

LESSON 8
October 25, 2026

Unit II: Lacking Leadership and a Moral Compass

Religious but Not Righteous

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 6:10–16

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Judges 17–18

PRINT PASSAGE: Judges 17:1–6; 18:18–19, 27

KEY VERSE

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judges 17:6, KJV)

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In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit. (Judges 17:6, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Discern between God's will and human desires.
- Understand more about God and themselves.
- Follow God faithfully.

*Key Terms

Dedicated (17:3)—Hebrew: *qâdash* (kaw-dash'): to have made, pronounced, or observed as clean, ceremonially or morally; sanctified; set apart; made holy; hallowed; did "consecrate" (NIV).

Ephod (18:18)—Hebrew: *'êphôwd* (ay-fode'): a priestly garment, part of the high priest's sacred attire (shoulder-piece); used in worship, sacrifice, and sometimes seeking divine guidance.

Returned (17:4)—Hebrew: *shûwb* (shoob): turned back or away; repaired; repented; "restored" (KJV). Micah returned the silver to his mother.

Shrine (17:5)—Hebrew: *bayith* (bah'-yith): dwelling habitation; receptacle; any place designated as sacred—whether a temple, sanctuary, or holy site; "house of gods" (KJV).

Teraphim (18:18)—Hebrew: *terâphîym* (ter-aw-feme'): idols, or cultic images, used for divination, protection, or illicit worship; "household gods" (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

Judges 17–18 describes a period of deep moral confusion in Israel. Without centralized leadership, each tribe governed itself, and religious practice became fragmented. Micah's household reflects this disorder. He desires God's blessing, yet his actions show misunderstanding of God's law and covenant (Beldman, 181-183). Micah's mother dedicates silver to the Lord, but that silver is used to create an image. Micah establishes a private shrine, installs his son as priest, and later hires a Levite to legitimize his worship. These actions reveal sincere intention mixed with serious error. Faith is shaped by convenience rather than obedience (Keck, 791-793).

The tribe of Dan later steals Micah's religious objects and priest, using them to support their own ambitions. The story exposes how easily religion can be used to justify power, violence, and self-interest when God's instruction is ignored (Brueggemann, 151-153). This passage invites reflection on how easily faith can drift when it is shaped without accountability, discernment, or community guidance rooted in God's Word.

Introduction

Many people value personal freedom and independence. As it relates to personal decisions, we are often encouraged to trust our instincts, follow our hearts, and decide what feels right for ourselves. While independence can be healthy, it can also become dangerous when it replaces discernment and accountability. What feels right is not always what is faithful.

Judges 17 introduces a troubling moment in Israel's story. The people are not openly rejecting God. Instead, they are shaping faith to fit their preferences. Micah and his household use religious language, images, and rituals, yet their practices drift far from God's instructions. What they call worship is actually self-made religion.

This lesson challenges adults to examine the difference between being religious and being righteous. Religious activity can be sincere yet misdirected. It can feel meaningful while still missing God's heart. The phrase "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" captures a community without moral clarity or shared obedience.

As you explore this lesson, consider how faith is shaped in your life. Ask whether your practices reflect God's instruction or personal convenience. This passage invites believers and seekers alike to seek discernment, humility, and obedience that align with God's purposes rather than personal preference.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

When Personal Desire Is Mistaken for God's Will

(Judges 17:1-6)

KJV

AND THERE was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

2 And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from

thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

3 And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

4 Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

5 And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

NIV

NOW A man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim

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

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

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

5 Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest.

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

Micah’s story begins with language that sounds religious. The Lord’s name is spoken, silver is dedicated, and worship objects are created. Yet nearly every action violates God’s instruction. Micah’s household mixes devotion with disobedience, creating religion shaped by preference rather than faithfulness. (Note: this is not the prophet Micah who wrote the book of Micah).

Micah believes that having religious objects and a priest will secure God’s blessing. His assumption reveals a dangerous misunderstanding. God’s presence cannot be controlled, purchased, or manipulated. Faith is not validated by religious activity alone. The outward appearance of righteousness should never be considered “good enough,” because obedience matters. This passage shows how easily faith can be distorted when personal desire replaces God’s will. Micah is not rejecting God outright. Perhaps, Micah thinks that “good enough under these circumstances” is what the Lord expects. Here, Micah is reshaping God to fit his

life. Many adults recognize this temptation. It is possible to desire God's favor while ignoring God's instruction.

Judges 17:6 provides the theological diagnosis. Without leadership and shared obedience, people follow what feels right to them. This does not lead to freedom. It leads to confusion and misuse of faith. These passages support careful self-examination. What guides your faith practice? Is it the Bible or convenience? Is it obedience to God's Word or personal comfort? The story warns that sincere intention is not enough. Faith must be shaped by God's instruction, not by what seems right in the moment.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Where might you be tempted to shape faith around convenience or preference?
Ask God to help you discern between what feels right and what is faithful.

