוָה מִיָּדִי

“I wholly dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand

**Purpose:** לְבָנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת פֶּסֶל וּמִסְכָּה

for my son to make a carved image and a molten image

**Conclusion** וְעַתָּה אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ לָךְ:

Now therefore, I will restore it to you”

<sup>4</sup> וַיָּשֶׁב אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף לְאִמּוֹ

So, when he restored the silver to his mother

וּתְקָח אִמּוֹ מֵאֵתֵימ כֶּסֶף

his mother took 200 hundred silver

וּתְתַנְּהוּ לְצוּרֶיךָ

and gave them to the silversmith

וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ פֶסֶל וּמִסְכָּה

who made it into a carved image and a molten image

וַיְהִי בְּבַיִת מִיכָהוּ:

And it was in the house of Micah

<sup>5</sup> וְהָאִישׁ מִיכָה לוֹ בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים

And the man Micah had a shrine

וַיַּעַשׂ אֵפוֹד וְתֵרָפִים

and he made an ephod and a teraphim

וַיִּמְלֵא אֶת־גֹּד אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו

and ordained one of his sons

וַיְהִי־לּוֹ לְכֹהֵן:

who became his priest

<sup>6</sup> בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אִין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

In those days there was no king in Israel

אִישׁ הַיִּשְׂרָאֵל בָּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה: פ

everyone did what was right in his own eyes

<sup>7</sup> וַיְהִי־נָעַר מִבֵּית לְחָם יְהוּדָה מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת יְהוּדָה

Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah of the family of Judah

וְהוּא לֵוִי

who was a Levite

וְהוּא גָר־שָׁם:

and he was sojourning there

<sup>8</sup> וַיֵּלֶךְ הָאִישׁ מִהַעִיר מִבֵּית לְחָם יְהוּדָה

And the man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah

**Purpose:** לָגוּר בְּאֶשְׁרָיִם יִמְצָא:

to sojourn wherever he could find a place

וַיָּבֹא הַר־אֶפְרַיִם

And as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim

עַד־בַּיִת מִיכָה

To the house of Micah

לַעֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכָו:

<sup>9</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר־לּוֹ מִיכָה

And Micah said to him

מֵאַיִן תָּבֹא

“Where do you come from?”

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

And said to him

לִנְי אֲנִי מִבֵּית לְחֵם יְהוּדָה

“I am a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah

וְאֲנִי הֹלֵךְ לְגוֹר

and I am going to sojourn

בְּאֶשֶׁר אֶמְצָא:

where I may find a place”

<sup>10</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מִיכָה

And Micah said to him

שָׁבָה עִמָּדִי

“Dwell with me

וְהָיִיתָ לִי לְאָב וּלְכֹהֵן

and be for me a father and a priest

וְאֲנִי אֶתְּנוֹ-לְךָ עֶשְׂרֵת כֶּסֶף לַיָּמִים

and I will give you ten pieces of silver per year

וְעֵרָה בְּגָדִים

and a suit of clothes

וּמַחְיֵתָהּ

and your sustenance”

וַיֵּלֶךְ הַלֵּוִי:

And the Levite went in

<sup>11</sup> וַיִּוָּאֵל הַלֵּוִי

And the Levite was content

לְשֹׁבֵת אֶת־הָאִישׁ

to dwell with the man

וַיְהִי הַנָּעֹר לּוֹ כְּאַחַד מִבְּנָיו:

And the young man became to him like one of his sons

<sup>12</sup> וַיִּמְלֵא מִיְכָה אֶת־יְדֵי הַלְוִי

And Micah ordained the Levite

וַיְהִי־לּוֹ הַנָּעֹר לְכֹהֵן

And the young man became to him his priest

וַיְהִי בְּבַיִת מִיְכָה:

And was in the house of Micah

<sup>13</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר מִיְכָה

Then Micah Said

עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יִטִּיב יְהוָה לִי

“Now I know that the LORD will be good to me

**Causal:** כִּי הָיָה־לִּי הַלְוִי לְכֹהֵן:

because I have a Levite as a priest”