Faith Shaped by Convenience Rather Than Obedience (Judges 18:18-19)

KJV

18 And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

19 And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

NIV

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

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

In this passage, the tribe of Dan seizes Micah's religious items and convinces his priest to accompany them. Their appeal is rooted not in devotion but in practicality. They offer him greater status, protection, and influence—promises that appeal to personal ambition rather than spiritual calling. Without pausing to seek God's direction, the priest agrees. In that moment, faith becomes a pathway to personal advancement.

This scene exposes how easily religious devotion can be twisted to serve self-interest. Objects intended for worship are transformed into tools of authority and control. The priest's willingness to remain silent reveals a compromised heart; what benefits him becomes more persuasive

than what honors God. His choice illustrates how discernment erodes when personal gain becomes the guiding force. Adults recognize this struggle. It is tempting to use faith to validate decisions instead of allowing God to shape them. When convenience outweighs obedience, spiritual clarity diminishes. The narrative warns that faith separated from God's instruction becomes empty, distorted, and ultimately harmful.

These passages encourage students to reflect on their own motivations. Why do we serve? Who truly benefits from our religious commitments? Genuine faithfulness requires listening for God's voice rather than choosing whatever seems most advantageous in the moment. The book of Judges repeatedly shows that faith without accountability leads to wandering. The actions of the Danites demonstrate that when God's Word is ignored, religion becomes merely a means to an end. This passage challenges readers to pursue obedience over convenience, even when obedience demands sacrifice, trusting God's way.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How do you decide what is God's will when you have difficult choices to make or you are facing challenging situations? What helps you choose obedience when convenience feels easier?

Living Without God as Our True Guide (*Judges 18:27*)

KJV

27 And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

NIV

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

Judges 18 ends with violence carried out in God's name, yet without God's guidance. The tribe of Dan launches an attack on a peaceful and unsuspecting city, relying on stolen religious objects to legitimize their actions. Their behavior exposes the tragic consequences that arise when faith is disconnected from obedience and when religious symbols are used to mask self-serving motives.

This passage is not written to justify violence or portray it as acceptable. Instead, it serves as a warning about the dangers of practicing religion apart from God's will. When people rely on their own judgment rather than seeking God's guidance, faith can become twisted, harmful, and even destructive rather than a source of redemption and life. For adult learners, this chapter offers a

sobering reminder of the need for humility and accountability. Genuine faith must be anchored in Scripture, shaped through wise community discernment, and expressed through love for others.

Yet the story also leaves room for hope. Judges does not close with this failure. God continues moving toward restoration, raising up new leadership and guiding His people toward renewal. The shortcomings in this chapter highlight the ongoing need for godly direction. We must examine who or what truly guides our decisions. Are choices shaped by God's instruction or by personal desire? The call is to return to God as the rightful guide, trusting that obedience to Him leads to life.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What helps keep your faith anchored to God's Word and love for others in daily life? Identify one practice that guards against doing only what feels right.

A Closing Thought

Judges 17–18 warns that religion without obedience leads to confusion and harm. Micah and the Danites desired God's blessing but rejected God's instruction by ignoring what God required. The result was merely a ritual shaped by convenience rather than righteousness. This sobering lesson underscores just how important it is to seek discernment that is rooted in the Bible, the church, and respect for neighbor. When God's Word guides faith, obedience leads to life, clarity, and trust in God's purposes.

Your Life

Examine one religious habit that you have or belief that you hold. Ask yourself whether or not it reflects obedience to God or personal convenience. Make one intentional adjustment this week that aligns your faith more closely with God's instruction, even if it feels uncomfortable or unfamiliar.

Your World!

When you encounter faith used to justify selfishness, harm, or control, respond with integrity rather than argument. Model a life shaped by obedience, humility, and love for neighbor. Your consistent witness can help others see the difference between self-made religion and faith that reflects God's character.

Closing Prayer

Lord, give us discernment to follow You faithfully. Guard us from shaping faith around ourselves. Lead us in obedience, humility, and love so our lives reflect Your truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, October 26	"God Speaks through the Prophets"	(Amos 3:1-7)
TUESDAY, October 27	"The Prophets Warn and Guide"	(Hosea 12:7-14)
WEDNESDAY, October 28	"Gifts for the Common Good"	(1 Corinthians 12:1-11)
THURSDAY, October 29	"Weigh the Words of the Prophets"	(1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 26-31)
FRIDAY, October 30	"Here am I; send me!"	(Isaiah 6)
SATURDAY, October 31	"Live Worthy of Your Calling"	(Ephesians 4:1-13)
SUNDAY, November 1	"Speak, for Your Servant Is Listening"	(1 Samuel 3:8-20)